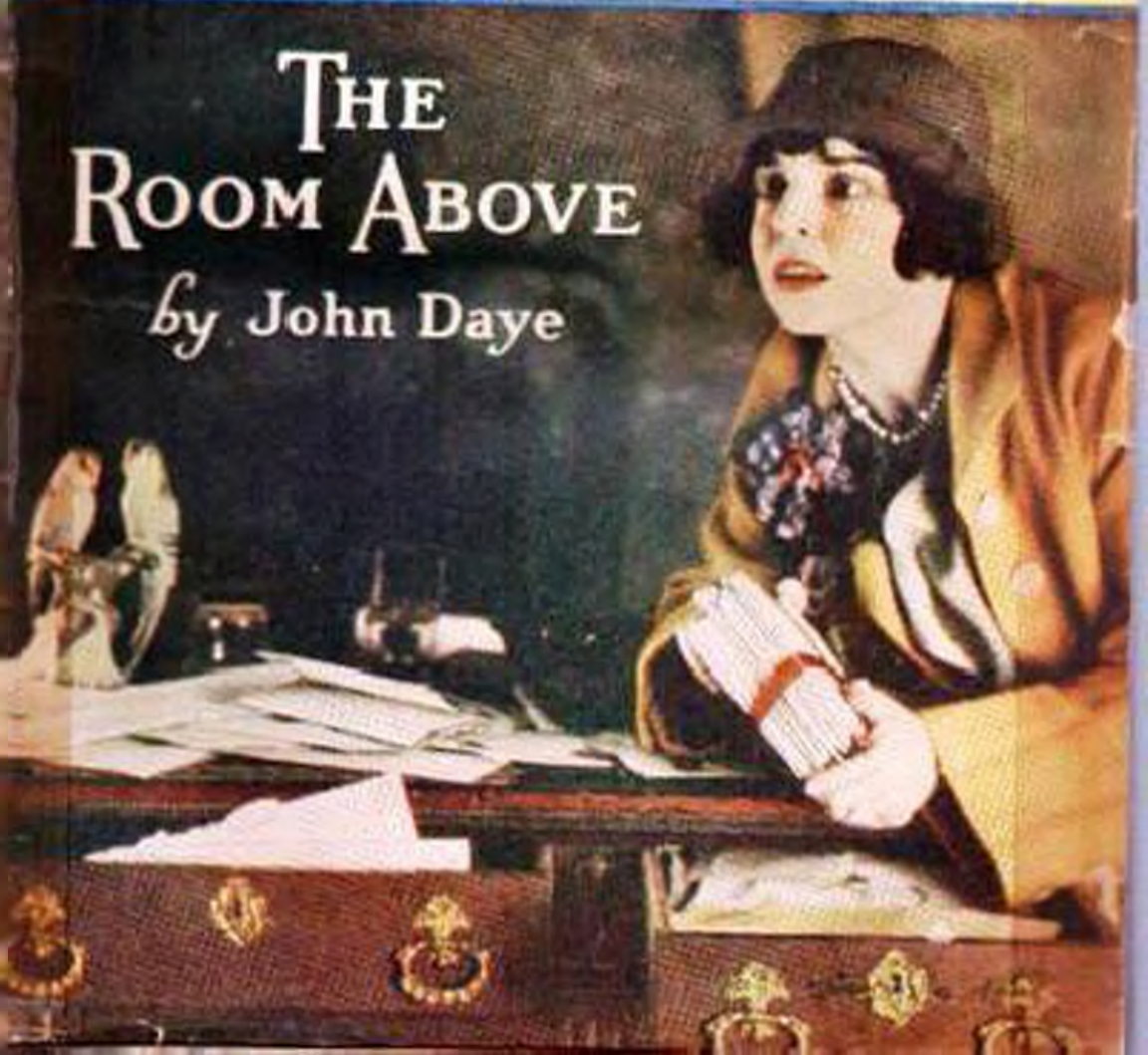
FLYNN'S

ISSUED WEEKLY

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

10¢ PER COPY MAY 9 THE YEAR $4.00



THE ROOM ABOVE

by John Daye

Derby CORD Tires

$1.00 Down
Balance on Easy Payments

Yes, only $1.00 down now brings you the genuine Derby Cord tire on approval. This is your opportunity to equip your car with *brand new, first grade* genuine Derby Cord tires at lower than list prices of advertised brands and on small monthly payments without feeling the expense. Read:

Guaranteed 10000 Miles

The genuine Derby Cord tire is guaranteed to be absolutely first quality. If any defects should develop, we will replace or repair the defective tire on the basis of 10,000 miles of service. The Derby tire is branded with the Straus & Schram name and backed by Straus & Schram ironclad guarantee. We know how the Derby is made and we say — no matter what brand or what price, there is no better tire than the Derby. The Straus & Schram Derby Oversize Cord is an **EXTRA HEAVY, EXTRA THICK, FULL OVERSIZE** cord tire. Compare it for size and weight with ANY other well known makes sold for cash at higher prices.

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$1.50 a Month

Yes, on this wonderful new plan, you can pay for your tires on easy monthly terms as low as $1.50 a month—6 months to pay. You need not wait until you have the cash. Get as many tires as you'll need for your car this entire season and pay while using them — only $1.00 down, balance in six equal monthly payments. You won't feel the expense on this monthly payment plan and you'll be free from tire trouble all year.

Our Prices (*6 Months to Pay*)

Clincher Cord Tires.

			Number
30 x 3	Standard Size	$ 9.95	Z8234A
30 x 3½	" "	11.95	Z8235A
30 x 3½	Oversize	13.80	Z8236A
30x3½	**Giant Oversize**	**14.85**	**Z8238A**

Note: We particularly recommend our **30 x 3½ Giant Oversize** Derby Cord — a bigger, better, stronger tire. Gives greater comfort and greater mileage and the price is only a few cents more per month! It's the best investment in the end.

Straight Side Cord Tires.

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30 x 3½	Oversize	$14.80	Z8237A
31 x 4	Giant Oversize	21.90	Z8239A
32 x 4	" "	22.95	Z8240A
33 x 4	" "	24.25	Z8241A

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Order a New Tube With Your Tire.

We offer gray inner tubes, extra strong, especially built to eliminate leaks. Also extra heavy red inner tubes which are 50% heavier than standard weight tubes and give extra service. All tubes made of best materials, thoroughly tested. *Experts will tell you it's best to have a new tube with a new tire.*

Size	Gray Tubes		Red Tubes	
30 x 3	$1.65	No. Z8242A	$2.40	No. Z8247A
30 x 3½	1.85	No. Z8243A	2.55	No. Z8248A
31 x 4	2.30	No. Z8244A	3.15	No. Z8249A
32 x 4	2.40	No. Z8245A	3.30	No. Z8250A
33 x 4	2.65	No. Z8246A	3.50	No. Z8251A

Straus & Schram
Dept. T 2275, Chicago, Ill.

On Approval — Send Coupon

Only $1.00 with coupon brings the Genuine Derby tire to you on approval at our risk. If not satisfied after examination, send it back and we will refund your dollar plus transportation charges. Send the coupon today while these lowest rock-bottom prices last.

STRAUS & SCHRAM, Dept. T 2275, Chicago, Ill.

I enclose $1.00. Send me *on money-back approval* and subject to your 10,000 mile guarantee the genuine Derby Cord Tires and Tubes I have ordered below. If I am not satisfied, I may return the tires at once and you will refund my $1.00 including transportation charges. If satisfied, I will pay the balance of the total amount of my order in six equal monthly payments.

You can buy 1, 2 or 3 tires and 1, 2 or 3 tubes up to $50.00 worth for $1.00 down on this coupon. Balance in six equal monthly payments.

..... *Derby Cord Tires.* No. ..... *Total Price* .....
How Many — Fill in Tire No.

..... *Tubes.* No. ..... *Total Price* .....
How Many — Fill in Tube No.

Name .....

Address .....

Shipping Point .....

Post Office ..... *State* .....

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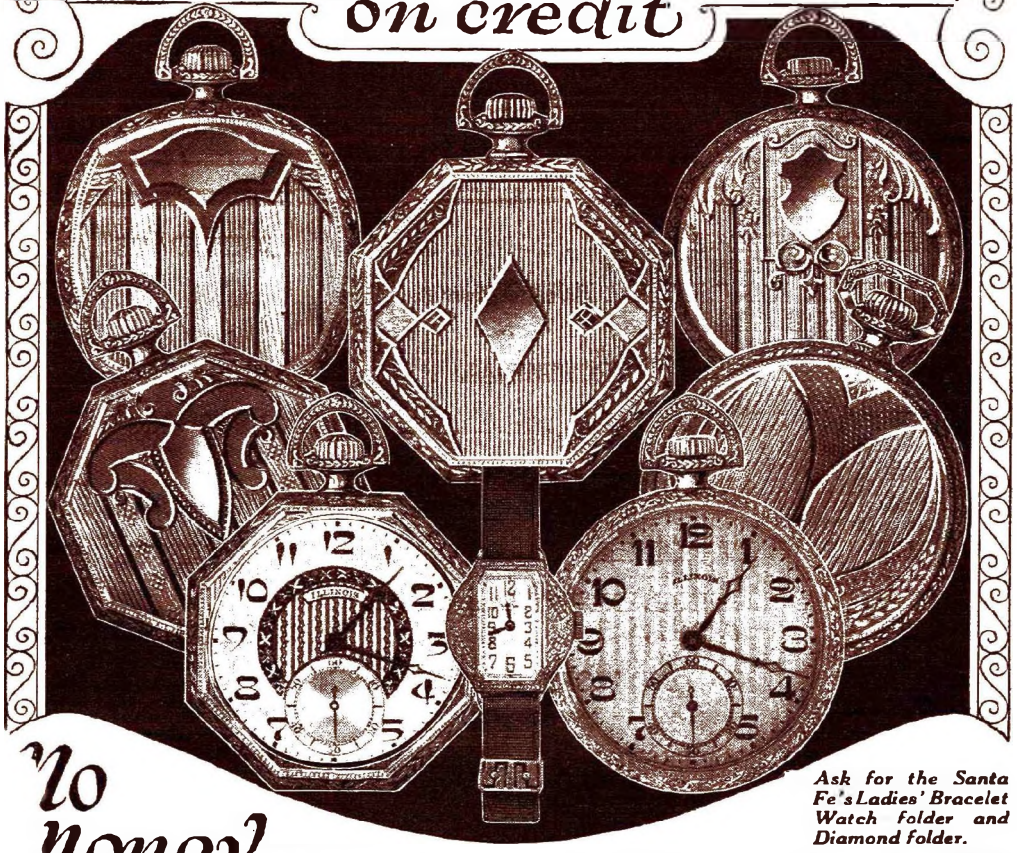

Ask for the Santa Fe's Ladies' Bracelet Watch folder and Diamond folder.

No Money Down

WE will send this famous watch direct to you, express prepaid on FREE Approval. Examine watch and be convinced it's the best watch buy you ever saw. You save ⅓ to ½ your money by purchasing a Santa Fe Special Watch. We trust you—wear watch while paying for it.

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SANTA FE WATCH COMPANY
57 Thomas Building Topeka, Kansas
The Home of the Great Santa Fe Railway

SANTA FE WATCH CO.,
557 Thomas Building,
Topeka, Kansas

Please send prepaid and without obligation your Watch Book Free, explaining your "No Money Down" Offer on the Santa Fe Special Watch.

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Address.....

FLYNN'S
ISSUED WEEKLY

WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR
Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

VOLUME VI | SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1925 | NUMBER 4

THE ROOM ABOVE . . . . . JOHN DAYE 481
A Four-Part Serial—Part One
A MASTER JOB OF BURROWING Short Fact Story 509
BAD MAN BALLADS 510
Special Feature
ANTOINE DERUES, SUPERCRIMINAL . . . LOUISE RICE 512
Special Article
THE MARK OF THE CHAIN . . . . ANTHONY WYNNE 520
A Short Story
PIRATES OF THE OHIO Short Fact Story 530
TOLD BY A DEAD MAN . . . . . DON H. THOMPSON 532
A Short Story
WHERE IS MARY MORELL? . . . . . T. A. O'KEEFFE 537
A Short Story
RECORDING CRIMINAL INTENT Short Fact Story 546
THE TWISTED TRAIL . . . . . FRANK BLIGHTON 547
Special Article
THE OPIUM SQUAD AT WORK Short Fact Story 564
SNOW . . . . . RUFUS KING 565
A Short Story
WHEN ROSA CONFESSED . . . . . RAY CUMMINGS 575
A Short Story
LOOT'S LABOR LOST Short Fact Story 583
WHEN DEATH RODE THE AIR . . . . JACK BECHDOLT 585
A Two-Part Serial – Part Two
MURDER BY PIECEMEAL . . . . . JOSEPH GOLLOMB 611
Special Article
PREY OF THE LAGOON . . . . . FLORENCE M. PETTEE 619
A Novelette
SURE CURE FOR SORCERERS Short Fact Story 637
HEADQUARTERS GOSSIP . . . . . WILLIAM J. FLYNN 638
Special Feature

THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and HOPEFIELD HOUSE, HANWELL, W. 7, LONDON, ENGLAND

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

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

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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50
Flynn's	1.00

Minimum space four lines.

Combination Line Rate $5.00 less 2% cash discount

June 13th Flynn's Forms Close May 16th.

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GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—Toilet articles, perfumes and specialties. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

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AGENTS—Be independent, make big profit with our soap, toilet articles and household necessities. Get free sample case offer. HO-RO-CO, 2718 Dodier, St. Louis, Mo.

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LET US MAIL YOU A FREE Bottle of our Life Tonic Elixir, Face Powder, Vegetable Oil Soap and Terms to Agents. All Big Repeaters. LACASSIAN CO., Dept. 45, St. Louis, Mo.

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AGENTS—WRITE FOR FREE SAMPLES. Sell Madison "Better-Made" shirts for large manufacturer direct to wearer. No capital or experience required. Many earn $100 weekly and bonus. MADISON MFRS., 503 Broadway, New York.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

LIGHTNING STRANGE BATTERY COMPOUND. Charges discharged batteries instantly. Eliminates old method entirely. Gallon free to agents. LIGHTNING CO., St. Paul, Minn.

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EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., Buffalo, N. Y.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR, TRAIN PORTERS (colored). $140-$200. Experience unnecessary. 836 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ill.

MEN—EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write AMERICAN FOREIGN DETECTIVE AGENCY, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

ALL MEN, WOMEN, BOYS, GIRLS, 18 to 65, willing to accept government positions, $117-$300 (traveling or stationary), write MR. OZMENT, 430, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

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WANTED—Girls—women. Learn Gown Making at home. Earn $25.00 week. Learn while earning. Sample lessons FREE. Write immediately—today. FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. D-521, Rochester, N. Y.

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AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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CASH PAID. Mail old gold, unused postage, W. S. & Thrift Stamps, Liberty Bonds, platinum, magneto points, silver, jewelry, DIAMONDS, antiques, watches, false teeth, any valuables. Cash sent promptly. Goods held 10 days, returned if unsatisfactory. The Ohio Smelting Co., 315 Hippodrome Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

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Plays, musical comedies and revues, minstrel music, blackface skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash Ave., Dept. 43, Chicago.

the non-removable head

$100 *for a name*

Marlowe sang "the topless towers of Ilium." I sing the topless tubes of Mennen. I want a good name for the new non-removable, non-refillable, non-leakable device that now makes the Mennen Shaving Cream container as inimitable as its contents.

Others have tried to denature the capricious cap. Mennen has abolished it.

Just move the Mennen knob a quarter turn and a hole magically appears. After you've squeezed out enough cream, another quarter turn closes the hole as tight as a drum. No threads to engage; no bother of any kind.

It's a knock-out—as far ahead of other sealing devices as Mennen Shaving Cream is ahead of the procession.

We've called this new patented feature "the plug-tite top." We want a better name. If you can suggest one we like, we'll send you a hundred dollars. If more than one submits the winning name, each one will get the century check.

To everyone who sends a suggestion we'll mail a complimentary tube of Mennen Skin Balm, the cooling, healing after-shave cream that's fragrant and greaseless.

Let me hear from you. Contest closes July first. Use the coupon, if it's handier.

Jim Henry
(Mennen Salesman)

Jim Henry, c/o The Mennen Company
377 Central Ave., Newark, N. J.
I suggest the name .....
My name .....
Address .....

$100

Color of life

YOU use silverware and linen, hang up curtains and pictures, wear fabrics carefully cut and adorned—all for the purpose of coloring the drab facts of food, shelter and clothes.

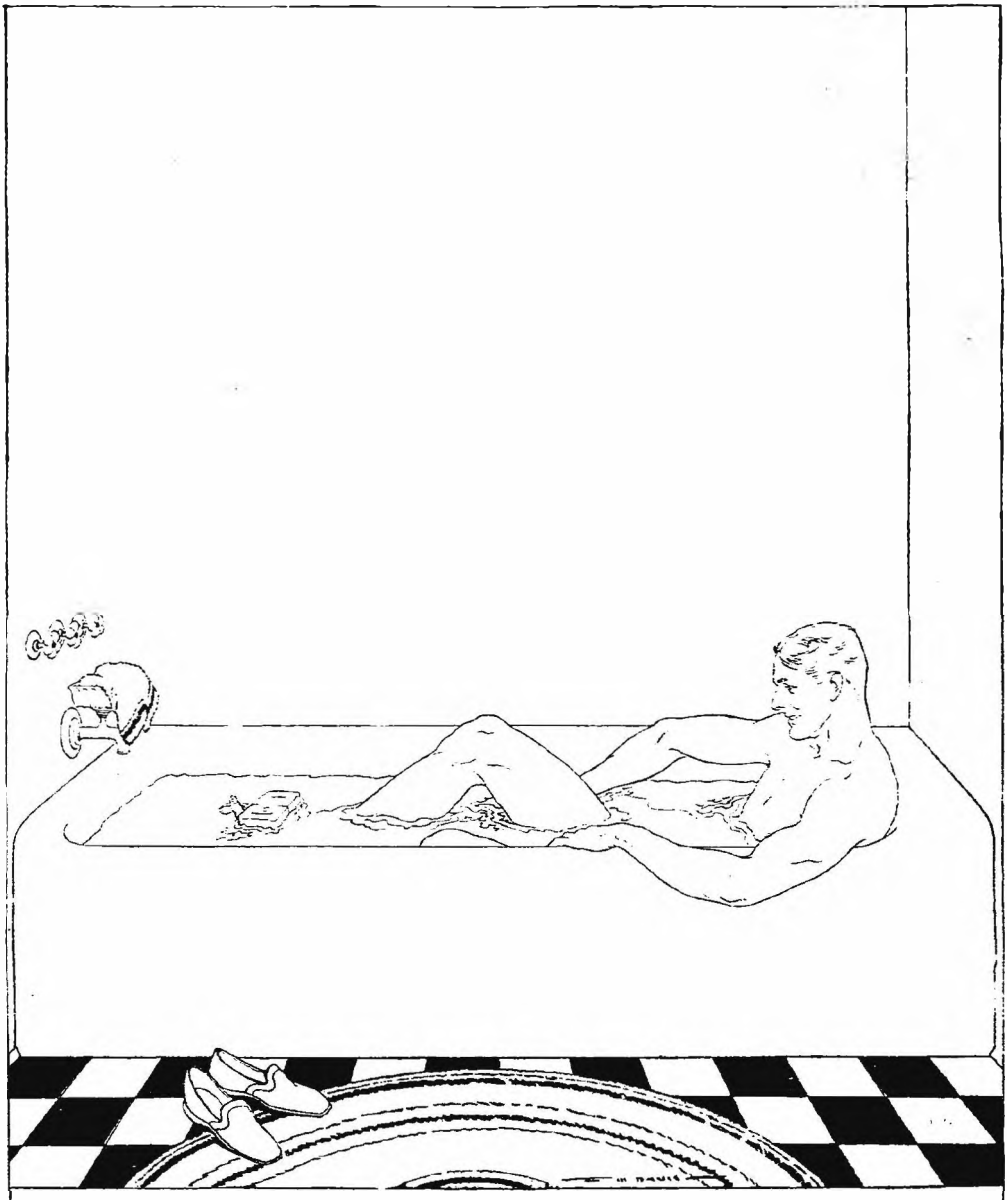
Advertisements enable you to put this color into your life. They bring you news of improvements to quicken your pleasure, increase your efficiency, lessen your work—to feed your hours with every comfort and convenience men have thought out for you.

Read the advertisements. Their timely messages, their intimate lessons in economy, their assurance that advertised goods will please—help you color your life even more.

When you choose from advertised goods, you choose from the safest goods known. They are value-true.

Read the advertisements in these columns. By their guidance you can obtain the best today; economize for the best tomorrow.

Advertising reduces the cost of products that add pleasure and comfort to living



GENTLEMEN BATHERS

it floats!

FLYNN'S
ISSUED WEEKLY

VOLUME VI | SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1925 | NUMBER 4

The tragedy in her every look held him spellbound

THE ROOM ABOVE

By John Daye

WAS IT A WOMAN'S HAND THAT PUT A VIOLENT END TO LORD HENRY'S CHECKERED CAREER?

IMAGINE you are a man-about-town, just an ordinary, clean-cut, well-intentioned man of average intelligence.

By accident you stumble into a miserable murder case. A man of rank and position has been killed. By chance you have seen a beautiful and charming girl in circumstances that are highly suspicious. You don't know she is a murderess. But circumstantial evidence points that way.

What would *you* do?

Would you conceal your evidence from the police and hope for the best? You probably would. Particularly if you had an idea the dead man needed killing.

But suppose you grew fonder and fonder of this girl till you knew you loved her. And then suppose you learned that there was another that shared your knowledge of the incriminating evidence. Then what would you do?

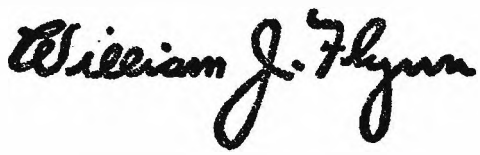
Read what Gerald Stapleton did in "The Room Above."

Here is a situation that might shape up any day in real life. Handled in the masterly style of John Daye, it is like life itself as we know it.

It is Gerald Stapleton here. But in reading it we know another time it might be you, or it might be I. There is a real problem here. And a *man's* decision is made.

And there is a real detective problem, too. Regardless of the dilemma faced by Gerald Stapleton, Oliver Smaile of Scotland Yard goes relentlessly, inexorably after the truth. And he gets it.

You can't afford to pass this up.



CHAPTER I

THE GIRL ON THE STAIRS

IT was a dark, misty, October afternoon, October the 20th, to be accurate. Gerald Stapleton left his club to walk to his flat in Malmesbury Mansions.

The clock of St. James's Church struck six as he passed. A few minutes later he reached the mansions and remembered that he must walk up to his flat on the second floor, as the lift was out of order and Egan, the lift man and porter, was away.

As he went slowly up the carpeted stairs to his bachelor apartment, Stapleton had a pleasant vision of an hour or more in a comfortable chair in front of the fire before he need dress for dinner with Lady Dundas, an old friend.

He put his latch key in his outer door, opened the door, entered, and was about to close the door behind him with one hand while he felt with the other in the darkness for the electric switch when he paused, surprised by a slight and unusual sound from the floor above; quick, light steps of a woman, probably.

Stapleton was not an inquisitive man, but women rarely entered the mansions, and the steps he heard were quite unlike those made by Mrs. Jacobs, who lived in the basement, and, with her husband, "did for" the tenants. Moreover her work upstairs was always finished in the morning.

Looking back afterward on this well-remembered moment, Stapleton always wondered what made him pause within his threshold and wait at the almost closed door to see who might be moving in the quiet house.

The woman on the floor above moved, he could hear, to the head of the stairs and came slowly, very slowly, down them. As she descended she came into view, and Stapleton, from the secure darkness of his small entrance hall, could see her through the inch-wide opening of the door as she moved in the full light of the stairway and landing.

He saw a tall and beautiful girl of perhaps two and twenty, who descended the stairs slowly and with hesitation, supporting herself with one hand against the wall, clasping her cloak close to her with the other.

Her eyes, looking straight before her, seemed to see nothing but some inner vision of horror; on her face was so dreadful a look of fear and repulsion that Stapleton felt as if he were taking a liberty in watching her, as one might feel who, himself unseen, witnessed the emotion of a woman who believed herself alone.

But, at the moment, the unexpectedness of the lovely apparition, and the tragedy in her every look and movement, held him spell-bound, so that he could but follow her with his eyes, as she passed across the landing—so close that the slight perfume of her presence reached him through the narrow opening of the door—and, still clinging to the wall, passed on her painful way to the floor below, and thence, as he could tell by the lessening sound of her movements, to the entrance hall of the mansions and out into the street.

As the last faint sound died away Stapleton gently closed his outer door, turned on the light in the hall, and entered his sitting room, where he stood for some minutes in deep thought, pondering on the unusual vision he had seen, and wondering what it might mean.

The picture of the girl, obviously a lady, feeling her way down the stairs with such emotion showing on her face, was stamped so firmly on his memory that it would not pass away.

It spoke of some tragedy in which she had played a part on the floor above, in Lord Henry Rollestone's rooms.

Lord Henry, a man of Stapleton's age, that is about thirty, was well known as a member of the fastest set in London, a half-brother of that equally well-known sporting peer, Lord Rollestone, like himself a bachelor.

But whereas the elder brother was a sportsman with little taste for anything but racing, hunting and shooting; the younger, who was rarely seen on a race course or in the hunting field, was best known for his social qualities, his good looks, and his success with women.

As Stapleton, who knew him only slightly, was well aware, he did not enjoy a very savory reputation and that he should make his London headquarters in so respectable a building as Malmesbury Mansions had surprised his neighbor, a building where certain rules as to the admission of female visitors were among the conditions imposed upon tenants by their lease agreements.

Stapleton had to confess that Lord Henry was a quiet and apparently respectable neighbor, and, although the two men were not on terms of intimacy, they occasionally visited each other's rooms.

As he reflected on these things, standing in front of his fire, Stapleton's eyes fell on a book on the table in front of him which Lord Henry had lent him a few days before, asking him to return it when read.

Stapleton had finished it late the previous evening and it struck him that its return would give him an excuse for going to Lord Henry's rooms and thus, perhaps, satisfying himself as to what had happened there. He took the book in his hand and went upstairs.

Arrived on the landing above, he was surprised to find the outer door open. A light was in the hall, and he pressed the electric bell, expecting to be told to walk in, but although the bell rang sharply in the silence, he heard no movement within.

He rang again, rapped on the open door, and called Lord Henry's name without getting any answer, so he passed through the hall into the front sitting room, which was over his own. It was empty, but lit up; a fire burned in the grate, a kettle stood in the fender, and a tea tray, laid for two, was on a table near the fire.

He placed the book on another table and hesitated for a moment whether to go back to his own rooms or explore Lord Henry's farther. Opening out of the sitting room which, like his own, was in the front of the house and looked upon the street, was a smaller one, which he knew Lord Henry used as a writing room.

The communicating door between the two rooms was slightly ajar, and he could see a light burning in the inner one. After a moment's hesitation he pushed open the door and looked in.

Lord Henry Rollestone was seated with his back to the door, in his writing chair, his head resting upon the table. One hand hung limply by his side, and, as Gerald Stapleton looked closer, he saw that a thin stream of blood ran across some of the papers on the table and stained their whiteness with its color.

The table was what is called a "kneehole" one, and some of the drawers on either side were open, their contents in a state of confusion. Several papers lay on the floor round about the chair, but there were no other signs of disorder that Stapleton could see.

As he stood within the communicating doorway between the two rooms and took in all this at a glance, he perceived two significant details. A small pocket revolver lay on a side table, close behind Lord Henry, and on the right side of his head, behind the ear, was a bullet hole.

Stapleton walked to the body and laid his hand gently on the shoulder nearer to him. The body was warm, but it was evident that Lord Henry Rollestone was dead!

CHAPTER II

DR. SHEA IS REBUKED

GERALD STAPLETON stood quite still for perhaps a minute; his eyes looking round the room; at the table where the dead man's head rested on a half-finished letter he had apparently been writing when shot, at the

disordered papers in the open drawers and on the carpet; and on the revolver, with which it seemed the deed had been done.

And, as he gradually took in the scene, the recollection of another came back to him like a blow, and he saw again the girl stealing down the stairs from this very room but five minutes ago, fresh, no doubt, from the sight he was now looking on.

What part had she played in this tragedy; What had she had to say to the man who lay here so quiet; what responsibility had she for the death of Lord Henry Rollestone?

The earlier picture upon his brain had been obliterated for the moment by the later one of the murdered man, but now the two were confused, as one photographic negative may be confused by the laying on of another upon it, and it seemed to Stapleton that he could see the girl standing, pale and undone, beside the man who lay so still in the chair, in front of him.

A clock on the mantelpiece striking the half-hour, recalled him to himself, and he realized that it was for him to take action.

He left the room and the flat, leaving the doors open and everything as it was, some instinct telling him that nothing must be altered till the police had been called in. Snatching up a hat from his own hall, he ran quickly downstairs and into the night.

In the next street, as he anticipated, he found a policeman, a fairly intelligent man, to whom he told his news. Before returning to the mansions, they called at the house of a doctor close by. The maid servant said that her master was out, but that she expected him at any moment, and she promised to tell him to come to Malmesbury Mansions as soon as he returned.

Arrived at the flat the policeman, after a hasty look round, said he must telephone to Scotland Yard, and went downstairs to the front hall to do so. He asked Stapleton to accompany him, and they descended the stairs together, leaving Lord Henry's outer door ajar, so as to be able to regain admittance.

As they ascended the stairs, after communicating with Scotland Yard, they were joined by Dr. Shea, a short, active Irishman, who had but recently taken over a practice in the neighborhood.

"Dead!" exclaimed the doctor after making a brief examination. "Dead, of course. Why wouldn't he be with a bullet in his head! And here, sure, is the weapon that did the deed." He picked up the revolver before the policeman could stop him.

"A handy little toy," he cried, "but with little penetrative power, which accounts for there being no exit wound. Lately fired, evidently," he added, as he replaced the revolver where he had found it. He rubbed his hands together and moved briskly about the room.

"See, here, now!" he said. "The shot was fired from here," and he placed himself close to the side table. "By a small man, I should say. The murderer scarcely raised his hand to take aim, I imagine. Lord Henry must have been taken unawares. You see, too, that as his head fell forward it smeared the ink of the letter he was writing," and he was about to draw the paper from the desk when the policeman stopped him.

The latter was obviously uneasy at the amateur detective's energy.

"Sure, my good man, you needn't be alarmed," exclaimed Dr. Shea. "I know what I am about, and won't disturb anything material. I'm a sort of a specialist in all this, you know; nothing interests me so much as crime. This promises to be a most interesting case, a most interesting case. Ha! What have we here?"

He pounced on something lying on the floor, half hidden by the scattered papers. "A lady's glove," he cried delightedly, as he picked it up. "Suède, four buttons, size six. Now here's something for you to make a note of, Mr. Policeman!"

"What is all this?" said a quiet voice. The three turned to see a middle-aged, clean-shaven man standing in the doorway.

The policeman saluted. "Mr. Gray, sir," he said. "I'm glad you've come."

"This gentleman," and he indicated Stapleton, "came up to me in the street, just now and told me a man had been killed here. We called for Dr. Shea, who followed us here. I have told him not to touch anything."

Mr. Gray, the Scotland Yard detective, advanced into the room. His looks suited

his name. He wore a gray suit of clothes, had iron-gray hair and a gray, colorless complexion, and presented a generally neutral-tinted appearance. His manner was quiet and dry, and, when at all moved, he had a trick of screwing his mouth up and speaking through closed lips.

He glanced quickly first at the dead man, then round the room, dwelling for a moment on the table and the disordered papers, and then on the revolver, and finished by looking steadily at Stapleton.

"Do you know this gentleman?" he asked, indicating Lord Henry's body.

"Yes," said Stapleton. "He is Lord Henry Rollestone; these are his rooms. I live on the floor below."

"And your name is?"

"Gerald Stapleton."

"And you are Dr. Shea?" said the detective, turning to the other man. "I see you have a glove in your hand. Where did you get it?"

"I found it on the floor as you came in. It is a lady's glove."

"You should have left it there," replied the detective dryly, with the twist in his lips apparent for the first time. "Put it back where you found it."

The doctor complied rather shamefaced.

"And now, Mr. Stapleton, kindly tell me what you know of this matter."

CHAPTER III

A LADY TO TEA

"ALL I know is that I came to my flat about a quarter past six from my club, and seeing there a book Lord Henry had lent me, I brought it up to return to him. His outer door was open, and, as no one answered my ring, I walked in, first into the front room, and then, finding it empty, into this one. I saw what you see, and went out to find a policeman and a doctor."

The detective made no comment on this brief statement, but, after considering it for a few moments, turned to Dr. Shea.

"How long do you suppose Lord Henry has been dead?" he asked.

"Over an hour, I should say," was the answer. "Maybe more, maybe less. No doubt he was shot by this revolver," the doctor went on eagerly, taking it up in his hand.

"Put it down!" cried the detective sharply. "I don't want it touched."

"I'm sorry, muttered the doctor. "I thought you might not have seen it."

The detective looked at him with the ghost of a smile upon his face. "Sir," he said, "it is my business to see everything, and if I want you to show me anything I'll tell you."

At this moment a sudden exclamation made them all turn to the doorway, where stood an elderly man of the servant class, looking from one to the other. As he caught sight of Lord Henry's body he put his hand to the doorpost for support, and stammered, "What—what is it?"

"This is Jacobs, who, with his wife, looks after these chambers," explained Stapleton to the detective; adding, in a lower tone, "He is rather deaf."

Gray looked Jacobs over. "Lord Henry Rollestone has been shot," he said in a raised tone. "He is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Jacobs. "Dead, did you say, sir?"

The detective nodded. "A bullet in the head," he said. "From this revolver, no doubt. Can you throw any light on it?"

The man seemed dazed. "I—I—" he stammered. "That revolver. Why, he put it there himself."

"Who did?"

"Lord Henry." Then before the detective could say anything, he cried, "What about the lady?"

Stapleton could not repress a slight movement.

"The lady!" exclaimed the detective. "What lady?"

"The lady his lordship was expecting to tea."

The four men looked from one to the other, and Dr. Shea gave a satisfied glance at the glove on the floor which he had been the first to discover.

"How do you know he expected a lady to tea?" asked Gray.

"Because he told me so, sir."

"When?"

" This morning."

" We had better adjourn to the next room," said the detective, realizing that his questioning might take some time. He gave directions for Lord Henry's body to be carried to a bedroom, took a general look around the flat, locked up the small writing room without disturbing anything in it, sent the policeman back to his beat, and led the way to the front sitting room.

" I need not detain you, doctor," he said. " I will make a note of your address. Your evidence will be required at the inquest. Good evening."

CHAPTER IV

ALL JACOBS KNEW

"NOW, Mr. Stapleton," said Gray as he sat down and invited the other to do so, " I must ask you to wait a little, while I question Jacobs. Tell me, Jacobs," he went on, turning to the man who stood, nervously, near the door, " what did you mean when you spoke of a lady?"

Jacobs seemed to try to pull himself together.

" It was this morning," he said, " that Lord Henry told me he was expecting a lady, and told me to bring up tea for two at half past four; also some buttered toast and brown bread and butter. He said he would bring some cakes himself.

" I came up with the tray at four thirty," continued Jacobs, indicating the tea tray which stood on a round table near the fire. " His lordship was standing in front of the fire, and took some letters off the tray as I came up to him."

" How many letters?" asked Gray.

" Three or four, I think. I can't say exactly. His lordship opened them and threw the envelopes in the fire."

" What happened then?" asked Gray, as the man paused.

" He went in the next room, and when I had finished laying out the tea and putting the kettle on the hob, I went in there and told him it was all ready."

" What was he doing?"

" His lordship was sitting at the table, writing. He did not look up, but just said: ' All right, Jacobs, you can go. Don't come back until I ring.' "

" Did you go?"

" Yes, I went at once."

" Did you notice the revolver?"

" Yes, sir, it was on the table."

" Had you seen it there before?"

" No, sir."

" Are you sure?"

" Quite sure."

" Had you ever seen it before?"

" Oh, yes. I knew his lordship kept a revolver in one of the drawers of the writing table. I have seen it there when the drawer was open."

" Was it usually in the drawer or on the table?"

" In the drawer, sir. I have never seen it on the table before."

" Now tell me," said Gray, screwing up his lips, " have you any idea why Lord Henry took out the revolver and put it on the table?"

The man shook his head. " No, sir."

" He did not say anything to you about it?"

" No, sir.

The detective thought for a moment.

" What happened next?" he asked.

" I left the room, sir."

" Now, Jacobs, be very careful about this," said Gray, looking hard at him. " When you went out, did you shut the door behind you?"

" Yes, sir."

" Which door? The door of that room, or the outer door of the flat?"

" Both doors, sir."

" Are you quite sure?"

" Quite, sir."

" Why are you so sure?"

" Because I always shut them," the man answered. " I wouldn't leave the door of the flat open for any one to get in."

The detective thought again for a moment.

" How do you get in?" he asked.

" What, into the flats, sir? I have my keys," said Jacobs, producing a bunch of keys.

" And without the keys you can't get in?"

"No, sir, not if the outer door is shut."

"Nor any one else?"

"No, sir, not without a key."

"How many persons have keys?"

"Only me and my wife, Mr. Brown, the manager, and Egan, sir."

"Who is Egan?"

"He's the porter and lift man."

"Where is he now?"

"He's away on a holiday, sir. His daughter is ill, and he got leave to go and see her. The lift is out of order, anyhow."

"And where is your wife? Downstairs?"

"No, sir. She's gone to her sister's in Lambeth for the afternoon."

"Then you are alone in the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Jacobs, tell me this. Did you hear any sound after you left the flat this afternoon?"

"Sound, sir?"

"Yes. Anything like the sound of a shot."

The man shook his head. "No, sir. I am a bit hard of hearing," he added; "but I heard nothing."

"And you saw no one?"

"N-no, sir."

"You're sure?" asked the detective sharply.

"Yes, sir."

Gray thought for a few minutes.

"Now, tell me, Jacobs, do you know who the lady was Lord Henry was expecting to tea?"

The man shook his head. "No, sir."

"Can you give a guess?"

"No, sir. His lordship did not often have a lady to see him."

The detective looked across at Stapleton. "Do you agree with that, Mr. Stapleton?"

Stapleton nodded. "I quite agree. I have hardly ever known Lord Henry have visitors here."

"That will do at present, Jacobs," said Gray. "You can go. I shall have other questions to ask you, no doubt."

The man withdrew with obvious relief.

The detective watched him as he went, and then turned to Stapleton.

"Do you give Jacobs a good character?" he asked.

"Quite," was the answer. "He and his wife are most respectable persons. You don't suspect him, do you?"

"I don't suspect any one yet," answered Gray. "But Jacobs seems to have been the only person in the house at the time the murder was committed."

"Except the invalid on the ground floor," said Stapleton, "and possibly his nurse and manservant."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gray. "I want to hear about the other occupants of the flats. Will you kindly tell me about them?"

"Certainly, although you will get more complete information, I imagine, from the manager."

"It will save time if you will run through them now," said Gray. "And time is of importance in these cases. I must interview the manager later."

CHAPTER V

GERALD GETS A SHOCK

STAPLETON gave a list of the people living in the mansions, which Gray took down in his notebook.

When he had finished he thanked Stapleton, and added: "There is another thing you can tell me. Who is Lord Henry's nearest relation?"

"His elder brother, Lord Rollestone, I imagine."

"Thank you. I can get his address easily enough. We shall want to communicate with him to-night. Now, Mr. Stapleton, I must ask you, as I asked Jacobs. Have you any idea who the lady is whom Lord Henry was expecting?"

"Not the least. I knew Lord Henry very slightly, and, as Jacobs said, it was very unusual for him to be visited here by a lady."

The detective looked straight at Stapleton, but rather as if he did not see him, but something beyond. "And yet," he said, "there seems to have been a lady here. Lord Henry said he was expecting one; there is tea here for two, and on the floor, within a few inches of his body, is a lady's glove. It seems fairly certain the lady he expected *was* here. Don't you think so?"

" It looks like it," said Stapleton. " But you will excuse me, I hope. I have just remembered a dinner engagement which all this has driven out of my head, and I shall be very late for it."

The detective rose. " Certainly. You can give me no further information, I suppose?"

" No; none."

" Very well. You will, of course, be wanted for the inquest. I must communicate with Lord Rollestone, and there are other things to be done."

Stapleton was going out when Gray called him back.

" By the way," he said, " do all the flats have the same key?"

" No. All different, I believe," was the answer. " The servants have a set each I fancy."

" Ah," said Gray. " Thank you, Mr. Stapleton. We shall meet again."

Then, as Gerald Stapleton left him to go down to his own rooms, the detective opened the door into the writing room in which the murder was committed, screwing his lips up as he did so and shaking his head in thought.

Lady Dundas, with whom Stapleton was dining, was the widow of a well-known Anglo-Indian, and had been a girl friend of Stapleton's mother. When Mrs. Stapleton died she assumed an almost maternal care of Gerald, of whom she was very fond and whom she gradually came to regard almost as her own son.

For some years she had been anxious to marry him to one or other of the many young girls she knew and occasionally chaperoned in London society, but Gerald had hitherto resisted her attempts, and he and his married sister had many a quiet laugh over Lady Dundas's unsuccessful maneuvers, and he even ventured occasionally to chaff her upon her ill success. She had been left fairly well off, had a comfortable house, an excellent cook, and gave pleasant dinner parties.

Notwithstanding all her kindness and affection for him, Stapleton stood rather in awe of her, and he well knew the sort of reception he would receive as his taxi drew up at her door, nearly half an hour after the time for which he had been bidden.

His forebodings were realized, for his hostess's reception was not an encouraging one.

" My dear Gerald," she said as he hurried into the room where a number of people were waiting with an air of hungry expectancy, " I did not expect this of you. You have kept my guests waiting half an hour and have ruined the soup and my cook's temper. Please make no excuses; they will only waste time.

" Come and be introduced to the girl you are to take into dinner. You don't deserve her," she added over her shoulder as she led the way across the room.

" Beatrice," she said to one of a group who had her back turned to them, " this is the gentleman who has kept us all waiting. Please scold him well." She murmured their names; but Stapleton did not catch that of the tall girl who turned toward him as he bowed.

His bow was interrupted, as were his half uttered excuses, for he saw at that moment, with a scarcely repressed start of surprise, that the lady he was bowing to was none other than the half fainting girl he had seen pass painfully down the stairs of Malmesbury Mansions little more than two hours earlier.

Gerald Stapleton could not afterward remember exactly what happened in the next few minutes, so confused were his thoughts as he went down to dinner, nor recall any words he may have said to the tall, pale girl at his side whose hand scarcely rested on his arm.

It was not till they were seated, and he had begun his soup, that he was able to take stock of his beautiful neighbor. He saw a pale, very fair girl, beautifully dressed, as even his masculine eye could tell, whose calmness he judged to be unnatural, and whose normal manner he fancied, as dinner went on, was overlaid with an unusual anxiety and constraint.

She did not give him the impression of a nervous or timid person, but was evidently in a state of high nervous tension, which he could well understand. The card in front of her bore the name, " Miss

Beatrice Amery," and he remembered having heard Lady Dundas mention it in the course of conversation as that of a girl of whom she was very fond.

Miss Amery received his first attempts at conversation inattentively, her mind apparently fixed elsewhere; and Stapleton could not help seeing in his mind's eye the fallen form of Lord Henry Rollestone, the revolver close at hand, the open doorway, and then the stumbling figure of this girl —for she was no more—as she fled from the murdered man's presence.

Looking round at her with this vision in his mind, Stapleton could hardly grasp that this cold, pale beauty beside him was the same person, and that little more than two hours had passed between the two scenes, the one he could not get out of his memory, the other he was taking part in at this moment.

Conversation, meanwhile, had become general. The sixteen people at the table were fairly representative of London society. Lady Dundas herself was supported by an elderly peer who liked a good story and was still more appreciative of a good dinner. There were several young people, for the hostess liked young people, and one or two of the men were known to Stapleton.

Just across the table, facing him and Miss Amery was a rather different and older couple. The man, a Mr. West, was a middle aged bachelor and noted diner-out and raconteur, whose presence almost insured a successful party.

The lady he was paired with, a Miss Walkinshaw, elderly, plain, and badly dressed, was a well-known authoress of advanced and, as she liked to believe, up-to-date views.

She and West were soon engaged in an animated argument in which it was apparent to their neighbors, although not to the lady, that West was drawing her out by the well known expedient of stating some outrageous view in order to get her to contradict it.

Lady Dundas, from the head of the table, looked rather anxiously from time to time in in this direction; disturbed, if the truth were known, as much by the constraint she observed between Stapleton and Miss Amery, as by the rather violent opinions she overheard from their neighbors opposite.

CHAPTER VI

ANOTHER SUÈDE GLOVE

AS dinner went on Stapleton gradually thawed some of his partner's cold constraint, and at one moment had the satisfaction of seeing a pale smile pass across her face at a remark of his. It was but a transient gleam, however, and her nervousness, which she seemed to be making great efforts to overcome, was very evident to Stapleton.

This knowledge made him in his turn a little nervous and constrained, so that Lady Dundas thought how exasperating young men were, and how tiresome it was of her favorite to first arrive half an hour late and then fail to get on with the very girl on whom she had hoped he would make a particularly good impression.

About half way through dinner Stapleton became aware that West and his partner had hit upon a somewhat alarming subject of discussion, and were disputing it so eagerly as to attract general attention.

" My dear lady," West was saying, " you are wrong, quite wrong. We are every bit as bad as the French in that respect. Ever since the war we have been growing more and more hysterical, more passionate, more violent and melodramatic.

" What has just happened in Paris may happen here any day now. Indeed, it has happened already, and the *crime passionel* is rapidly becoming as frequent and as popular in England as in the most depraved ' quarter ' in Paris."

" It may be," replied the lady, " although I don't think you are right. But what I maintain is that there is an atmosphere in Paris we have not got here. You must go to the continent to find it. Here a crime such as that we are discussing is a rare event, and sells the special editions of the evening papers because it is so rare.

" We discuss it everywhere, in the train, in the 'bus, in the restaurant, in the theater, even in this room; but in France it is different. The public there is so accustomed to

such things that it takes them as part of the day's routine.

"The murder of a man by his mistress, the death of a woman at the hand of her lover, is a natural event; the French are moved by it, because they are emotional people, not because they see anything remarkable or unnatural in it. The law acquits the murderer, who becomes a hero or heroine, and sets the fashion as an artist in violent death."

"Well, I maintain we are just as bad," said West, "and are going exactly the same way as our friends across the channel. Our code of morals, our standards of conduct have changed and are changing rapidly. Murder, violence, death, drugs, drink, debauchery: these are common incidents of our daily lives, and you or I may be touched by them at any moment."

During this conversation Stapleton had observed the growing uneasiness of his neighbor. Her breathing became quicker, and her hand, resting on the table, was so tightly clenched that the knuckles were white. She kept her eyes on her plate but it was evident to him that she was attentive to every word.

"Well, there is one respect in which we differ from the French," retorted the authoress. "No woman who killed her lover would be let off in England. Our courts of justice are above suspicion."

"Pooh! Don't you believe it!" cried West. "Courts of justice, indeed! Our judges are so many licensed buffoons. The bench has sunk to the level of a carpenter's bench, and the bar—saving the presence of my friend opposite—is just like any other bar—no better, no worse."

"I don't agree," said the lady stiffly.

"My dear madam," West continued, "the thing is well known. The time is coming when justice can be bought and sold in England, and when passion and prejudice will run rampant in the courts. Let us ask Stapleton here.

"He is a barrister and aspires to be a judge, I have no doubt. He can speak openly, for none of the bench are present.

"Now, own, Stapleton, that if such a crime as that in France were committed here, under exactly similar circumstances, the woman would get off. She is wronged by her lover. She stabs him.

"A *crime passionel,* extenuating circumstances, a beautiful woman in the dock, a dotard on the bench, and the lady is not only acquitted, but becomes a popular idol. Hey? What do you say?"

"I—er—I am afraid I don't follow you," was all Gerald could find to say. "I—I haven't read the case you are speaking about."

"Not read it, my dear man!" cried West. "Why, what *do* you read, then? The papers have been full of it for a week. The truth is that you young barristers don't live enough in the world.

"Give up your musty law-books, my boy, and read contemporary records; study men and women, and abjure precedents. The world is changing, and changing very rapidly since the war.

"We are all becoming internationalized, and are adopting the same code of morals and conduct, and a precious loose code it is! For a woman to walk into a man's room, stab him to death or shoot him through the heart is nothing now; it is all part and parcel of the way we live.

"The war has degenerated the whole human race, I tell you, and we wallow in blood and filth."

"Well, Mr. West," interrupted Lady Dundas from the end of the table, "I wish you wouldn't wallow at my dinner table. Kindly change the subject. It deprives my guests of their appetites."

West bowed, and made some chaffing reply, and Stapleton breathed more freely. He had fancied in the last few minutes that Beatrice Amery would collapse, so deathly pale had she become, so fixed her gaze and still her whole attitude.

Just before the ladies left the table a young man a little way from Stapleton, leaned forward and said:

"I say, Stapleton. You live at Malmesbury Mansions, don't you?"

As he answered Stapleton saw Miss Amery become still more rigid.

"I am being turned out of my diggings," the other went on, "are there any vacant chambers in the mansions?"

"No. None," replied Stapleton. Then,

remembering the event of the afternoon, he added, "At least, I don't know. There may be. I can't say." The other stared at him.

"Well, you can tell me to whom to apply, I suppose," he said, as the ladies rose on Lady Dundas's signal.

It was time. Beatrice Amery was almost fainting. As she rose she dropped her glove. Stapleton stooped to pick it up. and as he gave it to her he noticed that it was a number six, and at once the recollection of that other glove came back to him, and the doctor's exclamation, "A lady's glove; suède; size six. Here is something for you to think about, Mr. Policeman."

He handed the glove to the girl as she passed out, and, as she went through the doorway in the wake of the other ladies, her excessive pallor attracted Lady Dundas, who put her arm round the girl's waist, throwing a look at Gerald, as much as to say: "This is your doing."

"I say, Stapleton," said the young man who had asked him about chambers, moving to the table to sit next him. "You seem fairly struck, my boy. The lady is beautiful enough, but strangely white and cold. I like something rather more like flesh and blood."

CHAPTER VII

"NO—NOT ENGAGED—"

WHEN the men joined the ladies a few minutes later, Gerald found that Miss Amery had left. Lady Dundas, observing his look, whispered to him, "Yes, she has gone.

"You were too much for her, Gerald. The poor girl has gone home with a bad headache, and it serves you right, for you behaved abominably."

Stapleton could make no defence, but his obvious uneasiness seemed to soften his hostess's heart, as a little later, she told him to remain after the others had left.

When the last guest had departed she sat down with a weary air, and, motioning Stapleton to take a chair close to her, said:

"Thank goodness, that's over! I don't know when I have had so thoroughly unsatisfactory a dinner party. And you, Gerald, are a good deal to blame for it.

"You arrive half an hour late, so that the dinner and my guests' tempers are spoiled. As for my cook, she will probably give notice to-morrow.

"Then you get on so badly with the most charming girl I know, that you create a distinct coolness in your part of the table, and finally drive her home with a bad headache.

"You, yourself, seem distrait and preoccupied about something. What is the matter? Are you in love?"

Stapleton smiled. "I am not," he said. "But I have had a trying experience."

She looked at him more attentively.

"What sort of an experience?"

"I had not meant to say anything about it, but I may as well. After all, you will know all about it to-morrow."

"My dear Gerald, what do you mean? Has anything happened?"

He nodded. "Yes. Something rather dreadful. You know Lord Henry Rollestone has the rooms above mine?"

"Yes."

"Well, this evening he was found dead in them."

"Good Heavens! Who found him?"

"I did."

"You! Gerald! How did he die?"

"He was murdered."

"Oh, my dear boy; how awful! Tell me all about it."

Stapleton recounted his experiences of the afternoon, always omitting the vision of Beatrice Amery on the stairs.

It was a relief to speak of them to so sympathetic a hearer, and long before he finished Lady Dundas had her hand upon his and was giving him that sort of maternal sympathy which, even to grown men, can be so precious.

"Gerald," she said when he had finished, "I take back all I said to you before. No wonder you were not yourself, and as for being late, I wonder you came at all. What a dreadful experience! Will it be in to-morrow's papers?"

"I imagine so," he answered, "and I shall, of course, have to give evidence at the inquest."

"Yes, yes; that will be disagreeable. But, after all, you will merely say what you have just told me. And there is no clew, no trace of the murderer?"

He shook his head.

"Lord Henry was expecting a lady to tea with him," he said. "The servant, Jacobs, you know, had been told to bring up tea for two people at half-past four."

"Did she come?"

"It is not known."

"But you don't mean to say—"

"No, no. There is nothing to connect any one with the murder. But a lady's glove was found among the papers on the floor."

"Then there had been a woman there?"

"Apparently."

They talked for some minutes longer in this strain, when Lady Dundas exclaimed sharply: "You didn't say anything of all this to Beatrice Amery, did you?"

"Of course not. I have mentioned it to no one but you. Why?"

Lady Dundas hesitated. "Well," she said, at last, "Beatrice knew Lord Henry, and I thought—"

"She knew him?"

"Yes." She hesitated again. "To tell you the truth, Gerald, when she first came out he paid her a good deal of attention. There was some little talk about it. You go out so little that I don't suppose you heard of it?"

He shook his head.

"Oh, it's all over long ago," Lady Dundas went on. "There was nothing in it. Lord Henry, as you know, admired a great many women in his day. She was quite young and very, very pretty. But far too good for him."

"Do you mean," asked Stapleton, "that they were engaged?"

"Oh, dear, no. It was merely a passing fancy on his part; but if she had suddenly heard of his murder it might have upset her. I am glad you didn't say anything about it."

"Of course not," he exclaimed. "I had never met Miss Amery before, and would not be likely to speak of such a thing to her."

"No, of course not. It was stupid of me to think of it. She is a charming girl; the nicest I know."

He smiled a little.

"Ah, I know what you are thinking," she cried.

And he cut in: "You are a dreadful matchmaker, Aunt Helen."

"Oh! I give you up. You are hopeless. Her mother is a tiresome, silly woman," she went on, "but Beatrice—well, the man who marries Beatrice will be in luck."

Stapleton said nothing, and rose to leave.

Lady Dundas went with him to the head of the stairs. "Good night, my dear boy," she said. "Don't think too much of this. I hope you will have a good night."

Gerald hoped so too, but as he walked home he felt that his sleep might be short, as indeed it was.

CHAPTER VIII

A PEER OF THE REALM

THE day following the murder found Stapleton still in a state of puzzled and uneasy thought. He spent most of it in his rooms, to which he returned after a short visit to his club, where he found the members much excited by the news of Lord Henry Rollestone's death, as reported in the morning papers, with added details, mostly fictitious, and striking headlines, in the early editions of the evening journals.

Malmesbury Mansions was visited in the course of the day by a number of reporters, photographers, and idlers, who, however, were kept at bay by the police and were unable to penetrate to or annnoy the inmates.

The murder of so well known and much paragraphed a member of "smart" society naturally attracted a great deal of attention, and that it should have taken place in the heart of the West End, in the middle of the afternoon, and in the remarkable circumstances that gradually became known, only added to the general curiosity.

Stapleton had a good deal to consider. He realized that when he failed to inform

Gray that he had seen a lady leave Lord Henry's apartments he had taken a step he could not easily retrace.

It would be difficult now to explain why he had withheld that information—indeed, he found it difficult to explain to himself. Some instinct seemed to have made him keep silence in the first instance, and that instinct had been strengthened by his introduction to Miss Amery and his identification of her as the woman he had seen creeping down the stairs.

Lady Dundas's dinner party and the conversation that went on there, with its obvious effect on the girl by his side, seemed to him something like a nightmare to look back on, and, for some reason he was unable to explain, had ranged him more than ever upon Beatrice Amery's side. If he had not given away her secret to the detective when he was unacquainted with her, it seemed impossible to do so now he knew her.

He wondered if her presence in the mansions were known or suspected by any one besides himself. Of course had Egan, the porter, been at his usual post, no one could have come in or gone out unobserved.

But Egan had not been there for at least twenty-four hours before the murder, and although Jacobs was supposed to answer the bell in the porter's absence it seemed probable that Miss Amery, finding no one in the front hall, had walked upstairs and entered Lord Henry's chambers unannounced.

The house was a corner one, and had a servants' and tradesmen's entrance to the basement in a side street.

It seemed, therefore, that unless she had happened to meet one of the occupants of the flats on the stairs, Miss Amery might have passed in and out without remark.

Stapleton ran through these occupants in his mind.

On the ground floor there lived an elderly invalid, named Robinson, who went out but rarely and then only for a short drive on fine, warm days.

With him lived a valet-attendant, named Griffiths, whose duties were shared in the daytime by a trained female nurse, who arrived about nine o'clock in the morning and left in the evening. Griffiths generally slept in the daytime while the nurse was there, and went out for some fresh air in the late afternoon.

The first floor flat was occupied by a Captain Butler, who was abroad at present. Above came Stapleton himself, and then Lord Henry Rollestone, and on the top floor were two small bed-sitting room flats, one of which was empty, while the other belonged to a man named Carter, employed in a government office, who was usually out from about nine in the morning until dinner time.

The persons—other than the tenants—who had access to the flats by means of keys were Mr. Brown, the manager; Egan, the porter, and Jacobs and his wife.

Looking at all the circumstances, Gerald Stapleton could not but own that they looked very black for Beatrice Amery, and he was certain that did Gray, the detective, know what he, Stapleton, knew of her presence in Lord Henry's room, he would have no hesitation in arresting her.

It was evident that some circumstance connected with her acquaintance with Lord Henry, of which Lady Dundas had spoken, had led to her visit. What that circumstance might be Stapleton of course did not know, and preferred not to guess.

He could not believe the beautiful girl, whose suffering had been so obvious to him the previous evening, could be guilty of deliberate murder.

He was musing on all this when Jacobs brought him Lord Rollestone's card, and Lord Henry's half brother followed it into the room.

Lord Rollestone was generally described by the newspapers as a "sporting peer," and he did his best to look the part. He usually wore large check suits, straight-brimmed hats, and rather tight trousers, and, with his rubicund face and rather sandy hair, looked as if he would be more at home leaning over a stable door with a straw in his mouth than anywhere else.

He would have made an ideal representative of the typical sporting man in any race course film. He possessed a bluff, outspoken manner and a rather loud voice.

"I understand, Mr.—er—Stapleton," he

began, "that it was you who first discovered my unfortunate half brother's body. You knew him pretty well, I suppose?"

"Far from it, Lord Rollestone; I knew him very slightly."

"Hey! You knew him well enough, didn't you, to go up to his rooms with a book yesterday evening?"

"I did, but that need not imply very intimate relations."

"I don't know what you mean by 'intimate relations,'" was the answer. "You live in rooms immediately below him; very snug rooms they seem to be," he added, looking around him. "He lends you books; you return them in person, and enter his flat to do so. That seems to mean that you knew him fairly well. Two bachelors—you are a bachelor, I believe?—can't live so close together for some years without knowing a good deal of each other, I imagine.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. SMAILE IS ANNOUNCED

"AND that brings me to the object of my visit. I want to know if you have any suspicion who it was murdered my brother Henry. Don't mind what you tell me," Lord Rollestone went on.

"We are both men of the world, and I may say at once that Henry and I were not on very good terms. He went his way, and I went mine, and our ways didn't agree. He liked society of a certain sort; I don't. Sport is more my line. It wasn't his, and we agreed to differ.

"But, as head of the family, I can't ignore his death in such peculiar circumstances, and I am determined to find out all about it, although, if it means something not creditable to him, as may be the case, I shall probably keep my discoveries to myself. I have seen the Scotland Yard people, and, between you and me, I don't think very much of them.

"I am going to employ a man I know, who has done one or two jobs for me and for friends of mine, to go into all this, but I thought I would see you myself first, to hear what you can tell me about this affair."

"I am afraid I can tell you very little," said Stapleton, "and nothing I have not already told Mr. Gray."

The other pursed up his lips and looked at Stapleton without speaking for a moment.

"I have heard what you told Gray," he said at last. "It doesn't amount to much. But, as my brother's nearest neighbor, you probably know a great deal you haven't told Gray, and you may be able to give us a clew to the murderer or murderess.

"Now, look here, Mr. Stapleton," he went on, "my brother led a fairly fast life. He didn't live like a hermit in these rooms, I take it. He was expecting a lady yesterday afternoon, and there is very little doubt in my mind that if we could find that lady we should know a good deal more about his death than we do.

"You can probably give us a clew as to who she is. Will you do so? Your name need not be mentioned," he added.

"I assure you, Lord Rollestone," Stapleton began, "that I am quite unable to help you in this way—"

"Unable or unwilling, sir?" the other interrupted.

"Unable," replied Stapleton stiffly. "I have given the facts, as far as I know them, to Mr. Gray, and have told him, what will be confirmed by the manager and the servants, that I believe this is almost the first time that Lord Henry has had any woman visitor here."

"Pah!" exclaimed Lord Henry's brother.

"I am sorry if you don't believe me," Stapleton continued; "but that is the truth. These flats are very strictly run, and whatever sort of life your brother may have led outside them—and I know nothing of that—I can assure you that he lived quite irreproachably here.

"I can throw no light on the lady he was expecting yesterday, and I know nothing of his friends or his mode of life outside these mansions."

The peer almost winked. "Just as well you don't," he said. "Henry led a pretty lively life, I can tell you. I have no doubt a woman did this, eh?"

"I couldn't say," said Stapleton.

Lord Rollestone pursed up his lips.

"You *won't* say, I fancy you mean. But you said just now that this was about the first time you had known my brother have a lady visitor here. You admit, then, that some woman did visit him yesterday?"

Stapleton hesitated for a moment.

"If I said that I expressed myself badly. I should have said that this was the first time I had heard any mention of a lady visiting him."

"And who mentioned it?"

"Jacobs, the servant. Until he spoke of it I had heard nothing of your brother expecting any one. There was no reason why I should.

"I had not seen Lord Henry since he lent me the book a few days before, and we were not on such terms that he would be likely to tell me he was expecting a lady to tea."

"Well, I'll bet my life it was a woman did for him; no doubt the one he was expecting. What do you think?" he asked abruptly with a quick look at Stapleton.

"I really can't form any opinion," the other answered.

"Well, Mr. Stapleton," said Lord Rollestone, "you don't seem able to help me much; or is it," he added, with a shrewd look, "that you don't want to help? Had no particular liking for my brother, eh?"

"I assure you, Lord Rollestone," said Stapleton, who had been leaning against the mantelpiece throughout this interview, "I had no dislike of your brother."

"Ah, you'd have disliked him more if you'd known him better," the other struck in, shaking his head. "However, we needn't go into that. I must ask you to be good enough to see Mr. Smaile, Mr. Oliver Smaile, who will look into this for me.

"He is not in London to-day, but I've wired for him, and he may be here to-morrow. If you can tell him anything that will throw any light upon this mysterious lady I hope you will do so."

"I will answer any questions Mr. Smaile asks me," said Stapleton; "but I fear I have very little to tell him, and nothing I have not already told Mr. Gray. I am afraid that won't help much."

"I'm afraid it won't," said the other, rising. "I fancy you could tell us rather more if you liked. No offense, no offense," he added.

"Quite right to keep your mouth shut in these affairs. I should do it myself, I daresay. But anything you choose to say won't be repeated, and might give Smaile a clew, you know. I know how to keep a secret, and so does Smaile. We both know a few.

"He's a smart man, twice as smart as Gray, and I'll back him to find out most things. But to tell me that Henry lived here like a monk in his cell, and that the first time he ever received a lady here he was murdered—well, it doesn't seem to me to—what shall I say—carry conviction, that's all.

"I knew Henry, mind you," he added, as he went out on the landing and turned at the head of the stairs; "and I daresay you knew him too, a good deal better than you will admit, Mr. Stapleton. Good day. I'll tell Smaile to call here as soon as he arrives. He'll want to visit Henry's rooms and talk to the servants and so on, no doubt."

Gerald Stapleton shrugged his shoulders as he reëntered his rooms, while the peer rattled down the stairs, muttering to himself as he left the house:

"That fellow knows something, or I'm a Dutchman!"

CHAPTER X

GERALD IS GRILLED

AT the inquest the police, for reasons of their own, produced only such evidence as was necessary to obtain an open verdict, and warned Stapleton, Shea, and Jacobs to say nothing of the glove found on the floor.

Stapleton gave his evidence as shortly and lucidly as possible, and was not questioned as he feared he might be, as to whether he had seen or heard anything suspicious before going up to Lord Henry's rooms.

Jacobs's evidence that the murdered man was expecting a woman visitor caused con-

siderable sensation, as may be imagined, and furnished the late editions of the evening papers with some startling headlines.

The same evening, as Stapleton was reading in his rooms, Jacobs—Egan was still away—brought him a card, bearing the name, " Mr. Oliver Smaile," with an address in St. John's Wood.

The private detective was very different in every way from his Scotland Yard colleague. He was a large, loose-limbed person, with loose-fitting clothes, a broad, clean-shaven face, and an expression that gave no sign of the unusual sharpness with which Lord Rollestone credited him.

His eyes, which were small, piercing, and restless, were the sole indication of an unusually active intelligence.

" I come on behalf of Lord Rollestone," he said, as he entered. " I believe he has mentioned my name to you, Mr. Stapleton?"

The other acquiesced, as he motioned his visitor to a seat.

" I reached London this morning, just in time to be present at the inquest and I have been placed in possession of the facts concerning Lord Henry Rollestone's death by Scotland Yard, as far as they are known there.

" Before visiting Lord Henry's rooms and interviewing Jacobs and Dr. Shea I am anxious to hear what you can tell me, and although I heard your evidence this morning, I should be glad if you would go through the whole matter again, as fully as possible.

Stapleton sighed slightly as he prepared to comply. He was getting rather tired of telling the same story over and over again, and the necessity for withholding any mention of Beatrice Amery was something of a strain, especially in the presence of trained investigators. However, he had chosen to keep silence about her, and he intended to do so.

Smaile was sitting in a low easy chair, and, having asked and received permission to smoke a cigarette, gazed pensively at the ceiling through the smoke rings he blew toward it.

When Stapleton had finished his brief recital the detective asked him one or two questions—as to his intimacy with Lord Henry, the length of time both of them had lived in the mansions, and one or two minor details, and then relapsed into silence. Presently, withdrawing his eyes from the ceiling and assuming a more upright position, he looked at Stapleton and said, quietly:

" Thank you, Mr. Stapleton. But you can tell me a good deal more than that if you care to do so."

" Sir," cried Stapleton, starting up, " I don't know what you mean. I—"

" Pardon me," said the other, holding up his hand. " I don't mean that you are consciously withholding anything, but only that there are a good many things which may seem insignificant or irrelevant to you but may be of value to me."

" I can't see that," said Stapleton still rather offended. " I have told you what happened the other evening and I don't see what I can add."

" Exactly," answered Smaile. " You have told me what occurs to you and can think of nothing to add: but I can think of a good deal.

" You will understand, I am sure, if you think of it, that there may be a great many small incidents having no apparent connection with Lord Henry's death that may give a trained investigator a hint, an indication, I won't go so far as to call it a clew which may be of use to him in his investigation.

" Let me explain what I mean. You and Lord Henry have lived in this house for some two years or so, you tell me. You have met, no doubt, many times on the stairs, in the lift, going out and coming in.

" You saw each other occasionally, I daresay, in society, at a club, in the park, at Ascot or Ranelagh, and so on.

" You probably had mutual acquaintances, and you formed some idea of Lord Henry's life, his friends, his tastes, his amusements, habits, and so forth.

" You may be able to say if he was hard up, or quick tempered; whether he used bad language, had a sense of humor, was lively or dull; if he drank much, kept late hours, or was fairly regular in his life, went out and came in always at the same time of day.

"Two men cannot live so close together as you and he have done without knowing a hundred trifles like these about each other, no one of which may seem to you to have any bearing upon his sudden death, but many of which, especially if taken together, may give me some idea, not necessarily of how he was killed but of the sort of man he was and the sort of life he led.

"And I may tell you, Mr. Stapleton, that a man's death generally bears some relation to his life, and when it is such a death as Lord Henry's, it is certain to have a very close relation to it.

"If we knew the whole of his life in the last few months there is little doubt we should be able to solve the problem of his death.

"That is what I mean when I say that you, Lord Henry's near neighbor for the best part of the last two years, can tell me things I should like to know about him. It is for us, between us, to put those things together, and it is there that I want your help."

Gerald Stapleton sat back in his chair with a slight shrug of his shoulders. The detective's explanation satisfied him that his previous remark had had no reference to the withholding of information by him, and he regretted the momentary annoyance he had shown.

"I understand," he said. "Ask me anything you like, and I will answer you to the best of my ability, but I imagine you will get better information on most of these points from the servants here, and from Lord Rollestone and Lord Henry's most intimate friends, among whom I did not count myself."

"I shall certainly make inquiries of them," answered Smaile, "and I must of course interview the two Jacobs, and the porter, who is away just now, isn't he?"

"Yes; he has been away the last few days. If he had been on duty at the door no one could have come in or gone out, or even have gone upstairs from the basement, without his knowledge, and we should probably know who the murderer is, or very possibly the murder would not have taken place."

"Just so," said Smaile. "It is very unfortunate he was away. I understand he is in the country and not in London, but I shall want to see him when he returns."

He then went on to question Stapleton as to what he knew of Lord Henry's way of life, habits and friends, and especially as to any visitors he had at the chambers. He got but little information, however, for the simple reason that Stapleton had little to give.

"As to the revolver that was found in Lord Henry's room; have you ever seen it there when you visited him?" Smaile asked, presently.

"No. I did not know he had one."

"And you can imagine no reason for his producing it that afternoon?"

"No, none," said Stapleton.

"Would you call him a nervous man?"

"Not particularly."

"He never spoke of being threatened by any one, or of going in danger of his life, I suppose?"

"Not to me. But you must understand, Mr. Smaile, that I knew Lord Henry very slightly, and was in no way in his confidence or on terms of intimacy with him. I am afraid I have not been able to help you much, but I have told you what I can."

"Thank you," said the detective, rising. "I am much obliged to you for giving me so much of your time. I may have to ask your assistance on other points as my investigations proceed. These affairs are very tiresome for those who, like yourself, have the misfortune to be brought into them.

"By the bye," he added carelessly, as he turned at the door, "I suppose that in the few minutes that elapsed between your return to your rooms and your visit to Lord Henry's you neither saw nor heard anything suspicious?"

CHAPTER XI

FROM THE DRAGON'S MOUTH

STAPLETON stiffened a little. "No," he replied. "Had I done so, I would of course have mentioned it."

"Of course," said the other as he went out; "but it might not have occurred to you, you know. That is

why I asked. All sorts of small incidents that seem trivial in themselves at the time, are apt to assume an importance in the light of subsequent events, and they sometimes pass from one's memory.

"May I ask you to ring for Jacobs, as I want to go to Lord Henry's rooms with him."

Stapleton rang, and when Jacobs appeared, he and Smaile ascended to the floor above. As the detective went upstairs in the servant's wake, he shook his head and murmured to himself: "I believe Rollestone is right, and that there is something that young man wants to conceal.

"He flew out at me so smartly when I purposely said what I did. He would not have shown so much heat if there had been no sting in my words."

"Now, Jacobs," he went on, when they entered the flat above, "I want you to go through for me everything that you did when you came up here at half-past four that day. Here is a tray," he said, taking an inlaid one from a table in the sitting room.

"Imagine it is the one you had in your hands that day. Here are the letters you had on it," he added, taking a handful of papers from his pocket and placing them on the tray. "Now show me exactly where Lord Henry was when you came in, and make your entry just as you did then."

Jacobs, who seemed rather nervous, took the tray and placed the papers upon it.

"Now, where was Lord Henry when you entered?" asked Smaile.

"Standing right in front of the fire," said the man.

"Like this?"

"No, sir, leaning on the mantelshelf with one arm."

Smaile placed himself in position.

"Now, go to the door and come in as you did then."

Jacobs did so, and advanced toward the fireplace.

"Did you offer Lord Henry the letters?"

"He took them off the tray as I passed, sir."

"How many were there?"

"I couldn't say exactly; three or four, I think."

"Now, this is important, Jacobs. Are you sure there were more than two?"

"Yes, sir. There were three found on the writing table—after—you know."

"I know there were," said Smaile. "But I want you to tell me exactly only what you remember happening at the time. Were there half a dozen letters, do you think?"

"Oh, no, sir. There may have been three, or there may have been four, I couldn't say which."

"That's all right, Jacobs. Now go on with what you did next, after Lord Henry had taken the letters from the tray, like this—" and Smaile suited the action to the words.

"I can't do what I did then, sir," said Jacobs, "because I haven't got the tea things on the tray."

"Never mind; stand just where you did then." Jacobs moved to a round table near the fireplace. "Pretend you are setting out the tea things, as you did then, I suppose. Stand in the same position. Is that how it was?"

"Yes, sir. I took some cakes his lordship had bought, off that other table, like this, as it were," and the man moved across the room and back, "and arranged them on a plate here."

"And while you were doing all this, what was Lord Henry doing?"

"Opening his letters."

"Did he read them?"

"Yes, and threw the envelopes into the fire."

"Was that usual with him?"

"Yes, sir. I have often seen him do it. He never kept the letters in the envelopes, but put them in a heap on his writing table."

"I see. Was he standing here all the time he read his letters?"

"Yes, sir. It didn't take him long."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"No, sir. Not exactly, that is."

"What do you mean by 'not exactly?'"

The man hesitated. "Well, it was like this, sir," he said. "I was bending over the tea table, as it might be like this, and his lordship was standing where you are now, and I thought I heard him say something to himself as he read one of the letters. But I am deaf and I wouldn't be sure."

"And what was it you thought you heard him say?"

"Well, sir, it sounded like 'Damned cheek.'"

Smaile's eyes, the most remarkable feature in his rather ordinary face, sparkled.

"'Damned cheek,' eh?" he murmured. "A curious thing for him to say if he was only reading a letter of invitation from a friend. Did he say nothing more?"

"No, sir."

"Nor do anything?"

"Well, sir, it seemed to me as if he pushed the letter away from him, like."

"Pushed it away. Like this?" asked Smaile, again suiting his action to his words and pushing a paper away from him along the mantelpiece.

"Yes, sir. You see, I had my back partly turned, and I was busy with the tea things, so I didn't pay much attention to him, but I had a sort of idea that was what he did."

Smaile mused a moment, his hand, with the paper in it, stretched out along the mantelpiece. It touched a china ornament, one of several that stood there, a green dragon in whose open mouth were two or three paper pipe-lighters and other papers.

Smaile, after looking at these for a moment, drew out the contents of the ornament and putting the "spills," or pipe-lighters, back, ran his eye over two letters he had drawn out with them. As he did so his eyes again sparkled and he looked fixedly at the papers in his hand.

Moving closer to an electric light in the center of the room, he carefully read the papers, turning one of them over to examine it more closely. After a few moments he turned toward the fireplace where Jacobs was standing.

CHAPTER XII

EXPLAINING THE REVOLVER

"THANK you, Jacobs," he said. "Put back that tray where we found it." And as the man turned to do this, Smaile slipped one of the papers he had in his hand in his pocket, and walking up to the green dragon, replaced the other in its open mouth, saying, for Jacob's benefit, "Nothing here, anyhow. Did you mention to Mr. Gray or any one else that Lord Henry said 'Damned cheek' and pushed a letter away from him?" he asked.

"No, sir. You see, I only half saw it, as it were."

"When you finished arranging the tea things, did you leave the room?"

"Yes, sir. After I had put the kettle in the fender ready for his lordship to put it on the fire if he wanted."

"Was he still standing here?"

"Oh, no, sir. He had gone into the other room."

"I see. He went there after he had read the letters, and while you were still here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did anything else happen in here?"

"No, sir. I finished with the tea tray and kettle, drew the curtains, and made up the fire, and followed his lordship into the writing room."

"Yes?"

"I said, 'The tea things are all ready, my lord, and the kettle in the fender.'"

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'All right, Jacobs, you can go. You needn't come up again until I ring.'"

"Where was he when he said that?"

"Sitting in the chair in front of the writing table."

"Let us go in there," said Smaile, leading the way into the smaller room and seating himself in the writing chair.

"Was this where he was?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you stood at the door, where you are now?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was Lord Henry doing?"

"Writing."

"What happened then?"

"I went downstairs, sir."

The detective looked attentively at the man.

"Now Jacobs," he said, "when you left the room was everything just as it always was?"

"Yes, sir—I think so," he answered. At least—"

"Yes?"

"There was the revolver, sir."

"Where was it?"

"On this table," and Jacobs indicated a small side table, close to the wall of the room. "Just where it was when I came up that evening when Lord Henry's body was found."

"I wasn't here then, you know, Jacobs. So the revolver was there, was it? Was it usually there?"

"Oh, no, sir. His lordship kept it in one of the drawers of the writing table."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've seen it there more than once when the drawer was open."

"Loaded, I suppose?" observed Smaile carelessly.

"I couldn't say, sir. I never had it in my hands."

"Then, do you mean to say, Jacobs, that you had never seen it on this table before or lying about the flat?"

"Never, sir."

"Why did Lord Henry put it there that afternoon, do you suppose?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"Didn't it seem a strange thing to put out, when he was expecting a lady to tea?"

"Well, sir, I didn't think of it that way. You see, the lady would have tea in the other room."

"I see. Then you didn't connect the revolver with the lady?"

The man shook his head.

"When do you think Lord Henry took the revolver out of the drawer and put it on the table?" Smaile went on.

"I couldn't say, sir. It wasn't there when I was in the room in the morning."

"You can't think of any reason, then, for his taking out the revolver?" asked Smaile; and again the man shook his head.

"Did he see you looking at it?"

"No, sir. His back was turned to me. I wasn't in the room a minute, and he didn't look up, but went on writing, and just told me not to come up again."

"He didn't say anything about the revolver?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"And that is everything that happened before you went out, Jacobs?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Now be particular about this," said Smaile. "When you went out, did you shut the door after you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Which door did you go out by?"

"This one, sir," and the man moved to the door of the room leading into the little hall.

"Was the door between the two rooms left open or shut?"

"Open, sir."

"Was the door leading into the hall shut or open?"

"Shut, sir. I shut it after me when I went out, also the outer door of the flat."

"Now, Jacobs, this is most important. Can you swear you shut the outer door?"

"I can, sir."

"Why are you so positive?"

"Well, sir, you see, we always shut the outer doors of all the flats. It wouldn't do to leave them open."

"But you might have done so by accident this time."

The man shook his head. "No, sir."

"You might have done it so that the lady could walk straight in."

"Oh, no, sir. I expected the lady would ring the front bell of the mansions, not finding Egan downstairs, and then I should have shown her upstairs."

"Ah! You thought of that?"

"Yes, sir. It sort of occurred to me as I went downstairs."

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE TWENTIETH

THE detective remained silent for a few minutes, evidently picturing the scene as Jacobs had described it.

"When you went downstairs," he presently continued, "did you remain there until you came up to these rooms and found Mr. Gray and the others here?"

"Yes, sir. I was down stairs all the time."

"And were you alone, or did any one

come into the basement while you were there—any tradesman or servant, I mean?" Smaile continued as the man hesitated.

"No one, sir," answered Jacobs after a slight pause. "I was quite alone."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"There are only two entrances to the mansions, are there—one at the front end, and the other at the side, leading into the basement?"

"Yes, sir. I can show you the back door."

"We will go down to the basement presently," said Smaile. "You don't think any one could have come in by the side entrance while you were downstairs, do you?"

Jacobs again hesitated a little.

"I don't think so, sir," he said.

"You don't seem very certain," observed Smaile.

"Well, you see, sir, I am a bit deaf, and I was busy getting my tea in the kitchen when I went down, so it might be some one could come in and me not hear them."

"Do you suggest that happened?"

"Oh, no, sir. I only mean such a thing could be. The passage is very dark."

"I see. Now tell me, Jacobs, what made you come upstairs to Lord Henry's rooms when you did? Did you hear people up here, Mr. Gray and the others?"

"No, sir. I heard nothing, but it was past seven and I thought I had better go up to take away the tea things and to put out his lordship's evening clothes."

"Do you do that every night?"

"Yes, sir, and for the other gentlemen when they are here."

"One more question, Jacobs, before we go downstairs. Did you hear any noise at all while you were downstairs, which might have come from these rooms; any sound like a shot being fired?"

The man shook his head. "No, sir," he declared. "I heard nothing at all."

"So that when you came up at last, you were surprised to find Mr. Gray, Mr. Stapleton, and Dr. Shea here?"

"Very surprised, sir, and very shocked, if I may say so, to find Lord Henry dead. He was a pleasant, open-handed gentleman."

"You don't know of any enemies he had?"

"No, sir. I can't think he had many. He had a pleasant word for most."

"Well, Jacobs, I want to look through these rooms, and then we will go downstairs to the basement. Is your wife there?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll have a word with her. When did she come in that evening?"

"Not till half-past eight, sir; in time to get a bit of supper for me."

The detective, before leaving the room, looked carefully about it. "Have the things in this room been much disturbed since that evening?" he asked.

"No, sir. Everything is as it was, except that all the papers and other things have been taken out of the writing table drawers," said Jacobs, opening one or two of the drawers as he spoke, and showing them to be empty. Smaile nodded.

"I have seen the contents of the drawers at Scotland Yard," he said. "Were the drawers open or any of their contents on the floor when you left Lord Henry a little after half-past four?"

"No, sir. They were just as usual."

Smaile looked at the writing table, and, observing a date card upon it, said:

"I see the date shown here is the 21st of October; that is the day after the murder. When was the slip with the 20th on it torn off, do you know?"

The man looked a little surprised.

"I can't say, sir," he said. "This is the first time I've noticed it."

"Do you think the 20th was here when you left the room that afternoon?"

"Yes, sir. His lordship had written something on it. I usually tear the slip off each morning when I tidy the table."

Again Smaile's small eyes shone.

"You are sure of that?" he asked.

"Quite sure, sir. His lordship often made notes of his engagements like, on that slip."

"And he made a note on that of the 20th, you say?"

"Yes, sir. I remember noticing something there when I tidied the table in the morning."

"Can you remember what it was?"

"No, sir, not exactly. But I think it was to remind himself some one was coming to tea. Initials or such like."

"Can't you remember the initials, Jacobs?"

"No, sir, I can't."

And in spite of all Smaile's questioning he could get nothing more definite on this point, to which he evidently attached considerable importance.

"Well," he said at last. "Perhaps Mrs. Jacobs may remember better."

The man shook his head. "She wasn't in here," he said. "She does the bedrooms and the grates, but I always tidied up his lordship's writing table.

"Most vexatious," murmured Smaile to himself as he went down to the basement. "But at least I have found out two things which Gray seems to have missed. There may be more."

CHAPTER XIV

THE WATCHER AT THE WINDOW

THAT evening when Gerald Stapleton returned to his rooms, he found a note awaiting him, at sight of which he gave utterance to an impatient exclamation.

Opening it he found it ran as follows:

DEAR MR. STAPLETON:

Please come and see me as soon as possible. I have something of great importance to tell you, and want your advice. Don't fail to come.

Yours sincerely,
PAULINE LA TROBE.

Stapleton threw the note from him.

"Just as I feared," he said. "Now all the fat will be in the fire!"

Miss La Trobe was a partially paralyzed invalid, who lived with her mother almost exactly opposite Malmesbury Mansions, and whose rooms, on the second floor, faced Stapleton's. Her father, Stapleton believed, had been a professional man of some sort, a bank manager, he fancied, and, dying, had left his wife and daughter only moderately provided for.

Of partly foreign extraction, Miss La Trobe had a certain vivacity and liveliness, in spite of her misfortune—she was paralyzed below the waist—which caused her to chafe at the invalid life she was forced to lead, and made her eager for any excitemen or distraction the outside world could offer. She spent her days lying on a sofa in the window of her room, facing Stapleton's, from which she could see up and down the street.

She knew by sight the occupants of its every house, and, through the little maid servant who waited on her and her mother, she learned many bits of gossip concerning her neighbors. She knew at what hour each of them went out in the morning and came home at night, and she fancied she could tell by their gait and general appearance how they had fared during the day.

Lying there, looking down on the passers by, she invented romances and adventures for them by the dozen, and created endless situations in which they played parts that would have astonished them could they have known the thoughts that were passing through the head of the invalid woman, of whose existence many of them were quite unaware.

The inhabitants of Malmesbury Mansions had a special interest for her. In the first place they were men, generally bachelors, and might be supposed to lead lives of a less dull, prosaic nature than ordinary married business men. Secondly, the mansions were so exactly opposite her window that its occupants could scarcely enter or leave by the front entrance without being seen by her.

Her little maid was on speaking terms with Egan, the porter, who spent much of his time at the door of the mansions, and was wont every morning to lift his hand to his hat in a semi-military salute, reminiscent of his soldiering days, as he glanced up at the window on the second floor opposite, where the invalid reclined on her couch.

Stapleton's acquaintance she had made some time since in an accidental way. One day, as he went out, a letter, blown out of her open window, fluttered down at his feet.

He picked it up and, seeing whence it had come, rang the bell of her house and re-

turned it by the servant who opened the door, and, lifting his hat to the invalid woman above, went on his way.

On his return to his rooms he found a note signed " Pauline La Trobe," thanking him for his trouble and asking him if he would have pity on an invalid and call upon her and her mother.

Stapleton was a good-natured man, and had often felt compassion for the poor woman lying helpless in the window facing his. He responded to her appeal and called upon her.

The mother, he found, was a feeble and uninteresting old lady, who lived only to minister to her daughter, but Miss La Trobe was of a different spirit.

In her youth—she might be about forty, Stapleton imagined—she had traveled a good deal; she had keen observation, a certain amount of wit, and was well read and well informed, and she welcomed Stapleton with a warmth that touched him.

He got into the way of paying her occasional visits and of lending her books which she discussed with him, and occasionally he sent her flowers and fruit from his sister's greenhouses.

In return she gave him her very grateful thanks, built up romance round him and predicted for him a successful career at the bar.

The day following Lord Henry's murder it had flashed across Stapleton's mind that Miss La Trobe might very well have seen Beatrice Amery enter and leave the mansions. In fact, she was certain to have done so had she been lying, as usual, upon her sofa in the window.

The news of the murder would of course excite her greatly, for she knew Lord Henry well by sight, and had often discussed him with Stapleton, and her keen intelligence could not fail to connect the unusual appearance of a young and good-looking girl at the mansions that evening with the murder.

As Stapleton pondered over these things he dreaded hearing from Miss La Trobe, who he was sure would want to talk the whole affair over with him, and he anxiously awaited the summons from her which he expected would reach him, unless, by good fortune, she had not been in her window that evening.

Now that this summons had come, he knew full well that she had read in the evening papers of the proceedings at the inquest that morning, and he divined what the matter was upon which she wanted his advice. He decided to go and see her the next morning.

CHAPTER XV

ONE WHO SAW

WHEN Stapleton entered Miss La Trobe's room he found the little woman sitting up on her sofa, looking much excited, and with a slight flush upon her usually pale cheeks.

" Ah, Mr. Stapleton," she cried as he shook hands with her, " how glad I am to see you and how bad of you not to have come before. I have hoped every hour of the last two or three days that you would come, and in the end I had to send for you."

" I am sorry to have disappointed you," said Stapleton as he took a chair close to her; " but I have been rather busy."

" Oh, I know," she answered. " I know how busy you must have been, and how troubled with this dreadful affair; but I thought you might find time to come and tell me about it. You know how little excitement I get, and here was a whole armful of it at my very door.

" Poor Lord Henry!" she went on. " To think I shall never again see his debonair figure going down the street, with a glance for every pretty girl he met. And it is about this I want to see you."

" Indeed?" said Stapleton.

" Yes, indeed and indeed! I have something of great importance to tell you—something of which I did not grasp the full importance until I read the proceedings at the inquest last night. Can you guess what it is?"

Stapleton could guess very well, but he shook his head.

She leaned toward him and put her hand on his arm to give her words greater emphasis.

"I saw the mysterious lady enter and leave the mansions," she said, and drew back, her eyes bright with excitement, to watch the effect of her words.

"Now, listen. At about half past five I was lying here as usual. It was rather a dark evening and inclined to rain, but I could see quite clearly by the light of the street lamps.

"I saw a lady, young, tall and well dressed, come down the street from that direction," and she pointed westward. "She stopped for a moment outside the mansions and looked up and down the street and at the name of the mansions above the door.

"Then she went up the steps and into the house. The door, of course, is always open, but Egan was not there, as he had gone to see his daughter in the country. I knew that from my maid, Annie.

"I wondered what should bring a lady to the mansions, the abode of all you bachelors, but I thought she might be a friend of old Mr. Robinson's, or have brought a note for some of you, and would come out again at once. But she did not come, although I never took my eyes off the door.

"'Now, what can she be doing there?' I said to myself. 'She cannot have come to see Mr. Stapleton, because he is out, I know. Only old Robinson and Lord Henry are in'; for I had seen Lord Henry come in earlier in the afternoon, with a small parcel in his hand. Well, I waited and waited, and at last, just about a quarter past six, you arrived and went into the house.

"And almost immediately afterward I saw the mysterious lady come out. So soon did she come after you had gone in that I thought you must have met her on the stairs. Did you meet her on the stairs?"

"I did not," said Stapleton quietly.

She looked at him closely. "Well, I supposed you had not when I read your evidence in the paper. I imagined you would have mentioned it. But you can only just have missed her. Well, she seemed somehow disturbed. I can't exactly say how she gave me that impression, but she did. She hesitated on the top step there for a moment, and then she came down the steps, holding on to the railing as she went.

"At the bottom of the steps she seemed to pull herself together and walked quickly away in the direction she had come from. What do you think of that?"

"I don't know what to think," he replied.

"But don't you see what it means?" she cried excitedly. "Jacobs says that Lord Henry was expecting a lady to have tea with him, but, as far as I can understand from the account of the inquest in the papers no one seems to know if the lady came or not.

"Well, I saw her come, and I saw her go away, and she must have been there just at the time of the murder. Isn't that important?"

"That depends," said Stapleton quietly.

"Oh, you lawyers!" she cried. "Well, go on."

"The presence of a lady in the mansions doesn't necessarily mean that she was in Lord Henry's rooms, or that the lady you say you saw was the lady he was expecting."

"But who else can it have been?" she cried. "Do you have so many ladies in and out of the mansions as all that? Moreover, whom could she have come to see if not Lord Henry?

"Annie has found out that Mr. Robinson had no one to see him that afternoon; you were out, and the others were away. The girl I saw must have been the one he was expecting. I am sure of it."

Stapleton realized the danger of seeming to oppose this view too decidedly.

"It may be—" he began.

"May be! It must be!" she cried. "There can be no other explanation. Now I want you to advise me as to whom I should tell this. You agree I ought to tell, don't you?"

Stapleton looked gravely at her.

"I don't know that I do," he said. "Have you told any one already?"

"Not a soul."

"Not even your mother or Annie?"

"Not even my mother or Annie."

"And why have you not told them?" he went on.

"Because—well, because it seemed to me so important that I thought I had better say nothing until I had told the police."

"Then why have you told me?"

"Oh, because I want your advice," she said. "Besides, you can be trusted. If I told Annie it would be all over the street."

"I am glad you have mentioned this to no one else, because I think you had better not do so."

"Not tell the police?" she asked. "But why not?"

CHAPTER XVI

PAULINE WILL BE MUM

"WELL, for several reasons. In the first place, you may think this lady went into the mansions, but it was dark and misty, and you may have made a mistake in the door you thought she went into and came out of."

Miss La Trobe threw herself back on the sofa. "Really," she said, "you lawyers are the limit! Look," she went on, pointing at the opposite door. "How can I possibly have made a mistake? There is the door, exactly opposite us. Could any one mix it up with any other door?"

"They might, on a dark, wet night," he remarked. "It is broad daylight now."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I didn't make any mistake," she declared. "I sit here all day, and often late into the night, and am quite accustomed to the look of your door. I couldn't make such a mistake as that."

"Well, let us assume you are right," Stapleton went on, "and that some unknown lady did go in there. It does not follow that she called on Lord Henry, still less that she murdered him."

"I don't say she killed him," replied Miss La Trobe. "All I say is that I saw a lady go into the house; that there is no one she could have gone to see except Lord Henry, who was in at the time; and that she was in the house at exactly the time he seems to have been shot.

"If she didn't shoot him herself, she must know a good deal about the matter, and it seems to me that the police, who don't know if a lady went to see Lord Henry or not, ought to know what I saw. Don't you agree?"

Stapleton was silent for a little while, and Miss La Trobe sat watching him with surprise, impatience, and a growing suspicion.

"Look here," he said at last; "what you have told me may seem very important to you, but it will not seem so important when it has been turned inside out by a clever cross-examining counsel."

"A counsel!" she said. "But I only want to tell the police."

"Yes. But the matter can't stop there. They will send a detective to interview you, as you can't go to them, and he will want all sorts of details from you.

"Then, if, on your information, they arrest some one, you would have to appear in court to identify her. You would be cross-examined and your credibility would be attacked in every way.

"It would be an ordeal for a strong and vigorous person, and it would be a severe one for you. Moreover, your responsibility would be very great, for upon your identification of a woman you have only seen for a moment, and from above, might depend her life. Have you realized all this?"

It was evident that Miss La Trobe had not realized it, and was somewhat shaken by Stapleton's forecast of what would happen. Her ardent and impulsive nature, so cruelly cabined and confined, cried out for the cheap excitement of assisting the authorities in the detection of a remarkable crime.

She would not have minded even a little notoriety in connection with it; but to be hauled to a police court, to be carried in helpless, in an invalid chair, to be stared at by the crowd, snapshotted by photographers, interrogated by the prosecution, cross-examined by the defense, and to have to endure all this all over again when the case went for trial—as Stapleton explained to her—was quite another matter; and, as a woman of some refinement and delicacy, she shrank from such an ordeal.

After a long discussion she agreed to keep what she had seen to herself for the present, but reserved the right to speak at any time in the future. "But in that case you will have to explain," she said to Stapleton, "why I have not spoken now, and

bear the responsibility for my not communicating with the police at once."

He promised to do this, and left her, pleased to think that he had surmounted the difficulty for the present, but the little woman's disappointment at not being allowed to take part in the unraveling of a crime was evident, and was made more severe by the fact that she was unable to discuss it with any one; for Stapleton made her promise to keep the matter to herself.

As he walked away she waved her hand to him from the window, but she wondered then, and she wondered still more as time went on, if he had any other motive for counseling silence or was only actuated by a desire to spare her inconvenience and disagreeableness.

CHAPTER XVII

THREE COULD HAVE DONE IT

THE curious attraction that is often found between very opposite characters was exemplified in the case of Dr. Shea and Mr. Oliver Smaile.

The little doctor had the impetuosity and impulsiveness of his race, and in non-professional matters was wont to reach conclusions with insufficient reason and to propound theories imperfectly based. Professionally he was more cautious, and his diagnosis, although often rapid, was usually correct.

Smaile, with his large, loosely knit frame, his slow movements and deliberate speech, was physically a complete contrast to the little Irishman, and his methods were equally opposite. He formed his conclusions slowly, spoke little and then to the point, and never expressed an opinion hastily, preferring to let others talk while he listened.

Two more opposite characters could scarcely be found, but at their first meeting they took to each other and their acquaintance soon ripened into friendship.

Shea, an ardent lover of mysteries, had never been brought so close to one before, and found the murder of Lord Henry Rollestone a problem of absorbing interest.

The different manner and methods of the two detectives interested him greatly, and he much preferred Smaile's more tolerant nature and wider views to the stereotyped official reticence of the Scotland Yard representative.

It happened that Smaile had work which often brought him into the West End at this time, and he got into the way of looking in on the doctor of an evening, after Shea's professional work was over, and of sitting with him in his "snuggery," discussing the Malmesbury Mansions mystery and any other case of the sort that might be attracting public attention.

The doctor was a single man, and his establishment was run for him by a housekeeper.

One of the first of Smaile's visits took place not long after the inquest, and he listened for some time with an easy tolerance to Shea's comments.

The doctor was not backward in giving his view of the case, and was convinced that the woman whom Lord Henry had expected that afternoon, and whose glove was found on the floor of his room, was the murderer.

Possibly the fact that he had been the first to find the glove had some influence on his opinion; he loved to think that he had some part in the affair.

"The thing seems as plain as the nose on your face," he cried, standing on his hearth rug in front of Smaile, who lay extended in an easy chair in a characteristic attitude, his legs stretched out; his head thrown back, a cigarette in his mouth, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Here is Lord Henry expecting some woman to tea that afternoon. He tells Jacobs not to interrupt them. There is no porter downstairs to see who the visitor is. She comes upstairs. Lord Henry admits her. They have some sort of an altercation. She picks up the revolver which lies handy, and shoots him in the head.

"She searches the room for something; maybe incriminating letters, and in doing so drops her glove. She goes out, leaving the door open behind her, perhaps by accident, perhaps in order to mislead and—and there you are," he finished, rather lamely.

"*You* may be, I'm not," said Smaile.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am not convinced the lady did the deed."

"Well, who did it then?"

"Ah! That is another matter," and the detective stared again at the ceiling.

"Have you heard about the posting of the letter, doctor?" he inquired presently.

"What letter?"

"You will remember," Smaile explained, "that Jacobs brought up some letters with the tea, and that two of these were invitations, one from Lady Swinley, the other from Mrs. Hazeldean, both of them friends of Lord Henry's.

"These were found on the writing table, you know, and Lord Henry was evidently writing to Mrs. Hazeldean when he was shot, for he had written the words 'Dear Mrs. Hazeldean, I shall be very pleased to dine with you on—' the writing broke off here, and the last words were blotted by his head falling forward on them."

"Yes. Yes!" cried the doctor. "But the letter was not posted."

"No, that one obviously was not. But the answer to Lady Swinley was."

"What do you say? He had written to Lady Swinley?"

"Yes. Before answering Mrs. Hazeldean he appears to have written to Lady Swinley, whom he had known from childhood. He wrote something to this effect: 'Dear Milly,' (Lady Swinley's name is Millicent)—'Your note has only just reached me, four thirty, the stupid servant not having brought it in before. So sorry I can't come to-morrow, but I have a boring engagement I can't get out of.' Then there is another sentence or two on indifferent matters."

"And you say this letter was posted?" asked the doctor.

"Yes. It was posted that evening before six o'clock. It was delivered at Lord Swinley's house in Mayfair by the first post next morning, the 21st.

"Lady Swinley opened it herself with others, while still in bed, and presently handed it in its envelope to a girl she employs as a sort of secretary. This young lady's duty is to keep Lady Swinley's accounts, attend to her correspondence, type her more formal letters to dictation, and so on.

"She had not long taken the morning's letters downstairs when Lady Swinley sent for her in a great state of excitement. She had just read of Lord Henry's death in the morning paper. Few details were given, you remember, but it was evident that he must have answered Lady Swinley not long before his death. Lady Swinley was much affected.

"His letter, still in its envelope, was kept, but it was not till after the inquest, when Jacobs's evidence became known, that the significance of an answer having been written *and posted, after four thirty*, became apparent. Do you follow me?"

"Of course, of course," cried the doctor, much excited. "The letter must have been posted just in those few minutes after Jacobs left the room and before the murderer arrived."

"Not so fast," said Smaile. "Three persons apparently could have posted it."

"Three?"

"Yes, three. It might have been posted by Jacobs—"

"By Jacobs?"

"Wait, doctor, please. By Jacobs, by Lord Henry himself, or—" the detective paused.

"Yes, yes!"

"By the murderer," said Smaile quietly.

CHAPTER XVIII

SMAILE KEEPS A SECRET

"BY the Powers!" cried Shea, much excited. "Why would the murderer post it?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders. "Who can say? Men in such circumstances do strange and unaccountable things."

"But Jacobs said nothing about posting any letter, did he?"

"No, he said nothing at the time, and he denies all knowledge of it now. It would have been a simple explanation if he had been given it by Lord Henry when he was leaving the flat, with instructions to post it at once. The invitation was for the fol-

lowing day; an impromptu dinner and dinner party.

" Lord Henry was annoyed at not getting it earlier, as is seen from his answer. He sat down at once to reply to it, and if he had given the reply to Jacobs to post as he went out, it would have been very natural, and the posting would have been explained.

" But Jacobs declares that Lord Henry gave him nothing, and there seems no reason to why he should lie about it."

The doctor mused for a moment.

" You say Lord Henry might have posted it himself," he asked, presently. " But have you any reason to think he did?"

" None whatever. But of course, it is possible that he might have gone with it to the nearest pillar box; there is one within a hundred yards. Although it is not likely, as he was expecting some one to tea and might miss her if he went out."

" The lady posted it without a doubt!" cried Shea slapping his leg.

" Maybe," said Smaile. " But I don't know why she should. Besides, we don't know for certain that a lady was there."

" Man! Don't you remember the glove I found upon the floor?"

" I remember it perfectly, my dear doctor; but young men of Lord Henry Rollestone's stamp sometimes have ladies' gloves in their possession. It does not follow that glove had been left in the room by a lady that afternoon."

The doctor shook his head sadly.

" Ah! you're so cautious, so doubting," he murmured. " You're a most disappointing man, Smaile, to have anything to do with in such a case as this."

" Well, ' Watson,' " chaffed the other, with a broad grin. " If you expect the piercing intuition and lightninglike conclusions of my respected colleague, Sherlock Holmes, I am afraid I must be a disappointment to you. But you must put up with my slower processes of thought."

" You can't get any good impression from the pistol, I suppose?" asked Shea.

" You can't, doctor. The impressions are poor and blurred. I fancy you contributed to that, according to Gray," and the detective smiled.

Shea grunted. " I certainly took it up in my hand," he said. " But the surface was not one from which a good impression was likely. You don't think it odd that no one seems to have heard the report, Smaile?"

The detective shook his head. " These small pocket pistols make little noise," he said. " And you must remember it was fired in a third floor room, probably with closed doors, and that the nearest people were old Robinson and his nurse, on the ground floor, both perhaps dosing, and Jacobs, who is deaf, in the basement. A passing vehicle in the street would easily drown any report, in the circumstances.

" There is another little matter," Smaile went on, presently. " When I went through the flat with Jacobs I noticed a date-card on the writing table. It is one of those ordinary things which have a slip or sheet for every day of the year, and a day of the month printed in large letters upon each sheet.

" The date on the uppermost sheet when I saw it, was the 21st of October, that is the day after the murder. When I showed this to Jacobs he said it was the first time he had noticed it, and that when he last observed the thing it had the 20th on it, and some memorandum in pencil, written by Lord Henry, and noting that some one was coming to tea. Jacobs fancied there were also some initials, no doubt those of the lady Lord Henry was expecting."

Shea gave a little cry.

" Unfortunately, he can't recollect what the initials were. He says it was often Lord Henry's practice to make a note on these slips of any engagement he might otherwise miss, and that he, Jacobs, tore off each previous day's slip when he tidied up the table each morning.

" He did not tear off the date of the 20th, nor did his wife, nor did any of the Scotland Yard people, and the inference is that either Lord Henry or his murderer, more likely the latter, tore off what might have been a very important clew."

" That is very interesting, Smaile," said Shea, with a deep breath; and smoked in silence for some time.

" The only thing that puzzles me," he said presently, " is the revolver."

" Indeed!" said Smaile. " The only

thing? You are lucky. There are half a dozen that puzzle me."

"Including the revolver?" asked Shea.

"No. The revolver doesn't present so much of a puzzle," was the answer.

Shea looked surprised as he rose to knock his pipe on the fender.

"Well, you must be a clever man, Smaile, if you can account for the sudden appearance of the revolver," he exclaimed. "Here is Lord Henry, a gay young bachelor, expecting a lady to tea with him.

"He makes all arrangements to entertain her, and includes in them a revolver, which he takes out of a drawer in his writing table where it has lain for a long time, according to the servant. He puts it handy on the table close by, ready for any one to take it up and let it off at him. How do you account for that?"

"I shan't tell you," said Smaile. "At least, not yet."

"Ah! Then you know something," cried the other. "You've got some clew, something I don't know, something Scotland Yard don't know?"

The detective nodded.

"Come, Smaile," cried the doctor greatly excited, "play the game, man! Let me share the secret."

But the detective refused to be drawn, and, in spite of all the doctor's cajoling, he remained silent as to his reason for seeing nothing unaccountable in the revolver.

"All in good time, doctor," he said, as he rose to go. "I promise you, you shall know before Scotland Yard. That's all I can say."

And Dr. Shea had to be content with that.

TO BE CONTINUED

A MASTER JOB OF BURROWING

AN interesting and clever operator was David Cummings, who won the infamous renown of being the most famous crook who ever operated on our country's greatest inland waterway, the Mississippi. Cummings's career began with a series of robberies on that famous stream in 1865 under the guise of a waiter on a steamboat.

A most daring robbery by this noted gang organizer and leader of the South was carried out in March, 1873, with the aid of "Red" Leary and two other burglars. The Falls City Tobacco Bank of Louisville, Kentucky, was the scene of the theft, in which almost four hundred thousand dollars in money and securities was taken.

With the careful planning of the master burglar the gang selected Saturday night to begin their operations, so that they would have two nights and a day for them before the opening of the bank on Monday.

Entrance to the bank was obtained by breaking into the Masonic Temple directly over it, digging under the altar, and cutting a hole through the floor. Through this opening the desperadoes slipped one at a time, reaching the roof of the bank vault a few feet below with little effort. The steel structure was covered with a heavy wall of cemented brick, but the undaunted burglars attacked this with picks and sledges. Reaching the steel lining of the vault with the aid of drills they were able to weaken a section of it, which finally yielded under the blows of a massive sledge.

It was now simple to drop through the vault roof, though still another step in their work remained—the safe. But the door to it was successfully blown open and the loot made away with in safety. Before leaving the place, however, the wily gang skillfully wedged the vault door in such a manner that the theft would not be discovered until several hours after the bank had opened Monday morning.

Concealing further trace of their entrance, they carefully patched the hole in the floor of the Masonic Temple, which they covered with a stack of books. They then relaid that part of the carpet that had been removed.

And time has proved that the skill of that famous job was unsurpassed. For it was years before a single member of the gang was caught.

BAD MAN BALLADS

Old Songs of Famous Outlaws That Have Been Sung for Generations

FROM the days of Robin Hood and before, people have sung the deeds of the great law breakers. Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, our own Jesse James, the Boston Burglar, and countless others have had their deeds immortalized in crude rime. No one seems to write these ballads; they just grow.

FLYNN'S is setting itself to search out these old songs of the famous law breakers. They will be reprinted under the title of BAD MAN BALLADS.

Below appear two versions of a well-known song on Jesse James. This is a genuine folk song. No one knows who wrote it or when. Many of us heard it forty or even fifty years ago when the exploits of Jesse were still on all tongues.

We want to make this a continuing and important feature in the magazine. If you know any old poem or song that can be classified as a BAD MAN BALLAD, send it along. If you know only one verse or one line, send that.

Perhaps you know only the title. Send that—anything that will serve as a clew in the search for the complete song. Only be sure to tell us all you remember as to where and when and under what circumstances you first heard it.

Now for Jesse James:

William J. Flynn

JESSE JAMES

HOW people held their breath
When they heard of Jesse's death,
And wondered how he came to die;
For the big reward little Robert Ford
Shot Jesse James on the sly.

Jesse leaves a widow to mourn all her life,
The children he left will pray
For the thief and the coward
Who shot Mr. Howard
And laid Jesse James in his grave.

Jesse was a man,
A friend to the poor,
  Never did he suffer a man's pain;
And with his brother Frank
He robbed the Chicago bank,
  And stopped the Glendale train.

Jesse goes to rest
With his hand on his breast,
  And the devil will be upon his knees;
He was born one day in the County of Clay,
  And came from a great race.

Men, when you go out to the West,
  Don't be afraid to die;
With the law in their hand,
But they didn't have the sand
  For to take Jesse James alive.

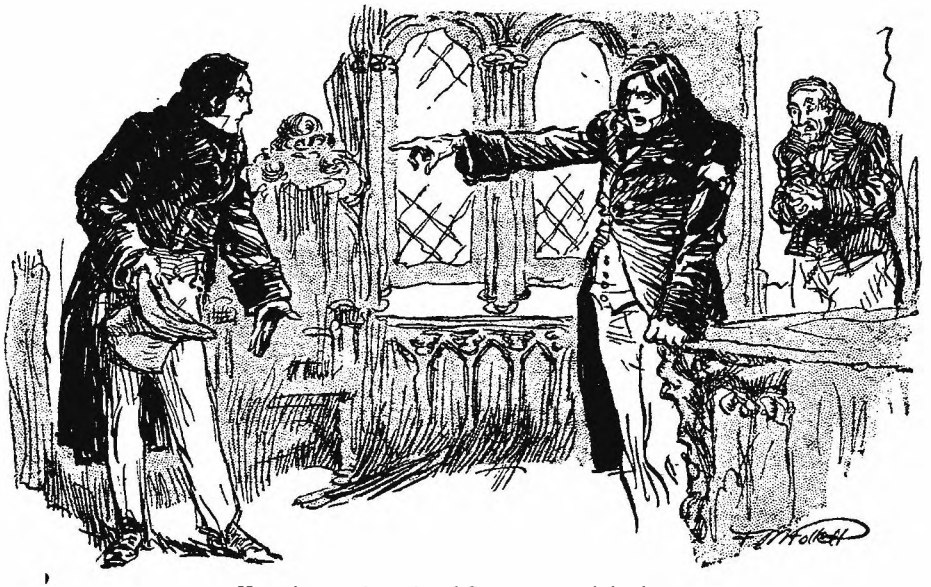
JESSE JAMES

JESSE JAMES was a man, and he had a robber band;
  And he flagged down the eastern bound train.
Robert Ford watched his eye,
And he shot him on the sly,
And they laid Jesse James in his grave.

Poor old Jesse, poor old Jesse James,
And they laid Jesse James in his grave.
Robert Ford's pistol ball,
Brought him tumbling from the wall,
And they laid Jesse James in his grave.

Jesse James's little wife
Was a moaner all her life,
When they laid Jesse James in his grave.
She earned her daily bread
By her needle and her thread,
When they laid Jesse James in his grave.

Jesse James was the most famous of American outlaws. He was born in Clay County, Missouri, in 1847, the son of a country preacher. The family were strong Southern sympathizers and were persecuted by their Union neighbors during the Civil War. The two boys, Jesse and Frank, joined Quantrell, the guerilla, and Jesse soon earned a reputation for reckless bravery. He returned home after the war, but was outlawed in 1866 and a price was put on his head. Notwithstanding his many train and bank robbing exploits and the constant efforts to capture him, he was never arrested. He was killed April 3, 1882, by Robert and Charles Ford, members of his own gang. His brother Frank lived until 1915, having been a peaceful Missouri farmer for the last thirty years of his life.



He vehemently ordered Derues out of the house

ANTOINE DERUES, SUPERCRIMINAL

By Louise Rice

A CUNNING SWINDLER RIDES THE STORMY WAVES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION ALMOST—BUT NOT QUITE—TO THE HARBOR OF SUCCESS

ANOTHER of Miss Rice's remarkable accounts of famous criminals and their deeds is presented here. It is the story of a Frenchman who lived in the years of the Revolution. It was a time when national consciousness was rising to the boiling point. The tension of living created a perfect atmosphere in which the criminal might ply his nefarious trade.

The value of human life was low. Authority was laughed at. When the spirit of justice did express itself, it destroyed the very ends it sought.

Antoine Derues, it was, who found himself on the border line of these conflicting classes, while the flames of hatred and terror smoldered in the breasts of the burdened populace. And Derues sought to lift himself from one class to another.

He resented the poverty of his early life and cast covetous eyes at the luxury of the upper classes. Luck gave him a push, nudged him on. It was the result of his marriage.

With this help and a brain that was as sly as it was ambitious, Antoine set upon his path to fortune and respectability. He was a born trader, and he prospered. Things went well as long as he applied his talents to even unfair business transactions. But he was too greedy; he fell a victim to that ever fatal trait of the supercriminal.

Antoine wanted easy money. His attempts soon made it urgent that he have any kind of money, gotten in any way. He laid his plans for a family among the upper

strata. This made his scheme the more precarious, but the fruits of it would pay for the risk—if he won.

How Antoine went about executing this, one of the blackest deeds in the history of French crime, is the story Miss Rice tells. It has no parallel. There was one Antoine Derues. There may never be another. His crime was a warning of the holocaust that was to follow.

William J. Flynn

FINANCIAL manipulations of a shady nature are not peculiar to any age. It is quite in the modern manner that a gentleman of Ninevah complains on one of the sun-dried bricks, which was then documentary evidence, that one Bubastis has falsified records so that the true title to certain properties is clouded—to the accruing benefit of Bubastis. But the people who have succeeded in rising to great wealth through sheer audacity were seldom lowly born, until the last hundred years.

One of the first to achieve this distinction, and to struggle against many physical weaknesses as well, was Antoine Francois Derues, born in 1744, at a time when the French aristocracy made it pretty hard for the so-called inferior classes to even make a living, much less swindle them.

Yet this is what M. Derues did. That he added murder to his other crimes is an incident. As he himself said, pleasantly, it was a regrettable necessity following upon other far more important operations.

Antoine's father seems to have been a dealer in fodder in a small way. The family lived at Chartres, not a very commercial town, in the quiet obscurity of people who have no social standing and little financial rating.

His parents died when he was only a few years old, and he was brought up by some distant relatives, even poorer than his own people. The dealer in fodder had left a little property, just enough to defray the expenses of the child and to bring him up to a working age.

Antoine was not christened by that name; he was given a girl's name because he resembled the opposite sex; and even throughout his life he preserved the high voice and the feminine cast of countenance which marked him as an oddity in a pathological sense.

However, he had nothing of a feminine cast to his mind. He was a natural mathematician, with a surprisingly retentive memory. He cared nothing for books or the theater, and in his early years was a frugal and austere youth, whose only idea was to climb up a little way out of the very ordinary society in which he found himself.

He was apprenticed to a grocer, after the fashion of the time, and pleased his master so much that he was soon allowed wages, a great concession, for apprentices often had to work out their full time with nothing but room and slim board as their reward.

Antoine saved every cent of his wages; not only that, he made a bargain with his employer that, if his advice about the purchase of certain commodities was found to be good he should have a small bit of the resulting profit. His advice *was* good, for even at that age he had learned to keep a sharp eye on "the market," and he added his profit to what he already had.

A nice, hard working, steady, sensible young man he would be called to-day. He didn't seem to care for pleasure at all; he didn't waste money on girls; and he would cheerfully listen for hours to the ramblings of petty merchants in a dull café, if he thought that thereby he could learn something.

When he left his master he was able to go to Paris and open a small shop of his own, where he served behind the counter and slept beneath it, and lived on four sous a day. At that rate he did pretty well, and the next year or two Antoine enlarged his shop, got an apprentice of his own, and took modest but pleasant living rooms over the premises.

The shop, however, did not engage all of his activities. In a very quiet way he bought and sold, as a commission merchant, such articles as his shrewdness told him would net him a profit.

Antoine Finds a Partner

Antoine now began going about a little, making friends, and discovering a quite charming social presence. He put another apprentice in the grocery store, made the first apprentice foreman, dressed a little better, and began to really make money without any trouble to himself at all. This was his method.

There were no great commission houses in any city, as there are now. There were men who did what Antoine had previously done—buy from the producers, hold the material for a raise in price, and sell to retailers; but this involved the actual handling of the material; and Antoine, always a dainty body, with a disinclination to physical effort, wanted something easier.

He therefore proposed to several market gardeners that he should pay them a certain sum in advance of the crops; and that the crops should be delivered as they matured to whoever came for them in his name.

By this simple and ingenious method he bought quite cheap, because the market gardeners got their money in advance, and he sold when things were dear—at the psychological moment, causing the purchaser to remove the goods direct. He then pocketed the difference in the two prices without having had to so much as look at his purchases. It was a neat scheme.

Being thus a man of leisure—for the apprentice proved to be a worthy person, of whom Antoine often spoke with the finest appreciation—he gave it out that his father had been an inspector of customs; and as he carefully chose the locality of his supposed family seat in an obscure place, no one questioned him. His delicate hands and feet, his good taste, and his cleverness all seemed to proclaim a birth above that of the humble fodder merchant of Chartres.

What Antoine was looking for was a woman who would help him with the schemes which were now taking vague form in his active mind. He found her in the person of Marie Louise Nicolais, the daughter of a non-commissioned artillery officer.

She had charm, distinction of manner, and a good education; and she was a scheming, intriguing woman, young as she was. There is reason to believe that the marriage was no marriage at all, and that the young lady bartered all natural desires and affections for the sake of the brilliant future which the dapper little monstrosity held out to her.

The first thing that he did was to give out the surprising news that his bride-to-be was a member of the Nicolai family, one of the most illustrious of the nobility; also, that she was an heiress.

Marie Louise rose to noble birth by the mere suppression of an "s" in her name, but she really was an heiress. A cousin of hers who had served a Marquis Desprez faithfully had been made his heir, the marquis being childless and without relatives.

Another account says that the cousin's mother secretly married the marquis, but however it came about this relative of Marie Louise's had quite a lot of money. He lived in solitary state in a castle that he had inherited and spent most of his time in hunting.

On several occasions he was shot at by poachers, against whom he maintained perpetual warfare, and his manners were so crusty that his servants never went near him unless they absolutely had to.

Prestige Heads His Way

No one was surprised, then, when he was found dead in his bed one morning. A window opening on a balcony was open, and there was a vine running up to it from the ground. To be sure, it did not seem as though it would bear the weight of a man, but there were plain traces that some one had gone up it the night before.

Several poachers were taken into custody, but they proved that the vine could not possibly have borne their weight. This was only a few weeks after M. Derues had been married to his fair bride.

You can draw your own conclusions; but nobody at that time thought of drawing the one that you probably will, because An-

toine had the reputation of being an exceptionally timid man who was afraid even of going out alone in the dark.

Marie Louise would receive, as her part of the estate, about sixty-six thousand livres, which would be close on to fifty thousand dollars. The settling of an estate, however, was a very slow affair in those days, and Antoine knew very well that it would be years before that full amount would come to him. But he had counted on that. What he wanted was the prestige of the impending heirship of his wife.

Lending Money at Usury

He got her to sign over part of her rights to him, for which in exchange he gave her his grocery store, now quite a concern. He neglected to mention that it was heavily mortgaged, but between husband and wife what is a little matter like that?

Marie Louise found it out soon enough and was very angry, but Antoine seems then to have taken her into his full confidence, and thereafter he had a wife who stood by him, no matter what he did. I suppose she was dazzled by the soaring imagination of the little grocer.

He then went to Jewish money-lenders and impounded part of his wife's inheritance for a loan of ready money. No doubt the money-lenders smiled in their beards, as they usually did at people who were foolish enough to get into their clutches. But they did not know Antoine. He was about to go them one better.

With the money thus secured Derues started what we would call to-day a Bohemian establishment. He affected long hair and a flowered dressing gown, had a study in which he pretended to pursue scientific investigations of various kinds, and made a play for the gay young nobility of the day, which, then as well as now, was always looking for some one with which to amuse itself.

Derues did not make the mistake at that time of living beyond his means. He frankly said that he was poor, and laughingly invited his rich guests to a " simple dinner " at his " cottage."

Those dinners were, indeed, simple and unpretentious, but Marie Louise was a superb cook, and with her own hands prepared the feasts, only to leave the servants to complete it, while she appeared as the beautiful and petted darling of the man of science. The trick in all this was that when some young nobleman said—as most of them would—that he was dreadfully hard up, Derues, after swearing him to secrecy, would make him a loan.

Being a very poor man, he charged a perfectly awful rate of interest. He said he had so very little that he positively must do that, but if a hundred livres would help any— As the sums he loaned were small, the reckless young fellows did not really understand that they were paying almost thirty-three and one-third per cent, which was decidedly a joke on the Jews, who had never dared to raise the ante that far.

Besides, Antoine always put the matter in an intimate way. This was money belonging to his wife; he himself was poor. If his esteemed young friend could make use of the money, it would mean nothing at all to him—with all the wealth which he really had—to pay a little high for the accommodation. It took Antoine's quaint little personality to put this over. If a big, lusty man had tried it, it would have been a flat failure.

So things went on swimmingly. He continued his operations with the market gardeners, he loaned out sums which brought him in a scandalous return, he paid off the mortgage on the grocery store, and sold it at a profit to his former foreman.

Antoine's Real Ambition

The real ambition of M. Derues was to become a country gentleman. He had a genuine passion for such an existence. He knew a great deal by reading about the care of vineyards, of cattle, crops, and so on; and his dream was to get a handsome estate not too far from Paris, where he could enjoy the beauties of nature and entertain the many charming friends whom he now had.

His wife seems never to have been so eager for this as he. She had been born in a city, and she liked city life; but with all his dainty little ways that husband of hers ruled her; she agreed.

A suitable place was found—pleasant, not big enough to require much of an upkeep, but large enough so that it seemed dignified for a man of science; and well furnished, so that it should set off the beauty of his pretty wife. A sum was paid down, with notes for the remainder of the purchase money.

An Estate Is on the Market

Antoine, however, was not able to leave Paris at once. By that time he had loaned out a large sum to his noblemen, and some of them had died—which put a crimp in that account, since no more than a legal rate of interest could be so publicly mentioned.

Besides, the market gardeners, awakened to their stupidity, now refused to sell their crops in advance. Other transactions began to wabble, too, so that Antoine was obliged to remain on the job.

At some loss he let the country house go; but the more he saw that things were going against him, the more he determined to fly higher, quite in the modern financial manner, you will note.

Therefore he cast about for some big coup by which he could forever get rid of worry.

About this time Metienne Saint-Faust de Lamotte decided to sell his country estate near Villeneuve-le-Roi, so he gave his wife power of attorney and sent her up to Paris to see about it.

Frenchmen haven't changed much about this matter of the woman in business; they won't let her vote, and they are notoriously unfaithful to her when she's good, and fiendish to her when she's bad. But when it comes to driving a bargain, Mamma is usually the one who is put on the job.

If you go into any Paris store to-day, there'll be a lordly gentleman with whom you think you must transact your business, but when it comes to the showdown you'll be taken back to the office where meek—and shrewd — *madame* is poring over a perfectly enormous ledger.

Well—so Mme. Lamotte went up to Paris and she went to see a man named Jolly, who was a lawyer.

Singularly enough, Antoine had seen this same man about the other end of the proposition, but now he was appearing as M. Derues de Cyrano de Bury.

He had found out that his esteemed father, born to that noble family, had had a quarrel with its head, and had thereupon cast aside part of his name, but now those quarrels so old were put away by the death of all relatives concerned in them, and therefore Antoine François Derues de Cyrano de Bury thought he might as well appear as his true self.

That mouthful of names sounded all right, and there really was a De Bury family, which had almost died out, the few remaining being old ladies who never came to Paris; so even Antoine's noblemen believed him. M. Jolly, of course, thought that there must be a lot of money back of so illustrious a lineage, especially when a man was practically the last of the line.

When Mme. Lamotte went to see the Derues she was quite charmed. They had moved into a larger and more handsome house, and all sorts of high-born people of Paris seemed to make a practice of stopping in for an intimate chat.

Most of these came to borrow money, or to renew notes, but of course Mme. Lamotte did not know that, and the Derues were careful to keep her away from any one who would tell her.

Antoine talked about his other country estates, but said that they were too far away from Paris; and with his delightful young friends of the nobility so kind as to say that they wished to visit him wherever he went, he felt that he could do no less than buy a place fairly near Paris. Besides, there was pretty Mme. Derues who must be thought of. She could not be buried too far in the country.

Derues Makes a Hit

Mme. Lamotte not only understood this, but was really pleased with her new friends and prospective purchasers. She had lived in Villeneuve-le-Roi for years, and the affability of M. Derues and his wife really won her heart. M. Derues she regarded with genuine pity.

He was from such an illustrious family, and was such a delicate, timid, but good-

natured and cheerful little person. What a marvel that he had found so beautiful and devoted a wife! Thus Mme. Lamotte told certain quiet friends of hers in Paris, who afterward had good reason to remember her remarks.

To Save the Purchase Money!

Antoine and his wife paid a purely social visit to the estate they thought of purchasing. They were delighted with it, and the bargain was struck. It was to cost about a hundred thousand dollars, of which eight thousand were to be paid down as promise of good faith and to clinch the matter.

The rest was to be paid in installments, M. Derues de Bury explaining that he did not wish to sell any of his other estates, and that therefore he had not the ready money by him. This was entirely satisfactory.

The little matter of Mme. Derues's inheritance was casually mentioned. Altogether, the deal was most satisfactory. M. Derues's conversation showed him to be accustomed to handling large sums of money. A very substantial man, for all his odd personal appearance.

But the real truth was that Antoine was almost at the end of his rope. His scheme had been to get an option on the property at a certain figure, then go back to Paris, find a purchaser at a much higher figure, and, pleading some excuse, transfer the deeds; but this was not as easy as he had thought.

Antoine sent word down to the Lamottes that some of his investments were temporarily tied up, and that they would have to wait a bit for the next installment. Mme. Lamotte, as usual, was dispatched to Paris to have a personal look-in on the situation.

She found the Derues entertaining even more than usual; and they insisted upon her making her stay with them. She had her son with her, a boy of about fourteen, but that made no difference; the Derues were delighted to have both mother and son.

This was a very shrewd move on the part of Antoine, for if Mme. Lamotte had been away from the house she could have made some genuine inquiries about her prospective purchaser, but she was taken in—and deceived.

As it was December and the town was quite gay, she wrote home that she thought she would remain a little while, being so pleasantly situated, and the boy could go to school. M. Lamotte, feeling quite easy about his wife being in the house of substantial people like the Derues, consented.

Antoine had now changed his plan. He had found it almost impossible to find such a purchaser for the option on the property as he desired, and he had begun to wonder whether he might not juggle in some way with it, so as to defraud the owners.

He coolly decided to do away with Mme. Lamotte and her son, to then claim to have paid her the purchase money, and to demand the estate. Once having possession of it, he knew French law well enough to feel sure that it would be almost impossible to get him out.

He had found out a little family history about the Lamottes, which he intended to put to use in the matter.

Madame Becomes Ill

Lamotte had been rather a poor young man, and *madame,* as a young girl, had been a great heiress. Her father forbade Lamotte to enter his house. The law not permitting a girl to marry without her father's consent, the young lady ran away and lived with M. Lamotte until a son was born, when her father gave his consent to the marriage.

Antoine intended to represent to M. Lamotte that his wife had met a man with whom she fell in love; and that, after receiving the purchase money for the estate, she had gone off with the man, taking her son with her. Antoine counted upon the early history of the lady telling against her.

He reviewed this scheme carefully and made some arrangements. His creditors were pressing him hard by that time, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he prevented his guest from encountering the sheriffs and bailiffs who were continually haunting his doorstep.

Mme. Lamotte began to feel a slight malady. She took to her bed. She was so listless that instead of writing her husband she got M. Derues to do it for her. He wrote M. Lamotte that his wife was well and having a gay time.

Strange Doings in the Country

A servant in the house was discharged, and the other was given a vacation. All one day M. Derues was alone with the ailing woman, having sent his wife out to shop. Young Lamotte, coming home at night, was told that his mother was sleeping. He tiptoed into her room, saw that she was, and was sent to bed.

Derues had a large trunk, and in that he put the body of the unfortunate woman, whom his poison had killed. As one of the writers who have discussed this famous case says: " It is possible that to Derues belongs the distinction of being the first murderer to put that harmless and necessary article of travel to a criminal use."

The trunk was taken away to a quiet street, where a little man giving the name of Ducoudray had hired a cellar.

To young Lamotte and to all inquiring friends M. Derues said that Mme. Lamotte was visiting friends; and to such of the inquirers as were gentlemen he shrugged his shoulders significantly. He called Heaven to witness that while Lamotte was his friend it would be quite impossible to keep his wife indoors if she chose to go away!

What he said to young Lamotte when he took him on a trip no one knows. To the world Derues said he was taking the boy to his mother, as she had directed. The next day a gentleman with his young nephew hired a room in a town outside Paris.

The boy did not seem well. He died that night. On the following day " Louis Antoine Beaupre " was buried, his pious uncle leaving a sum with the priest to pay for masses for the repose of his nephew's soul.

Derues went home full of good spirits. He told every one that he had succeeded in getting together the purchase money, that he had given it and the boy into Mme. Lamotte's charge, and that it was surely not his fault if she made off with both instead of returning them to M. Lamotte. The old tale about Mme. Lamotte was revived; it was said, " Well, what could you expect?"

Derues had in his possession a bill of sale signed by Mme. Lamotte, acknowledging the payment to her of the receipt of the purchase money; with the added statement that an advocate by the name of Duclos had advanced part of it.

This was true, but the money had immediately been returned to the advocate, M. Derues saying that it was a mere formality between himself and the Lamottes that he was concluding.

Soon after a heavily veiled woman had the deeds of the sale recorded, giving the name of Mme. Lamotte. M. Jolly, about this time, heard of the conclusion of the sale, and also that Mme. Lamotte had run off with a lover and the money. He was amazed, for he had known her for years, and believed her devoted to her husband and her home.

This man held the power of attorney which M. Lamotte had given his wife, and the sale of the property was not legal unless the purchaser held it. What was more, M. Jolly declined to give up the document until he should receive instructions from the lady herself.

Ending With a Dash of Irony

Antoine was stunned. He had not known of this point in the law. So he went to Villeneuve-le-Roi to see what he could do.

The next day Derues appeared. All he could say was that *madame,* M. Lamotte's wife, had concluded the negotiation as her power of attorney gave her a right to do, and had gone off. True, it was very queer conduct, but with that M. Derues, naturally, had nothing to do.

What he wanted was the property handed right over to him, that instant. If the lady had absconded, he was sorry—and if M. Lamotte was seriously incommoded by the loss of the property, perhaps M. Derues might be prevailed upon to give him a small yearly stipend. Meanwhile he had arranged for a sale of that year's vintage, then in the cellars, and would be obliged if M. Lamotte would give him the keys.

M. Lamotte, recovering from his amazement which had left him speechless, ordered M. Derues out of the house and declared his intention of going to Paris and finding out exactly what had happened. Derues put a man whom he had brought with him in charge of the place, to represent his interests, and went off with a high head.

But he was desperate, for he had not expected M. Lamotte to fight. He had always appeared to be such a quiet, unassertive sort of a fellow, so completely under the influence of his wife that it had seemed, with her away, he might be easily managed.

The only thing that could help would be for Mme. Lamotte to be heard from. The next day a lady, veiled, giving her name as Mme. Lamotte, went to a notary and wanted him to draw a document for her—a power of attorney, by which she could give her husband some money she owed him.

She said she had left her husband, and therefore would not take the document, but wanted it mailed to the parish priest at Villeneuve-le-Roi. Also, a lady giving the name of the missing woman called at a well-known hotel several times in the course of the day to inquire for a gentleman who was expected there, she said. He did not arrive.

While Derues was walking around Paris leaving a trail of Mme. Lamotte, her frantic husband was talking to the Paris police.

The power of attorney which the notary duly sent to the priest was forwarded to M. Lamotte, who pronounced the signature a forgery. The signature on the deed of sale was declared to be a forgery. Derues was arrested.

Still, so long as Mme. Lamotte was merely missing, it could not be proven who had forged her signature. Derues thought himself safe.

To make sure that no question of her death could arise, Mme. Derues put on some of the dead woman's clothes and a veil and attempted to impersonate her. She was discovered in the very act and arrested. That looked bad.

Spring was coming on. The trunk in the cellar began to disturb the people who lived in the house over it. There was an examination. The body was discovered.

Derues now said that Mme. Lamotte had died by accident and that as she was out with him on a secret little party he had been afraid to reveal where the death took place. This idea was scouted by every one. Mme. Derues, not knowing what her husband was saying, and he not knowing what she was saying, the couple had contradicted each other.

The priest who had buried "Louis Beaupre" had a suspicion. Combining all these things, the police dug up the son of M. Lamotte. And a medical examination of the bodies proved that both had died from doses of corrosive sublimate, though where Derues ever got the dangerous stuff was not found out.

The law of that day was a brutal thing. All along M. Derues had persisted in his assertions of innocence. Many of the details related here were only brought to light long afterward. Torture was applied.

That dreadful thing called "the Boot," in which the victim's legs were crushed, was applied. The frail little man endured it without a groan and without a word. When the contrivance was at last taken off of him he reasserted his innocence. He reasserted it before he was cast into the fire, which was then the French way of executing criminals who had committed murder or were traitors.

He made only one dreadful outcry as he was thrust, alive, into the flames.

Mme. Derues was sent to prison for life. She had a bad record there, and was frequently punished for her disorderly conduct. But an old uncle of hers, who remembered her as a bright, pretty girl, and knew nothing of her Paris life, never ceased his efforts to get her released.

He was finally promised, after ten years, that she should be delivered into his care, but the Revolution was then in full swing, and Mme. Derues was a victim of one of the wholesale massacres in which the Paris mob released its fury upon prisoners.

She was supposed to be an aristocrat because her name was recorded under the title of Mme. Antoine François Derues de Cyrano de Bury!

Lady Cesare unlatched the gate and strode boldly to the murderous creature

THE MARK OF THE CHAIN

By Anthony Wynne

DR. HAILEY ATTENDS HIS FIRST DERBY AND SEES THE FAVORITE RUN A BLOOD-SOAKED RACE

COLONEL SIR JOHN CESARE was what the descriptive writers are apt to call "a fine figure of an Englishman."

He was tall, and, at the same time, sturdy. His healthy face looked the healthier for the crisp, white hair which crowned it, and the still crisper white mustache which adorned its upper lip. He had sharp, blue eyes, too, of the kind which can be sternly just without qualm.

His country knew and liked him. As an owner of race horses, he ranked high in popular esteem—and no one can reach very much higher than an owner of race horses. He was spoken of, even in circles where one end of a horse is scarcely distinguished from the other, as a "good fellow," and a safe, wholesome type.

Consequently, when his colt High Star became favorite for the Derby, every one was pleased. Sir John, it was felt, was the kind of owner a Derby favorite ought to possess—the kind of man it would be a delight to see leading his horse in, with the great, wonderful crowd jostling and cheering about him.

He thought so himself, for he had a queer vanity, which was not so much personal as social—in the wide sense of that abused term. He believed in his breed; believed that it had been evolved and perfected by an all-wise Providence for a great and important purpose, of which leadership in war and sport was the chief element. He was prepared to lead, no matter at what trouble or expense to himself.

He suggested as much to his guests at "The Pentlands" after dinner on the night before the great race. The house, which stands a few miles from Epsom, had be-

longed to his great-great-grandfather. Ever since the Derby was founded, there had been a party there on this evening.

"My stable is a big drain in these days of high taxation," he declared rather wearily, "but I feel that I owe it to the public and my own conscience to keep it going."

The port was in circulation, and the men had the old, richly paneled dining room to themselves. Lord Racey, who sat nearest to his host, nodded his handsome head.

"It is unthinkable," he said, "the turf without a Cesare."

"And yet, you know, this is the first time any member of my family has owned a Derby favorite. We have had horses in the race for the best part of half a century—and never even been classed in all those years."

He raised his glass to his lips, and drank reflectively. Dr. Hailey, who was a fellow-member of his club, and an old acquaintance, watched him with gladness. This was his first visit to "The Pentlands," but he felt that he could have guessed the place from his knowledge of its owner.

"I count myself happy, then," he declared, "that my first Derby is also your first triumph."

The other guests exclaimed in wonder. The idea that a man should achieve early middle age—and distinction in the world—without having seen the Derby, left them gasping. Sir John smiled in his peculiar, rather acidulous, fashion.

"When Hailey confessed to me that he had never seen the race, in the club last Saturday," he told them, "I brought him down with me by the hair of his head."

He helped himself to more port. Dr. Hailey glanced at his flushed, wrinkled cheeks, and wondered again how he had come to marry the beautiful child, who had been introduced to him a short time before. Elderly men, he reflected, are incurably romantic, much more romantic than young men.

Probably, he had not meant to marry her in the first instance, when, as a duty to her dead father, his brother officer, he began to befriend her in her poverty. His goodness of heart must have betrayed his common-sense.

And yet, it had to be allowed that Cathie Milsom—Dr. Hailey had known her father slightly—made a picturesque, if not exactly orthodox, Lady Cesare. There seemed to be a quality in her character which, somehow, discounted her extreme youth. She gave one the impression of a diamond—she glowed, yet she remained cold.

He felt this effect of her character more actually than before when he had talked to her for a little while in the drawing-room. She seemed excited, and he noticed that her hands twitched in a nervous fashion while she was speaking to him. But her eyes remained unkindled.

Even when she spoke about the chances of High Star there was nothing of the enthusiasm of joint ownership in her tones. Yet she did convey the impression that if the colt failed, it would be a severe disappointment to her. The doctor found himself thinking of a dead spirit within a living body—or at best, a spirit unawakened and unresponsive.

When she went to bed, Sir John conducted his guests to the smokeroom. A fire was burning here, in despite of the season, for the nights are cold on the high downs. They discussed the race with complete assurance of High Star's victory. The second favorite, Blackamoor, in the view of these well-informed people, was simply not in the running. Dr. Hailey listened until he began to feel drowsy. Then he excused himself.

When he slept, the lovely, regular features of his hostess under the masses of jet-black hair, haunted his dreams. He saw her watching, with strange trouble in her deep eyes, while the great race swept past her, and the crowd bent and stiffened in its tense excitement.

Then he awoke suddenly and sat up in bed.

The old house was steeped in silence. He had left the window open, and, far away, he could see the fires of the gypsies encamped on the racecourse—like the fires of some distant army in full campaign. A breath of wind stirred in the ivy making the dry leaves rustle. He listened, wondering whether the sound he had heard belonged only to his dreams.

And then it came again. A soft whistle, not unlike the calling of a curlew on Northern moors, only much less clear and distinct.

He got out of bed, and crossed the room to the window. Cautiously, he looked out. His bedroom was on the first floor but the night was very dark. He could scarcely distinguish the pattern of the ground below. He remained a few moments, wondering whether, after all, he might have been mistaken when he heard the unmistakable sound of a window being opened. There followed a whisper of voices, and then he thought he saw two figures move out from the side of the house, and disappear.

After that, the deep silence fell again.

He returned to bed, wondering what this incident might signify. His lifelong interest in crime, and his considerable adventures in the practice of its detection, had induced an undercurrent of suspicion in his mind, which always asserted itself strongly in the face of unusual happenings.

Suppose that one of the guests was a thief—but no, that was absurd. They were all men of standing in the world, men whose names were sufficient guarantee of their characters. Then another idea struck him. Was it possible that the house party included some one whose relations with Lady Cesare were more intimate than her husband suspected?

But again, that could not be the explanation, for the baronet and his wife shared the same room. He had heard her mention at dinner that they had lately had it refurnished. His mind drifted, and he fell asleep again.

II

NEXT morning, the guests at The Pentlands suffered a severe shock. They learned that a terrible crime had been committed during the night within a few yards of the house. An attempt had actually been made to break into the stable occupied by the favorite. It had been frustrated, but only at the cost of the life of one of the stableboys.

"He was found," Sir John told them, "lying huddled on the pavement just outside of the loose box. They must have flung him down with great violence, because the poor lad's head is terribly bruised and battered. High Star is uninjured."

His breakfast lay untouched on the table before him. He rose and excused himself, saying that he must return to Lady Cesare, who was greatly upset by the news. As he left the room, Dr. Hailey thought that he had already grown older in this terrible experience. He turned to Lord Racey who was sitting beside him.

"Is there any idea when it happened?" he asked.

"None, I believe. The discovery was made this morning by the chief stableman.

"The lad's body was quite cold then, so that he must have been dead some hours. He slept in the loft above the loose boxes. No doubt the opening of the stable door awoke him."

Dr. Hailey took his snuffbox from his pocket, and opened it with great deliberation. His large, kindly face wore a look of deep concern.

"There must have been at least two thieves, I suppose," he suggested.

"Oh, probably. A well-plucked lad like young Grainger would know how to give a good account of himself. Criminals of the type who try to dope race horses are always cowards."

Silence fell in the room. The doctor glanced uneasily round the table, and then took a pinch of snuff. Sitting opposite to him was Mr. Jim Derwentmere, the famous "gentleman jockey." He had Major Pykewood on his left, and Lord Alldred on his right—sporting men, both, of the very highest repute. The hawk-like face of Sir Thomas Ingoldsworth gloomed from the far end of the table.

"It is certain, then," he asked, "that the object of that burglary was to dope the horse?"

"Or maim it in some way, perhaps. A race horse is a difficult thing to steal, you know. Attempts of the sort have often been made before, usually with very little success. The average stable lad can be relied on to the last breath in his body."

Lord Racey got up and went to the fireplace. He seemed very much shaken by

the news. He picked up a copy of *The Times,* which had been placed on the sideboard, glanced at it, and then laid it down again.

"I see their racing man gives High Star as a certainty," he declared. "I wonder what he would say if he knew as much as we knew. Yet the probability is that the horse was not reached at all. He has a bad temper, and is unsafe for anybody to whom he is not accustomed. They would most likely have failed, even in the absence of poor Grainger."

No one had much appetite and the meal was soon over. When the others had left the room, Lord Racey came back to where Dr. Hailey was sitting.

"Sir John rang Scotland Yard up at once," he announced, "and they are sending Inspector Biles down by a fast car. He told them that you happened to be one of the guests, and that he meant to ask you to make an immediate examination. They were entirely agreeable to that."

"I know Biles very well. I helped him, you may remember, in the case of Sir William Ormond."

"My dear doctor, I followed that case with breathless interest at the time, especially your contributions to it."

Lord Racey's eyes were full of enthusiasm.

Dr. Hailey took a pinch of snuff to cover his embarrassment. Then he rose.

He was reputed the biggest man in the medical profession, and that not only in respect of his height. But somehow, as Lord Racey reflected, Providence had endowed him with the power to carry his size gracefully.

"I should like to go to the stable at once, if I may," he declared. "As a rule, there is no time to be lost in these matters."

They went by a narrow pathway, which led through the shrubbery surrounding the mansion to join the carriage road just before it reached the stable. It was a perfect summer morning, and the ambient sunlight seemed to fill the air with showers of fine gold. Dewdrops still sparkled in the grass at their feet.

"Tell me," said Dr. Hailey, "for I am singularly ignorant of these matters, will the horse fulfill its engagement to race today?"

"Oh, absolutely. Think, my dear sir, of the millions of pounds which it is now carrying——in every part of the world from Calcutta to the Canadian prairies."

They came to the stable yard. The chief stableman was awaiting them at the door of the stable itself. He led the way to the favorite's box.

"According to Sir John's order," he assured them, "nothing has been touched or disturbed."

The lad's body, dressed in a shirt and trousers, was lying huddled up at the gate of the loose-box. A single glance sufficed to show that it had been flung violently to the ground in its present position. The face was streaked with dark blood from a great gash in the forehead. There was more blood on the neck, and over the shirt. Lord Racey exclaimed in horror, and immediately returned to the open air.

"You heard nothing at all," Dr. Hailey asked the stableman.

"Nothing, sir. But I live a few yards from the door here, on the other side of the yard."

"The boy would have shouted for help, I suppose, if he had been able. It looks like the work of more than one man."

"That's my view, sir. Grainger was a dear, good lad, and as brave as a lion. They must have felled him before he reached them."

The doctor bent down, an operation for which Nature had by no means fitted him. He examined the dead lad's hands and nails carefully, but found no evidence of a struggle in the shape of cuts or scratches. Just under the first joint of the forefinger of the right hand, however, there was a curious-looking mark, like the imprint of a tiny chain. He scrutinized it carefully, but could not decide what it represented.

Then he looked at the wounds. They had been made evidently by a heavy, blunt object, possibly a loaded walking stick. He tried to see the scene, as it must have been enacted, in his mind's eye. No doubt, the lad had heard in his sleep the opening of the stable door. He would start up into complete wakefulness, and then creep to-

ward the head of the stair leading down into the stable. Then he must have seen the intruders and simply rushed at them, to prevent any injury to his beloved horse.

He straightened himself, and looked over the door of the box. White Star was standing well back, with his big eyes fixed on the stranger. He seemed nervous, for he laid his ears back, and stamped his foot. His powerful flanks shone in the rather dim light. Dr. Hailey thought that he looked like a winner. He turned to the man at his side:

"Sir John said that very few people could handle him with safety," he remarked.

"That's so, sir. But Grainger was one of the few. Could do anything with the colt, he could. Her ladyship is another, and Sir John, too—though, in a manner of speaking, he's not specially fond of horses himself, I should think."

They returned to the yard, where the trainer, Jack Smedley awaited them. He looked pale and anxious, and at once asked the doctor in eager tones if he could throw any light on the tragedy.

"None, I'm afraid, at present."

"When I got the news I feared, at first, that the cold might have savaged him. He's a fickle-tempered horse at times, and has even turned on me. You are satisfied that that is out of the question?"

"Quite out of the question."

Lord Racey had gone away. Dr. Hailey left the men and walked slowly back in the direction of the house. If his suspicions had any foundation in fact, it must have been by this path that the murderers came and returned. The ground was hard, but here and there there seemed to be patches of softer consistency. He reached one of these, and knelt down to examine it in minute detail. A moment later, he uttered an exclamation.

There was the imprint of a woman's heel on the mud—faint, but quite definite.

The owner had been going toward the stable, when the imprint was made. He searched carefully to discover whether or not she had been going alone. But the ground yielded no further information. He cast his scrutiny a little further afield, to include the turf borders of the footway. They had not been tramped on. He was just about to rise again, when a ray of sunshine, which had managed to pierce the heavy foliage, was reflected from a bright object lying just beyond the border. He reached and picked it up. His rather dull eyes gleamed.

It was a plain gold link, which had clearly been broken very recently from its chain. He drew a sharp breath. So that was the explanation of the strange mark on the murdered boy's finger. The lad must have clutched at his assailant as he fell, and, in doing so, broken away the link from one of his cuffs.

He examined his find with anxious care. Unhappily, it was without any mark of identification. Most of the members of the house party probably possessed links of the same type. He slipped it into his pocket, and walked round the house till he came to a place which he had marked earlier in the morning, as the probable location of the sounds which had awakened him.

He could see that the windows here, both of which were open, belonged to a ground-floor bedroom. He approached it, and saw that it was empty. Then he glanced at the flower bed under the windows.

"Ah!"

He bent and easily identified the same heel mark which he had found on the pathway.

He looked about him, and discovered several of these marks, both going and coming; and he found the marks of a man's boots going and coming also.

The man's footprints seemed, in a number of instances, to have been superimposed on those of the woman.

That could only mean that it was the woman who had whistled in the first instance, and so summoned the man to join her in the garden. And presumably, then they had gone together to the stable. Dr. Hailey felt a sense of lively horror as this conclusion forced itself on his mind. Lady Cesare was the only woman member of the house party.

He strolled to the front door and entered the house. One of the footmen was stand-

ing in the hall. He asked him who had the ground floor bedroom on the west side.

"Mr. Derwentmere, sir."

The gentleman-jockey, a man whose knowledge of horses was almost proverbial! He stood a moment overtaken, as it seemed, by his own thoughts. A car came purring to the door behind him. He turned, and saw his friend, Inspector Biles, of Scotland Yard, alight from it.

III

FIVE hours later, from a point of special vantage secured for him by his host, Dr. Hailey watched the start of his first Derby. He had Lady Cesare on one side of him, and Lord Racey on the other. Jim Derwentmere had remained in the paddock with Sir John. In spite of the fear and distress which gnawed at his heart each time he glanced at his hostess's lovely face, he was aware of a thrill as the cry, "They're off," reached his ears.

His eyes traveled over the vast, wonderful crowd overflowing all the horizons. The surge of its emotions in this supreme hour was like some spiritual avalanche which not even the calmest might resist. All other feelings were literally swept aside.

He gazed where all were gazing, and saw a row of horsemen on the skyline. Perhaps it was the slight ground mist which the heat occasioned, perhaps only his own senses, but the riders seemed to him bigger and taller in their saddles than ordinary men—like the storm riders in the "Valkyrie" on their way to Valhalla.

He raised his glass, and focused it on the field, just as it swept down the hill to Tattenham Corner. He saw Sir John's colors well to the front and judged that High Star had a long lead of his opponents. So the racing tipsters had almost unanimously foretold.

He followed the horses to the straight, where it was possible to obtain a better view of them. High Star's lead was still considerable, though not, he judged, as yet decisive.

Suddenly, Lady Cesare seized his arm:

"Oh," she cried, "Blackamoor is pulling up on him. Look—look—"

He glanced at her, torn momentarily from his interest in the race. Her hands, holding her glasses, trembled visibly. He could see that her cheeks were pale, in deadly contrast with the raven of her hair. The suspense she was suffering was evidently very acute.

The crowd gasped, irresistibly recalling his attention to the object of its anxiety. He saw the black horse, about which he had heard so much talk in the last few days, draw slowly closer and closer to his host's splendid bay. The white patch high up on the latter's forehead, from which he derived his name, was clearly visible now. Somehow, it appeared to wane with every tremendous second. Now the two horses had begun to fight it out in deadly earnest.

Lady Cesare sobbed as she watched that mighty encounter. The crowd, it seemed, sobbed with her, swaying and rallying again as High Star's chance of victory ebbed or flowed. But always the tide of anxiety rose higher and higher.

"Neck and neck. Oh, why can't he draw away!"

The thunder of the hoofs came to them, that wonderful sound, with which, already, was mingled untimely cheering. High Star yielded—yielded. They saw his jockey punishing mercilessly, as he was swept past the post.

"Lost! Oh, my God!"

Lady Cesare's hand, which held her glasses, fell limp in her lap. She covered her eyes, shutting out the pitiful spectacle.

But the crowd, quicker than she to apprehend what had taken place, roared its satisfaction and relief.

"It's all right," said Dr. Hailey, "High Star has won by a head."

"What!"

In a moment, the color swept back to the beautiful face. The girl sprang to her feet. She cheered, and laughed hysterically while she cheered, and he saw tears gleam in her eyes.

The numbers went up. It was as he had stated.

And then Lady Cesare seemed to recover herself. She sat down, silent and rather abashed, while her husband led in the winner. Dr. Hailey caught a glimpse of

his host at that moment, over the heads of his surging, cheering admirers. The sunlight was on his face. He looked the very type of the sound racing man, fresh complexioned, handsome, debonair. The splendid horse by his side was not more completely master of its surroundings.

The thought of the awful, shattering blow which, within a few hours of his triumph, was about to fall on this good sportsman's life, made the doctor shudder. He turned away from the woman who was his companion lest she should read his horror in his eyes.

He excused himself as best he could and made his way out of the stand. He crossed the course and strode off toward The Pentlands. Inspector Biles was waiting for him in the smoke room.

" Well?" he asked.

" High Star won by a head."

" Good heavens! And the horse was supposed to be invincible. Is it possible that—that it got the drug after all?"

Dr. Hailey shook his head.

" I am no judge," he said. " Race horses have never been an object of interest to me. I can tell you this, though: either Lady Cesare is the finest actress in the world, or else the dope theory will have to be abandoned. She certainly wanted her husband's horse to win."

Biles shrugged his shoulders. He knew the doctor's weakness where women, especially pretty women, were concerned. His voice assumed its brisk, businesslike tone.

" I've completed the investigation," he declared, " and I've got the warrants. I secured one of Lady Cesare's slippers, by the simple process of taking it from her room—one of Derwentmere's shoes also. There is not a shadow of doubt about the footprints. These two visited the stable during the night, leaving the house by the window in Derwentmere's room."

He paused. Dr. Hailey took out his snuff box and helped himself to a large pinch.

" Can you explain," he asked, " how Lady Cesare was able to leave her husband's bedroom without awakening him?"

" Oh, he's an extremely heavy sleeper. I found that out from the servants."

" You mean to carry out the arrests, then?"

" Certainly; about six o'clock. By that time the roads will be cleared, and we can take the prisoners straight up to London."

He added after a moment: " I looked for a broken sleeve-link among Derwentmere's stuff, but I didn't find it. However, that proves very little. Most probably he has the other half of the link in his pocket, where we shall find it when we search him."

Biles went away to make some further inquiries of the servants. Dr. Hailey sat down in one of the big armchairs. When he went to the race course he had felt scarcely a doubt that Jim Derwentmere, aided in some way by Lady Cesare, was the murderer. But that idea rested on the assumption that these two stood to profit if High Star were beaten.

He had told himself that, in all probability, Derwentmere had " put his shirt " on the black colt. He was notoriously short of money, and so also, of course, must she be. If they were in love with one another and meant to run away, money would be essential.

But the girl had shown lively fear when her husband's horse seemed likely to prove a loser.

That her fear was genuine Dr. Hailey did not doubt for an instant. It was his professional business, after all, to study the human mind, and read the signs and symptoms which reveal its secret workings. He had never seen anxiety—and then, at last, relief—more unmistakably expressed.

Then a new idea occurred to him. Was it possible that Derwentmere possessed some drug capable of increasing the muscular power of a horse? Such drugs certainly existed; there were strychnine and adrenalin, and of course cocaine, with its wonderful properties of reinvigoration. Derwentmere had spent his whole life training and handling race horses.

He got up and began to pace the room. It was quite possible that this was the explanation. He recalled hearing a South American physician lecture before the Royal Society of Medicine on one occasion, on the use made by the " Indians " of cola leaves when great efforts of endurance had

to be undertaken. A man would run for a whole day without distress if he had a few of these leaves to chew. Cocaine, of course, was the very essence of the drug contained in the leaves.

No doubt Lady Cesare administered the "dope"; the horse knew her, and would be quiet and good-natured in her presence. No doubt, too, it was she who had obtained the key to the stable door. That would mean that Derwentmere was free to deal with the lad, Grainger, when he attacked them.

It was all pitiful and dreadful, for of course these two had had no idea of committing a serious crime when they concocted their plot. Crime had literally been thrust upon them. He reflected that that is perhaps the most frequent of all the manners of its coming. He sat down again, and, as he did so, caught sight of a small object lying in the fender, which he had not observed before. He stooped and picked it up.

It was very much blackened by the smoke of the fire, yet there could be no doubt about its nature. A look of great astonishment appeared in his eyes. He rubbed it with his handkerchief, and it shone brightly. It was gold. He started, and the expression of surprise on his face deepened to sheer incredulity. He muttered the word "Impossible!" several times.

IV

THEN suddenly he knelt down and began searching with his hands under the grate, which was old-fashioned and raised well above the hearth. A moment later he had his reward in a second discovery.

This caused him to exclaim in horror. He stood up and carried the thing he had found to the window. He examined it for several minutes with the most fervent attention. So absorbed was he, indeed, in his task, that he did not realize that Lady Cesare had entered the room until she stood beside him.

He thrust the hand which held his find into the pocket of his coat.

"Where is the detective?" she asked, in tones which were little more than a whisper.

"At the stables, I think."

"No; I've just come from there. We expected to find him and didn't."

She moved restlessly to the fireplace and stood in front of it.

"It is terrible, isn't it?" she moaned. "I have been haunted all the time, except for that one instant, at the very end of the race."

He bowed his head. Then he asked:

"Has High Star returned yet from the course?"

"Oh, yes. My husband is at the stable now. He's sending everybody off for the night to celebrate the victory."

Her voice fell away. He saw that she was very pale and that her eyes were weary and distressed. For a moment he thought that she was going to challenge him directly.

"If you will pardon me," he said, "I think that I will join him there. I have had no chance to congratulate him."

A queer, wild look gleamed in her eyes. She took a quick step toward him.

"Tell me," she cried, "do you suspect anybody at all?"

"I suspect nobody."

The manner in which he emphasized the word "suspect" left no doubt as to his meaning.

Lady Cesare turned deadly pale, so that he feared she was going to faint. He came to her side.

"No, no," she whispered. "I'm all right—only a little tired."

She sank down in one of the chairs and lay back, gazing before her with wide-open eyes. But she asked him nothing more. He left the room and walked out slowly through the hall to the carriage drive.

There seemed to be nobody about. He took the path to the stables and reached them without seeing a soul. The yard was empty. He came to the stable door and raised the latch. The door was locked. Evidently, Sir John had already returned to the house. He was about to retrace his steps when he heard a loud cry.

It was a cry of fear, and it came from the inside of the stable.

He sprang to the window and attempted to look within, but the light was very feeble. He could not see anything clearly.

Then the cry was repeated, this time with greater urgency. A heavy sound, as of stamping hoofs, came to his ears. He smashed the thin glass with his fist, and shouted. At the same instant a light flashed from the darkness, revealing a sight which made him gasp with dismay.

Right in front of him, its beautiful sleek neck thrust out, its ears laid back, and its teeth savagely bared, was the Derby winner. The light flamed in its eyes, which seemed to blaze with red fire.

The spectacle was indescribably terrible.

The animal advanced and then recoiled again. Suddenly it reared itself up. He saw the plates on its forefeet gleam horridly. Then the hoofs struck downward with a sickening thud.

The light went out. From the fearful darkness came a new cry of agony and dismay.

Dr. Hailey rushed to the door and flung his whole weight against it, but its stout frame resisted him. He glanced round the empty yard with frantic eyes, but it offered him nothing of any avail. The place was deserted. He ran back to the house, shouting for help as he ran.

At the front door he found Derwentmere and Lord Racey. Lady Cesare stood a few paces away from them, inside the house, talking to Biles. Even in this moment of horror he noticed that their expressions were very grave.

He cried out:

"For God's sake, quick! Some one is being savaged in the loose-box!"

He turned to run back, and they followed him. A moment later, by their united weight, they had broken in the stable door. Biles, who carried an electric torch, flashed it on the gate of the box and then over the gate. He recoiled, shuddering.

"Oh, my God!"

A slight figure pushed past him. Next instant the lights were switched up.

"No!" cried Derwentmere in loud tones.

But Lady Cesare had already unlatched the gate. She advanced boldly to the murderous creature which stood tense and threatening behind it.

"High Star—good horse—good horse!"

At the sound of her voice the animal shivered slightly. Its eyes seemed to lose their ferocity. The splendid neck relaxed.

"Good horse—good horse!"

A moan, feeble and stifled, came to their ears from the far corner of the box. They saw a huddled form, and instantly Derwentmere strode to it. He returned a moment later, staggering with it in his arms. The sound of Lady Cesare's hand patting the neck of the thoroughbred fell clear and crisp in the silence.

She came back to the gate and closed it. Then she saw her husband's face.

Dr. Hailey sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

Sir John died a few minutes after they had brought him to the house. Lord Racey and Derwentmere and Biles were in the room along with the doctor. Horror and amazement were in all their eyes. The doctor beckoned them to approach close to the bed.

"For the sake of the living," he declared in low tones, "it is essential that we should make an immediate inventory, in the presence of us all, of the contents of all his pockets."

He turned to the detective as he spoke. Biles seemed to hesitate. Then he bowed his head.

"Very well," he consented.

He passed his hand swiftly from pocket to pocket. Suddenly they saw him start. He extracted a small object from one of the waistcoat pockets and held it out to them.

It was a portion of a broken sleeve link.

Dr. Hailey dipped his hand in his own pocket. He produced the portion he had found in the garden during his first search, and laid it beside the other. The link was complete.

"What does it mean?" asked Lord Racey hoarsely.

"It means," said Biles in awed tones, "that Sir John murdered the lad, Grainger."

He took from his own pocket a little plaster cast he had made of the chain mark

discovered by Dr. Hailey on the dead boy's finger. He laid the tiny chain of the sleeve link upon it. The correspondence was exact and indubitable.

V

THEY were about to leave the room. Suddenly the door opened and Lady Cesare entered. She was deathly pale, but her eyes glowed.

"Well?" she asked.

"I am sorry to tell you," said Dr. Hailey, "that Sir John has just died."

He interposed his huge figure between her and the mutilated form on the bed. They saw her glance apprehensively at Biles.

"In that case," she said, "I can tell you the truth about—about everything. I could not speak before, and Mr. Derwentmere would not. But first of all, I want you to understand one thing."

She drew herself up, a queenly and splendid figure.

"My husband," she declared in very low tones, "had endured terrible suffering. I wish you to know that he was deeply, almost insanely, fond of me. I could not reciprocate his love. Our marriage was a dreadful mistake, and I know that I am partly to blame for that. My excuse must be that I was seventeen and he sixty when we were married three years ago."

She paused. Her lips quivered, but she maintained her self-control.

"A month ago," she declared, "he lost the greater part of his fortune through the failure of a company in which his money was invested. A week ago he drew Blackamoor in the Calcutta Sweep. It meant that if Blackamoor won he would be saved from ruin."

She turned to Lord Racey.

"You knew about that, of course. He told me you had got him the ticket, and that he had asked you to keep it for him in your own name, because of the awkwardness of the position in which he was placed as owner of High Star."

"Yes."

Lord Racey's fine features were drawn and haggard.

"My husband believed," she continued, "that it was only his money which I cared about. If he lost that, he would lose me also. It was because I knew all this that I was so frightened when I woke up last night and saw him going out, half dressed, from our bedroom."

Again she paused. Then her voice became quick and rather staccato.

"I followed him. I saw the light of the torch he carried, going in the direction of the stable. At first I thought of trying to stop him myself. But I was afraid of him. I turned back and saw a light in Mr. Derwentmere's window. I went to the window and whistled, in case my husband might hear and recognize my voice if I called. Mr. Derwentmere put the light out at once and came to the window. Then he dressed and we went to the stable together."

She shook her head sadly. Tears were running down her cheeks.

"There was nobody there—except poor Grainger—dead—murdered. I knew that my husband always carried a loaded stick with him, for fear of poachers—"

She stopped speaking. Derwentmere declared:

"It was at my suggestion that we decided to leave the body there. The boy was past all help, and Lady Cesare could not incriminate her husband. Besides, it was necessary that we should get back as quickly as possible to the house, in case he had returned to it. He had returned, as a matter of fact, but he was shut up in his smoke room—for what reason I can only guess—and so never knew we had been out at all."

Dr. Hailey nodded.

"The reason," he said, "was an urgent one. Look at these."

He showed them two small objects which he had in his pocket. One was a gold collar stud, the other a piece of thick, half charred linen.

"I found these," he explained, "under the grate in the smoking room this afternoon. The linen is a portion of a shirt front. The shirt must have been burned while the fire was lit last night, no doubt, because it was covered with blood. I argued that no one except Sir John himself would dare

to burn so large an object in that room, even in the middle of the night. Then it occurred to me that he must have noticed the loss of his sleeve link when he was engaged in his task.

"In that case he would take the first opportunity of recovering the lost portion which might become a most dangerous piece of evidence against him. I have no doubt he went back to the stable at once. But the link, as you know, had not fallen out there. The force which broke the chain—the lad's finger—would tend to pull the two studs inward, and so secure them for a time. The next available chance for making a search would be this evening. That is why I visited the stable an hour ago."

Silence fell in the room. Then Derwentmere asked:

"Why didn't he switch on the stable light, I wonder?"

"Because, though he had sent the men away, he could not feel sure they had all gone. Naturally he didn't wish to advertise his presence. I fancy the torch frightened the horse—after what had happened by torchlight the night before."

Derwentmere nodded.

"In addition to which," he declared, "the colt was full of strong dope. I am certain of that. I don't mind admitting now that I had a lot more money on him than I could afford to lose. I knew he was a certainty, barring accidents, and that the black horse simply didn't have a look-in. And yet, you saw what happened."

Dr. Hailey glanced at the lovely face of the woman beside him.

He thought he understood at last why she had been so terribly anxious when it seemed as though High Star must be beaten in the great race.

PIRATES OF THE OHIO

SHOULD you be drifting down the Ohio somewhat north of Henderson, Kentucky, you would come suddenly upon the cold bold face of a great cliff with a gaping mouth in the center, low to the water's edge. This is "Cave-In-Rock," and you would say, "What a perfect place for mystery, strange occurrences, and crime!" And a perfect place it was in its day.

One Jim Wilson, murderous outlaw, who had already a famous string of crimes behind him, flat-boated down the Ohio and settled at this spot about 1797.

The strange and romantic atmosphere of the great cave, with its air of mystery, captivated Wilson, and there he moored for all time. It is said that the cave itself seemed to hold an evil effect over all those who entered its shadowy portals. Thieves and gamblers searched for the place and stopped there. After a few months the spot became a haven of crime and a refuge for the worst known criminals.

There was hung at the lapping water's edge a bold sign which read: "Wilson's Liquor Vault and House for Entertainment." This placard, together with the desolate aspect of the place, seemed to attract only the worst types of criminals. For these reasons it was only a short time until Wilson's tavern had a wide reputation for infamy, licentiousness, and blasphemy.

The crimes perpetrated in and staged from the cave are some of the most terrible in history. Flat-boat after flat-boat loaded with precious cargo and manned by stalwart crews floated down the river, never to be heard from again. The goods went into the hands of Jim Wilson's men, the crews of the boats were forced to either join his forces, or, refusing, were murdered in cold blood and their bodies dumped into the Ohio.

One of the most outstanding illustrations of their devilish treachery is shown in a voyage made by Charles H. Webb, of that day, with his six boatmen. They were sailing down the Ohio in a gentle breeze when they espied two pretty young women on

the wooded but lonely shore, who had been washing. These two were frantically waving their bared arms and beckoning the boatmen to land, which they did. One of the party, however, remained on board.

The men landing were escorted to the great cave, where they stood in awe and amazement, to see the walls of a stony cavern rise over seventy-five feet above them and reach back along the floor over a hundred and sixty feet, with a height at the mouth of over fifty feet. It was a huge, mysterious room; about them sat many women who were spinning and sewing and apparently bent on innocent labor. The magnetism and lure of the place were enthralling and gripping.

Then suddenly, to their astonishment, they were leaped upon from nowhere by a band of outlaws and overpowered. In the meantime the single man on the flat-boat had met his end and the boat was already being pillaged. Three of the men, hearing of the fate of their brother on the boat, put up a stubborn fight and were murdered, their bodies being thrown into the river. The other three, seeing that to fight was useless, gave themselves over to Wilson's gang and amid great ceremony were sworn in with the outlaw band. Their boat had been burned and sunk.

The fate of Webb and his crew was the fate of many. The women were decoys. The rude sign, "Liquor Vault and House for Entertainment," lured many tired captains and their crews into the great cave for a last view of the blue sky.

One of the most successful tricks of piracy in trapping the river boats was through pilots employed by Wilson. The channel near the great cave was serpentine in its windings. At this point a pilot would be stationed who would meet all the oncoming boats. If by the time the next point had been reached the pilot now on board decided that the cargo was worth the risk and that the crew could be overpowered, he would run the vessel on one of the many sandbars.

Here it would be wrecked, the crew overwhelmed and massacred by the outlaws, or part of them sworn in to the band if it was thought that the men could be trusted.

If one pilot failed, another, at a more remote point, succeeded in gaining the decks of the vessel, and through one trick or another the ship and her crew would be trapped.

In numerous cases the boats were not considered worthy of pillage; these were graciously allowed to pass on unmolested, the only request being that the captains recommend the pilots to the next boating parties that passed along that stretch. In this manner considerable confidence was aroused and the pilots had little difficulty in trapping many boats.

Another ruse that worked with success was that of women and men placed on a prominent point of desolate character, pleading that they were lost and alone in the vast wilderness. When the crews went ashore to rescue them, they were attacked by Wilson's outlaws and many shot down, while their boat was captured and plundered.

In other cases boatmen awoke with dismay to find that when near the vicinity of the cave their vessels were slowly sinking.

Some one of Wilson's men had schemed to get on board early in the voyage, and creeping stealthily into the bilges, often during the night, would scuttle the boats.

The terror-stricken boatmen would do everything possible to save their boat, but usually by the time they succeeded in reaching the nearest bank their decks would be clattering with the strange feet of pirates. That was the signal of doom for the boatmen.

Many young families, happy over their venture into the homestead lands of the great West, radiant in their hopes of the future, drifted into the lair of Cave-In-Rock and her bloody outlaws, a prey to their murderous schemes. The attractive young women were taken captive; the men joined the gang, or were killed, as the case shaped itself. Many were the tortures witnessed by the gang and their lewd women.

The career of this most notorious band of pirates of the Ohio went on for years unmolested. It was not until 1810 that it was finally broken up.

"The first bird that makes a move gets drilled

TOLD BY A DEAD MAN

By Don H. Thompson

GIBBY COMPETES WITH PROFESSOR MERTON IN SLEUTHING AND A DEAD MAN ADJUDGES THE WINNER

DEATH walked in on Schultz, the loan shark, as he sat in his little office on the second floor of a musty building on the water front. A janitor found him, hunched crookedly in his chair, his mouth open in a frozen cry, great blots of blood staining the front of his pleated shirt.

Schultz was writing a letter when he was killed, an unaddressed letter in which he was threatening to tell what he knew about some of the many shady deals he had engaged in during a lifetime of usury.

It was just a few lines scrawled on a sheet of dirty foolscap, but where the writing left off, there was printed in a bold hand, evidently that of the murderer:

DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES

Captain Kearney, of the homicide squad, grunted when he saw it.

"True enough," said he, "but killers often tell stories out of school."

The case looked fairly simple. Kearney, noting that the place was undisturbed, immediately discarded the robbery theory and set his men to work to ferret out Schultz's business associates. Then he sat back to await results.

He waited five days and by that time all of the old man's many enemies had been eliminated and Kearney was up against a blank wall.

The assassination of Schultz had attracted no more than the usual amount of attention from the newspapers, but when the police failed to produce the murderer, it bounded back to the front pages and editorial writers waxed sarcastic at the expense of the department.

It was on a day that two newspapers had hinted, more or less gently, that the

police were very sound sleepers, that Captain Kearney, red-faced and exasperated, sat in the office of the young chief of detectives and talked savagely about the case.

"And none of 'em leads any place," he mourned. "Sample of his handwriting and two pretty good finger-prints found on the scene, but they don't mean a thing."

The chief smoked in silence for a moment.

"Understand the *Evening Globe* has retained Professor Merton to solve the mystery for them," he said finally. "Know anything about him?"

"Nut," snorted Kearney. "College detective."

"He's made some pretty good cases," observed the chief, "but I suspect that he is the kind that always gets results and doesn't give two whoops whether the results are correct or not."

"Say," demanded Kearney suddenly, "what's the *Globe* hornin' in on this for?"

The chief smiled. "Public spirited newspaper. The police can't find the murderer, so the *Globe* will hire a competent detective to do the work, thereby making a lot of noise and some circulation."

"Whew! It 'd be hell if he produced!"

"Exactly." The chief smiled again. "That's the reason I've decided to put every available man on the job, including our ancient and dumb friend, Detective Sergeant Gibby."

"That 'll be a big help," said Kearney in a voice tinctured with sarcasm. "A big help."

The chief leaned back in his chair and chewed on a cigar.

"You know, Kearney, we may be all wrong about Gibby. He's thick, there's no denying that, but he works and he's got a single track mind which is a great asset in some cases. The commissioners wished him on me and he came through on everything, finally forcing me to make him a sergeant. How do you figure that?"

"I don't figure," snapped Kearney. "Gibby 'll be about as much at home on this case as a pair of hip boots at a funeral."

When his superior did not reply Kearney knew it was hopeless to press his objections.

"Send Gibby in," said the chief to a clerk, and a moment later the door swung open to admit a great, hulking man of about fifty years, whose face shone like a full moon.

Fallen arches lent a peculiar shuffle to his gait as he ambled to the chief's desk, waving a fat forefinger in the general direction of his head in token of salute.

"Didja want me, boss?" he asked.

The chief nodded gravely. "Have you kept in touch with the Schultz case?"

"Yeah," said Gibby. "Read all the reports. Somebody cut the old bimbo's throat. No trace found of the murderer."

"That's it," agreed the chief. "In addition, our friend the *Globe* has hired Professor Merton to run down the slayer. Now it's up to us to beat him to it. Get on Merton's trail and stay there and let me know what he is doing."

"Yes, sir." Gibby fumbled with his battered derby uncertainly and then lumbered out of the room.

When he had gone, Kearney spoke again.

"That bird," said he, "couldn't find his way home at high noon with a lighted lantern."

Gibby did not have the slightest notion of how to proceed to find Professor Merton, so he borrowed the file on the Schultz case from a condescending clerk and studied the reports minutely. The coroner's findings on the condition of the body was attached and the big detective read that document laboriously, but for what reasons he knew not.

When he had fixed all the known details of the murder in his mind, Gibby decided to begin his search for the professor at the scene of the crime, which was but a few blocks from the headquarters building.

"Some dump," said Gibby to himself as he surveyed the peeled front of Schultz's office. "That old boy was so tight he never put his hands in his pockets except in zero weather. Yeah."

He rattled a door insistently. There came the clatter of chains and a little man with a wisp of a sandy mustache looked out.

"These damn reporters been pesterin' me until I finally locked the joint," he explained.

"That so?" said Gibby politely; then he peered closer at the little man. "Say, aren't you George Walker who usta work the cars outa the Fourth Street sheds?"

"Sure, I am," retorted the little man, "and you're old Gibby that usta be my motorman. Well, well! Ain't seen you in fifteen years. Well, well!"

He whacked Gibby on the back violently.

"I'm a detective sergeant now," said Gibby, expanding.

The little man's eyes widened and his voice took on a mysterious tone.

"Workin' on this Schultz case, eh?" he whispered. "Well, I'm the guy that found him. Yes, sir. I walks in there to sweep up and Schultz is sittin' at his desk big as life and deader'n hell! Yes, sir."

"Let's look," suggested Gibby, but Walker waved a protesting hand.

"Not now," said he grandly. "Later. First, we'll have one to the good old days. Come on."

He led the way down a dark flight of stairs to the basement, where two chairs and a table sat in front of a huge furnace. Gibby wedged his bulk into a complaining rocker and dropped his derby hat on the table.

Walker ducked behind a coal pile like a frightened rabbit and came up with a brown jug in one hand and two glasses in the other.

Gibby squinted at the light through the liquor.

"Here's looking at you," croaked Walker.

"Yeah," said Gibby.

They drank.

II

SOME three hours later it suddenly came to Gibby that he was searching for a mysterious personage called the professor, although the reason for the quest was far from clear in his mind.

"Yeah," he insisted to the amiable Walker, "I've got a date with the perfesser. Must go. Yeah."

Walker protested to the last, but finally folded up on the coal and went to sleep, whereupon Gibby gathered up his derby and departed into the outer darkness.

He walked obliquely down the levee, muttering as to a companion.

"Must find the perfesser," he told himself. "Must find him. Yeah."

At a poolroom he paused and peered through the fly-specked window, his eyes falling upon an elderly ruffian, who was taking a tarpaulin from a billiard table.

"Ah," said Gibby, "the perfesser himself."

He entered on the bias and made his way to the bar in the rear, where he called loudly for a drink. A youth made a few motions like a magician taking a duck from a hat and a glass of liquor appeared in front of the big detective.

It was downed in a trice, the room whirled, the crashing piano seemed miles away and Gibby sank into a chair with a faraway look in his eyes. He dozed.

Then, wrecking sleep, came the stab of the damp wind, the thump of many boots and loud, angry cries.

Gibby leaped to his feet, every sleep drenched fiber of him awake and sober.

In the rear of the hall, a bearded giant and a lean, wiry youth were fighting, surrounded by the howling, drunken riff-raff of the riverfront. It was an unequal contest.

Gibby soon saw that the boy had, at best, a very remote chance of beating the big man who was his superior in every way physically.

Now the lad was down. Up again. Now down from a crashing swing to the jaw. The big man closed in on his prostrate opponent and his lumber jack boots swung wickedly.

"Hey!"

Gibby was elbowing his way through the crowd. His cry had stopped the bearded giant and when the detective broke through the circle of men, the victorious fighter wheeled on him, his vicious, little eyes crackling with spleen.

"Well," he snarled. "How come?"

"Don't kick the kid," said Gibby mildly. "Let him alone."

The giant put his bushy face close to Gibby's fat countenance.

"Make me," he said. He turned away, and as he did so Gibby's hand flashed be-

neath his coat and when it came out it bore a forty-five automatic.

"I'm a police officer," he announced calmly. "The first bird that makes a move toward that kid on the floor gets drilled. Stand back! All of you!"

Reluctantly the river rats fell back and Gibby menacing them with the revolver lumbered to the side of the injured boy. Then he spoke to him, but his eyes never left the crowd.

"Can you get up?"

"I guess so." The lad staggered to his feet and rubbed his hands over his torn and bleeding face. "Out the side door here. Come on."

He moved weakly away and Gibby backed after him with his weapon still leveled at the men before him.

"Now!"

Gibby turned swiftly, pocketed his weapon, slipped one arm around the boy's shoulder and they ducked out the door and down a dark, deserted street.

"They won't follow us," said the youth. "Wowie! I'm about all in. Let's go coffee up some place."

They traversed several dark blocks before they finally found a smelly little all-night restaurant and went in.

"Listen, big boy," said the youth over a steaming coffee cup, "that was a close call for me. If the coppers had been called, I'd been in bad right."

"That so?" commented Gibby carelessly, but his tiny blue eyes flickered with interest.

"Yeah, bo," assured the youth. "I bumped a guy off the other day. Self defense it was, but you know how much chance a bum like me with a long record of arrests has with a self defense plea. None!

"And besides that the bulls would be bending their sticks over my dome to make me confess. Say, I don't know why I'm telling you all this, but you look like an all-square gink to me, so I guess it's all right."

"I'd surrender if I was you," said Gibby. "Yeah. Walk in. That always helps the self defense plea."

The youth shook his head. "Nix. They're makin' too much noise about this guy I put off watch. He tried to stick me with a knife and I jabbed him with it."

"Schultz?" asked Gibby in a low voice.

"Yep, that's the guy. I'd surrender in a minute if I thought I could get a square deal."

"You didn't hear what I told those birds back there in the saloon?"

"Naw, I didn't hear anything. What'd you tell 'em?"

"Plenty."

Gibby ordered another cup of coffee and the waiter returned with an evening paper, the *Globe*. Gibby glanced at the big, black headlines and whistled in surprise.

"Professor Merton solves Schultz mystery," he repeated. "Cousin of loan agent confesses to murder. Was traced through handwriting."

The youth laughed.

"That's damn peculiar," said Gibby. "Damn peculiar."

III

SIX men sat in the office of the chief of detectives the next day. One of them, a long, lean man with a confident air, was speaking.

"I have come to claim the police department reward in the Schultz case," said Professor Merton, "and to turn over my prisoner, Jed Alden, with his complete confession." He pointed to a sallow individual with a look of abject terror who sat beside him. Alden's knees were palpably shaking; there was a tic at the corner of his left eye.

"Not so fast, professor," said the chief. "I understand that there is another claimant to the reward, Detective Sergeant Gibby."

The professor laughed. "My dear fellow," he purred, "of course, you recognize that it is impossible for both of us to be right and I submit that I have an airtight confession from my man here. It was really a very simple case."

"Yeah," said Gibby, who was sitting in a corner with the youth he had rescued from the saloon. "I found it pretty easy."

The professor favored him with a withering look and turned to the chief again.

"I am willing," said he, "to submit to any test and I believe that I can demonstrate by a few questions that your man Gibby here is a faker."

"I'll ask the questions," declared the chief. "Read this fellow Alden's confession."

"Certainly, chief." The professor reached into his pocket and produced a document of many pages and began reading in a sonorous voice. It set forth that Alden had believed himself cheated in a business deal, had gone to his cousin's office and after an altercation had stabbed Schultz in the throat.

"As I was leaving," the professor read, "Schultz turned to me and begged me not to leave him, but I ran down the stairs and hid under the docks until darkness fell when I went home."

"Stop a minute, professor," ordered the chief, and then turning to Gibby: "Is that it?"

"Yeah," said Gibby lumbering to his feet. "That's it. Perfesser, did you examine the coroner's report on the finding of this body? You did? Well, sir, you did a bum job of it. The truth is that Schultz's vocal cords were cut clean through in one slash and he couldn't have said a word to nobody. Your confession is too fancy."

Silence fell upon the room. Merton attempted to speak but his voice broke in an amazed croak. The chief smiled, Captain Kearney looked dazed and Gibby's features were unreadable.

"The facts also are," the big detective went on, "that this boy at my side killed Schultz with Schultz's knife in a fight. He didn't know or care anything about the letter Schultz was writing. But Alden, the poor fish, came in later, saw what had happened and added the line, 'Dead men tell no tales.' That's about all there is to it."

The chief turned to Merton who leaped to his feet as though to protest.

"Get out of here," said the chief softly, "before I throw you out."

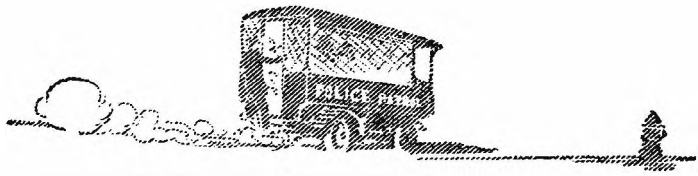
It did not take the professor long to execute the order.

"You get the reward, Gibby," announced the chief. "Turn Alden loose. He was frightened into signing that confession, the poor dope. Lock the boy up. Swell work. Shows what strict attention to business will do, eh, Kearney?"

"It shows something," retorted Kearney, "but I don't know just what."

They both looked at Gibby appraisingly, as though seeking something not visible to the naked eye.

"Well, gents," piped Gibby embarrassed and oppressed by their scrutiny, "that's one tale that a dead man told, anyway."



William J. Flynn

ANNOUNCES for next week's FLYNN'S in addition to "Beating the Clock," by Louis Lacy Stevenson, announced last week, another Gibby story, "Straight to the Point"; another true story of an American policeman, this time from Bridgeport, Connecticut; another Gollomb article, "Robin Hood of Vienna"; and several others.

There will be further chapters of our two serials. And there will be a couple more of the special articles that have proved so popular. All this in FLYNN'S for May 16.

"I seen the bogie an' got the fright o' my life"

WHERE IS MARY MORELL?

By T. A. O'Keeffe

MARY MORELL, NOVELIST EXTRAORDINARY, AND WOMAN OF MYSTERY, DISAPPEARS AND REAPPEARS AND DISAPPEARS

EXTRACT from a London paper dated June 5th, 192—:

"Is Mary Morell dead?" asks the world of literature. "Is she? And if so, how could this most gifted authoress go out of the world in silence, and without a sigh or a tear to do honor to her memory?

"Two years have elapsed since she was last heard of, that occasion being when she launched into the world her latest and most wonderful masterpiece, '*Myself* and the Deity!' This work, with its audacious title, is pronounced to be the book of the age by those whose opinions are generally accepted in the literary world.

"The controversy it started in sectarian circles is like a rolling snowball—for it still moves—and the incalculable number of tongues that began to wag about it then have kept on wagging about it ever since.

"Readers of Miss Morell's works—and their name is Legion—have gone hungry for two years; for having once tasted manna, they are unable now to satisfy their craving with bread.

"During the last quarter of a century, with almost mechanical precision, a book has come to light from her pen once every year, until two years ago; and when her last work appeared it was announced by Miss Morell's publishers that another ship, of an equally extraordinary and unusual character, was in the stocks and would be launched as usual.

"But, through no fault of theirs, they have been unable to effect this, and they are equally in the dark concerning their client's movements as we are ourselves. Her

stronghold in the Midlands, across whose threshold no interviewer, photographer, nor reporter has ever passed a foot, is empty and has been so for close on two years.

"Around that time a breath appears to have been wafted over the twenty-foot wall, inside which this mysterious little lady lived and wrote, that her health was indifferent. Some now think she has left England to seek health in the sunshine abroad; while others, who are of a pessimistic strain, say we have now read the very last work that will ever again originate from the brain of that most original of writers.

"But, either way, Miss Morell will have lived up to her secretive reputation, whether this be the end or not. For though her name has been in the mouth of the world for so long, she was personally known to but a few, and to none intimately. She but rarely passed outside the gates of her home, her earthly paradise; and her face or form has never appeared in any publication that we know of, to show to her readers what fashion of woman she was or is.

"One wonders, knowing her recluseness, where her marvelous inspirations came from and her profound knowledge of humanity. But culled they were from an unfathomable mind that had an intelligence and intuitive range far beyond that of acknowledged extraordinary mentality."

Extract from the same paper. three days later:

"To the Editor, Rectory,
"Dear Sir, Devon.

"I have read with very great interest in your issue of 5th inst. the article headed: 'Where is Mary Morell?' and while I am, *by no means*, in sympathy with the mind of that lady, whose writings I consider not only unorthodox, but blasphemously profane, I cannot but admit, in fairness, that from a literary point, few, if any, have ever attained to her eminence, and none, I should think, her world-wide popularity as a writer. However, that is all outside the object of this letter.

"'Where is Mary Morell?' you ask.

"Well, I will not dare to say where I think Mary Morell is, for I judge not that I be judged myself; but in a little graveyard, situate within the moorlands of Devon and within a dozen miles of Okehampton, a simple headstone was set up about fifteen months ago. On it is a simple legend. Nothing more—nothing less—just:

MARY MORELL
"Yours faithfully,
"Rector."

Extract from the same paper, eight days later:

"WHERE IS MARY MORELL?

"How little did we know eight days ago, when we wrote under the above heading, that we were, inadvertently, about to knock over a beehive. Like bees—some of which are harmless drones, but most have a sting at the business end—the letters come swarming around our heads. To publish these letters, alone, would mean the suspension from our paper of all other matter for days to come, so we refrain from publishing any more; but with gladness in our hearts we are able to make the announcement:

MARY MORELL HAS BEEN FOUND!

"A letter, which has just come to hand from her publishers states they are in communication with Miss Morell, who is back again in her home. She has forwarded them a fresh manuscript, and in due course a new book will be on the market:

GOD'S HASTE, by Mary Morell

"This work, we are informed, deals with what the writer considers to be God's haste in rushing the creation. Attention is drawn to a number of inexactnesses in the hastily finished universe, which was completed in seven days and pronounced *good*. Miss Morell thinks that an extra day's thought put into it might have raised the pronouncement to *better!*

"Peace! peace! No more letters, we entreat!—nay, we insist! for this subject is now closed.

"The Editor."

Extract from the same paper dated August 1st, of the same year:

ANOTHER NEW BOOK—
MARY MORELL

"It is evident that during the past two years Miss Morell has not been idle, for

another new work, following fast on the heels of "God's Haste," is now in the hands of her publishers. This makes her quota complete, basing same on her annual output of one. Details will be announced later.

"It will be remembered that about two years ago a rumor was current regarding the condition of Miss Morell's health. It went so far, even, as to say she was dead; but the recent announcements, we are pleased to say, go to prove that she not only was, but is, very much alive."

"I wish I could find out what Mary Morell is having for breakfast this morning," remarked Benson, K.C., helping himself to another egg.

Mary Morell's book, "God's Haste," had just been published, and the announcement of another having reached the publishers' hands had appeared in that morning's papers.

"Same as we're having probably—eggs and bacon," replied Coulthard, the actor. "Why do you want to know?"

"Notoriety, of course," Courtenay answered for him, laying his napkin on the table. "If Benson could only tell the public that he had breakfast with Mary Morell this morning, and saw her eat eggs and bacon like any ordinary human being, he'd eventually die of suffocation—smothered in briefs."

"You're right, old sleuth, as you usually are. But 'twould be a glorious death. I'd like to risk it."

"How strangely some of us are constituted," remarked Coulthard. "Here's a woman about whose private life and antecedents not a soul seems to know a thing, and of whose personality all that is known is that she is small and ordinary. But, oh! what a soul!—what an intellect! Gossip has made some wild rumors about her from time to time, but whether it made of her princess or beggar-maid she'd never bother to contradict it. She shrinks from publicity—of course she cannot help her notoriety—but the more she shrinks, the more notorious she becomes."

"While others like myself," said Benson, carrying on the theme, "would sell their immortal souls for the crumbs of it that fall from her sumptuously overburdened table."

"There's a man outside in the vestibule, sir, who wishes to see you," said a club porter who had just entered. He stood at Courtenay's side and presented a card-tray. The card was inscribed: "Ernest Perkins, Embalmer, Chiswick," and below the name was scrawled in an illiterate hand:

"*Would like to see you, sir, on a private matter.*"

"Is the small committee room empty?" Courtenay asked, taking the card.

"It is, sir," replied the porter.

"I'll be glad if you will show Mr. Perkins in there."

"Well, Mr. Perkins, and what can I do for you?" asked Courtenay a few minutes later, as he seated himself opposite a corpulent and not overintelligent-looking individual of the tradesman type who was seated, ill at ease, on the edge of a couch.

"You'll pardon me, sir, I'm sure, for the liberty," said Mr. Perkins rising.

"Quite so, Mr. Perkins, but won't you sit down?"

"Thank you, sir," and Mr. Perkins resumed his seat.

"The—er—fact is, sir, I 'ave 'eard tell o' you for a long time, an' I thought it best to come and 'ave a kind o' friendly chat like, with you afore taking my news—which may not be news at all—elsewhere. I 'ope there's no 'arm in what I've done, sir?"

"Not a bit. What is your news?"

Mr. Perkins did not reply immediately. He sat for a while in contemplation with one elbow resting on the end of the couch and his chin posed in his open palm. Suddenly he thrust his hand into a breast pocket and produced a greasy pocket wallet that was filled to bursting with dog-eared documents. He selected one and offered it to Courtenay.

"Read that, sir," he said.

Courtenay took the document and opened it.

"This looks very harmless, Mr. Perkins," he said when he had perused it. "A letter from a would-be client near Okehampton—who forgot to sign his name, by the way—requisitioning your professional services, is it not?"

"Yes, that's all it is, sir. It was enclosed in a registered envelope, and accompanying it was a note for fifty pounds."

"H-m-m!" was all Courtenay said, but he was certainly interested.

"That was the enclosure it mentioned, an' my own fee on top o' that, too, as you see. "*Motor will meet your train at Okehampton,*" it says."

"Did you go?"

"Of course, sir. I'd be a fool if I didn't. Though I did think it strange as 'ow no names was mentioned an' no address given of where I was to go.

"It was late, eleven thirty, when I got to Okehampton, an' it was a bitterly cold, January night with a harsh, biting wind blowing sleet across the moor. A big, closed-in motor car met me."

"Where did that take you?"

"That's what I don't know, sir; whether it was north, south, east or west. All I know is that I was driven for miles through a wild country—not that I was able to see it, but it sounded like it with the wind blowing a gale and whistling through the car. Up one 'ill an' down another, until I thought we would never stop. But when we did I saw by my watch that we 'ad been only 'alf an hour on the road. We stopped before a house that was all in darkness, 'cept for a dim light in the 'all. A woman took me in charge at the door.

"'How long will you be?' she asked.

"'About three hours, madam,' I said. For that's the time my process requires.

"'That 'll do. There's an early train going through which I'll arrange for you to catch!'"

"What service were you called upon to perform?" asked Courtenay.

"The case was a woman, sir; on in years and medium in size."

"Did you see anybody else in the house while you were there?"

"Not a soul, sir. When my duties was finished the woman took me to 'er room—she was the 'ousekeeper, I expect—and gave me refreshment. While I was there I asked the lady for the name of the people as employed me."

"Yes."

"'Money—money, Mr. Perkins; your master and mine,'" she said as she 'anded me an envelope; 'and as long as it satisfies you that's all you need know!' The envelope contained four fifty pound notes."

"And then?"

"Then I was driven back to the station, sir, in the dark and cold, in time to catch my train to London."

"That's all very interesting; but what is your object in coming to tell me all this, and waiting eighteen months after the happening before doing so?"

"There's been a lot lately in the papers about the great writer, Mary Morell. Of course, you've seen it, sir?"

"Yes. But what has that got to do with your story?"

"To be straight about it, sir, I don't know. I'm but a plain man and I find it 'ard to put my thoughts into words, sir. I can't 'elp thinking there's something in it, it was all so mysterious; an' ever since I read that parson's letter in the paper it's on my mind.

"There's a mystery somewhere—the whole thing is clouded in mystery; and one room I looked in, after I'd finished my work, had shelves all around it with Mary Morell's books on 'em in every kind o' binding you could think of."

"Then you are of opinion, I take it, Mr. Perkins, that the body you embalmed was that of Mary Morell?"

"Sometimes I think like that, sir—but, there, again, one hears she is back home and writing books as fast as ever. I don't know what to think, Mr. Courtenay. My brain don't act like an eddicated brain, same as yours, sir; but I've given you all my facts, sir, an' whether you think them mountains or molehills, I can do no more. You 'ave my address, Mr. Courtenay, and should you want me at any time you'll know where to find me."

"Thanks for coming to me. Your client's act, whoever he or she may be, points, perhaps, more to eccentricity than to criminality. However, I'm glad you came to me first, and, if I were you, I should think and say no more about it."

"I don't talk, sir," replied Mr. Perkins, rising to go. "Even my own missus don't know nothing of what I've told you. It's

in your 'ands now, Mr. Courtenay, an' off my mind. Good day, sir."

But when the embalmer had left the room Courtenay returned to his seat. He was thoughtful, and the contemplative look on his face meant that the story he had just heard had made a greater impression on him than what he had led Mr. Perkins to believe.

After a while he drew a letter from his pocket which he had received only that morning, and read it again. It came addressed to him from a parsonage in Devonshire, a place called Lynmeet, which lay about ten miles from Okehampton in an easterly direction. The letter ran:

" Dear Mr. Courtenay:

" It was my very great pleasure, about three years ago, to have met you at your famous club where I greatly enjoyed your conversation. You may remember I was introduced to you by our mutual friend, Dean Thackeray, who is your fellow member. I was then greatly impressed with the various incidents which you related for my benefit, in connection with your profession.

" Lynmeet is a very quiet spot on the moors, rarely heard of, but wild in its grandness and grand in its wildness. Will you favor it with a visit? I think you might find material here for a story that would astonish the world! You may remember, some months back, seeing a letter which I wrote under the pseudonym of 'Rector' to a London paper concerning Mary Morell.

" I enclose cutting in case you may not have seen it. Does the matter interest you? If it does—come! I'm a bachelor and there are several vacant rooms in my rectory. One is at your disposal, and what you will find lacking in entertainment will be made up in welcome. I've got an old rattletrap contraption which I use in visiting my moorland parishioners, and can meet you at Okehampton, which is our nearest station.

" Yours sincerely,

" Thos. Langbridge,

" Rector."

A few minutes later Courtenay, who had been seated at a writing table, rose and rang a bell.

" Send this telegram at once," he said to the attendant who answered. It was addressed to Rev. Thos. Langbridge, Lynmeet, Devon.

" That," said the Rev. Thomas Langbridge, laying a small cardboard box on the table, " contains Exhibits I and II. There are three exhibits in the case. No. III won't fit in the box; it is now gossiping with the cook-housekeeper over a cup of tea in the kitchen, and will present itself here whenever we choose to ring for it."

It was the next morning, and Courtenay and his host were seated in the rectory study at Lynmeet.

The rector was a tall, lean man with a pair of bright, intellectual, gray eyes. He was in the seventies, but his healthy, outdoor life on the moorlands kept him as hale and active as many men who were thirty years his junior.

" Now, Mr. Courtenay, if you will bear patiently with an old man's ramblings, I will tell you all I know.

" I have lived in this parish and in this old rectory for almost forty years. The countryside, for many, many miles around, is known to me as though it were my own garden, and the lives of those who live here are like an open book wherein I may at all times read.

" In our small God's Acre that surrounds my church there is a grave that is eighteen months old. Two miles from here, in the heart of wildness and grandeur, there is an isolated dwelling; and in it there dwells a mystery, part of which is buried in that grave. The house was purchased six years ago by a mysterious Stephen Barrow. Mysterious inasmuch as no one around here has ever seen or heard of him.

" Who he is and where he comes from and why ever he purchased this desolate place are mysteries to the rural minds around here, where your business and my business is everybody's business. A lady, who we presumed was Mrs. Barrow—but little less of a mystery than Stephen—has been here four times since the house became Barrow property.

" But whether she is Stephen's wife, widow, or mother, no one knows—speaking, of course, only of ourselves here—and the

lack of this knowledge, I can tell you, is considered a big grievance among the locals."

"Have you ever seen Mrs. Barrow?"

"Mrs. Barrow—as she is called—oh, yes! I called as a matter of duty—tinged, I admit, by a little curiosity—on each occasion of her stay. Twice I was admitted—twice I wasn't."

"What was Mrs. Barrow like?"

"Very ordinary, indeed. Small, middle-aged—and pleasing; but not greatly different to our own middle class Devon folk."

"Intellectual?—learned?"

"I wish I could say *yes* to that!"

"Why, Mr. Langbridge?"

"Because I might then be able to reconcile a little theory that's got stuck fast in my own mind. We'll talk about that presently.

"When I came to this parish, Mr. Courtenay, in the very early eighties, that isolated house, now called Glebe House, was then on church land and had been, some years before, a rectory, but not of this parish. It belonged to a parish which, a few years before I came here, had been incorporated in the parish of Lynmeet.

"The widow of the late incumbent was allowed to continue to occupy the house, and did so until her family—two boys and one girl—had grown up, which was about ten years later. You wonder why I go back into ancient history, I have no doubt; but, perhaps, you will bear with me when I tell you that the name of the late incumbent was Morell, and the one girl-child was called Mary. Are you at all interested, Mr. Courtenay?"

"Intensely."

"Good. To all intents and purposes Mrs. Barrow died at Glebe House on the twenty-ninth of January of last year, and was buried in Lynmeet churchyard. Six months afterward a tombstone was erected over the grave, but the name inscribed thereon is:

MARY MORELL

What do you make of that?"

"Go on, Mr. Langbridge. I'd like to hear more, first. What became of the Morell family?"

"Mary was away at school most of the time. I never saw much of her, but the rest of the family I knew very well. She was employed by some literary people in London, I believe—which is not unworthy of note—and got on remarkably well, according to rumor. Finally the family emigrated to Australia, and that was the last I ever heard of them—at least as far as I know."

"Why do you qualify your last statement?"

"Because I feel it in my old bones that Mary Morell who went to Australia, Mary Morell the writer, Mrs. Barrow of Glebe House, and Mary Morell of Lynmeet graveyard, is one and the same. I don't mind a bit if you say I'm a dithering old fool for thinking so. I have called myself worse than that, many times, over the same thing."

"I'll say nothing of the kind. I think your reasoning is based on very good ground."

"That is, indeed, a compliment. But my stumbling block is Mrs. Barrow—cultured, but ordinary. I find it difficult to reconcile Mrs. Barrow with the writer of Mary Morell's books."

"Cultured, but ordinary, equally describes Mary Morell, the writer. When you first met Mrs. Barrow were you struck by any resemblance between her and the Mary Morell you used to know?"

"That was thirty years ago, and I had seen too little of the other Mary to have her face fixed in my memory. I can remember a bright, healthy girl, such as we breed around here; but there was no trace of this in the faded little lady of Glebe House.

"Now, Mr. Courtenay, before we go any further, we'll have up Exhibit III," continued the rector, and he pulled on a bell-cord that was suspended at the side of the fireplace.

"Exhibit III, Mrs. Mann," he said, as a little old woman entered. Her sallow face was a mass of fine lines and puckers that imparted to the skin a resemblance to the shell of a walnut. Her body was bowed from toil, and she was attired in an ancient bonnet and shawl.

"I had better talk, for she is very deaf,"

said the rector. "No doubt her deafness was in her favor when she was selected to prepare the late Mrs. Barrow for burial."

"Now, Mrs. Mann," and he addressed the old woman in a loud tone, "tell this gentleman what happened on the night you were called to attend at Glebe House."

"I will, sir," she replied, and she bent her head respectfully. She turned and faced Courtenay.

"'Twas in the darkness of night, after supper, sir, they sent for me to lay her out—Mrs. Barrow, as I've 'eard 'em call 'er. A big car with glass windows in it come for me—one o' them motors; the first one as I ever rode in—same as I was a lady.

"Mr. Mansfield, 'im as is 'usband to the lady as keeps 'ouse there, drove me 'cos they won't 'ave none of our Lynmeet people to serve in the 'ouse for them; an' plenty o' tidy wenches looking for work, too, in the place."

She then, at great length, described how she prepared the body for burial.

"And when I turned her over, sir," she continued, "something round, like a little, white sweet, fell out of her clothes on to the bed."

"Exhibit I," whispered the rector.

"I thought I would keep it for luck; an' when my work was done I 'ad a peep into a couple o' the rooms that was near. The first was full o' books around the walls, and 'ad a big, shiny table with a pile o' papers on it. I made a quick grab an' took two that was clung together, for I wanted something to wrap the round sweet up in."

"Exhibit II," again whispered the rector.

"I then 'ad a peep into another room, sir, an' 'twas there I seen the bogie an' got the fright o' my life. I'll never forget it long as I live. It must 'ave been the devil. 'imself; for if God made it, 'e never made anything less like a 'uman being. I don't know what it was like. I never waited to see.

"It looked like it was only one big head that wasn't much higher than a table off the floor; an' if what I saw was its body, it was twisted like it 'ad been in a hacident. I gave one scream an' ran back into the room with the dead woman; 'twas safer to be with the dead than with an evil bogie like that."

"Thanks, Mrs. Mann," said the rector, and he dismissed the old woman.

"Now for Exhibits I and II," he continued when the door had closed; and he emptied the contents of the box on the table. It contained a medicated, sugar-coated tabloid and two sheets of paper covered with small, neat writing.

"This," and he took the tabloid gingerly in his fingers, "is more than it looks. I have had it analyzed through the agency of the local doctor. It is like a false prophet that comes in sheep's clothing, for outwardly it is a quinine tabloid coated with sugar; but inwardly it is filled with arsenic!"

"Poison! Murder!" exclaimed Courtenay.

"I'm afraid it appears so. What do you think of these?" and he handed Courtenay Exhibit II.

"Good God!" Courtenay could not help exclaiming again. "When did these come into your hands?"

"About six months ago. Mrs. Mann could not help talking, and I heard rumors. I then questioned her, and she told me her story and gave me the papers and the tabloid. You will notice where the latter was drilled to make room for the poison and the hole sealed up with wax."

"There is no doubt, I suppose, that the papers were really in her possession on the 29th of January of last year?"

"None. I see your point. In any case they were in mine for close on four months before the public was even aware of the existence of the manuscript. Here is the book itself," and the rector lifted a copy of "God's Haste" from the table.

"The matter in your hand appears about midway in the book, and you will note from the discrepancies between it and the book that some one had to rewrite those two pages."

"This is a story that would startle the world, if the truth is ever known," said Courtenay, sitting in his chair. "There is but one solution as far as I can see. Mary Morell is dead! She was poisoned by some one—some one whose evil she did not sus-

pect, whose course, perhaps, has been a gradual one; and this some one is pirating her unpublished works under her own name. I shall have the body exhumed, but I fear it will tell us nothing, Mr. Langbridge."

"Why—why shouldn't it? Arsenic traces are hard to destroy, and, sometimes, even after the lapse of years, I understand, it is discovered in the bones."

"Yes, that is so, when the arsenic is buried with the body. I'll tell you something you don't know. On the night following the woman's death her body was embalmed. Why? Because the intestines would be removed and, of course, with them all traces of the poison. We are doubtless dealing with a clever criminal, but, thanks to you, Mr. Langbridge, he has overshot the mark this time. If it can be brought home to him, we shall probably discover his name either is or was Stephen Barrow."

"I have thought that myself for some time," said the rector, highly pleased at Courtenay's commendation. "But how do you account for Mrs. Mann's bogie? I have argued with her about it, but I cannot move her."

"I think the bogie explains the reason of the high walls round Mary Morell's residence in the Midlands. There is nothing known of Mary Morell's life either before or since she entered the arena of literature. The bogie is possibly an unsightly offspring of whose existence the world is in ignorance, and she intended, evidently, that it should remain so.

"I'm glad you asked me here, Mr. Langbridge. You have started a good work, and it's my job now to try and put an equally good finish to it."

Three days later, in the quiet of early dawn, the grave of Mary Morell was opened and the coffin lifted. When the lid was removed, the coffin was found to be empty, except for a few carefully arranged stones.

All through the day the wretched creature sat with head bowed upon his twisted limbs, flinching under the cruel gaze of the curious, who had crowded the court to watch and note every movement made by Mary Morell's monstrous murderer.

When the stronghold in the Midlands had been invaded by the arm of the law, only three persons were found there. Two of them were servants, a man and his wife named Mansfield, who were people known in the district as being connected with Mary Morell; the other was a monstrosity who answered to the name of Stephen Barrow.

It was a silent trio they lodged in the county jail, for none of them would speak; and silent they remained to the day of the trial. For two months Barrow and Mansfield had been in prison awaiting trial, but the woman was released for want of evidence against her. The only evidence against Mansfield was that of the chemist who had sold him the arsenic.

Whether Stephen Barrow was endowed with normal intelligence or not, the prison authorities were unable to say. He would answer no questions, and the only words he had spoken since his arrest were:

"Yes, I poisoned Mary Morell—I poisoned her. I deserve to die."

He looked, indeed, a monstrosity with an abnormal-looking head of man's size perched upon a diminutive, twisted child's body and limbs. His face was not unsightly, except for the abnormally high forehead and domelike cranium. The eyes, which were dark almost to blackness, were close and deep-set, but they did not lack intelligence.

At first it was difficult to say whether he was man or boy; but the graying hair at the temples, and face that acknowledged the use of a razor, would prove him to be a man probably approaching fifty.

It was during Mrs. Mann's evidence that he showed the first gleam of intelligent interest in the proceedings. She was being questioned with difficulty, owing to her deafness, by the crown prosecutor regarding the finding of the tabloid. He now sat erect upon the high seat that was allowed him in the dock, and his eyes blazed with intelligence. He waited till the prosecutor had finished with the witness. He then addressed the judge, and his voice was deep and musical.

"My lord, may I speak?"

"If there is any question you desire to put to the witness—certainly."

"There is nothing I want to ask her, but I would like to ask the crown prosecutor if he will be good enough to describe to me that tabloid."

"That will all come out in the course of the evidence," replied the prosecutor.

"But I want to know it *now!*" and he struck the clenched fist of his right hand forcibly into his left palm. "It is *my* life that is in jeopardy—but it's not because I'd give that much to save it I ask!" And he snapped his fingers in the air. "Wait!" and his tone was commanding. "I will describe it to the court myself."

The scene was both dramatic and unexpected. Even the judge looked astounded.

"I prepared that tabloid myself. Is it not a quinine tabloid, sugar-coated, with the inside bored out and refilled, but with arsenic? The hole is sealed with white wax. If this describes it—well, it is the one I administered. Am I correct, Mr. Crown Prosecutor?"

"Is he right?" asked the judge, looking at the prosecutor over his glasses.

"My lord, the prisoner—I doubt if he realizes it—is only making his own case the worse for himself. His description is correct according to the evidence which I shall produce later."

"My lord," said Barrow, "I disagree with the prosecutor. If Miss Morell had swallowed the tabloid—yes! But I only prepared the one tabloid—I only gave Miss Morell the one tabloid to swallow—and that tabloid is there now on your desk."

"Yes—yes," admitted the judge, after reflecting for a second or two.

But the little man was heeding neither the judge nor the court. His eyes were filled with a divine happiness, and he looked and raised his hands toward heaven.

"Then, oh, God," he said, "as you have saved me from this, I surrender the fight! I sacrifice myself upon your altar!"

"Stephen Barrow—who are you?" asked the judge.

"One, my lord, who has a devil's twisted body—but a man's soul! Since I entered this world, a sport for demons to mock at, I have tried to hide these twisted limbs and abnormal body from humanity's sight; but I am now dragged from my lair and subjected to the insulting gaze of the idle curious who look upon me as something droll and whose right place is in a cage, where they may come and pay pennies to gaze upon me to their hearts' content!

"But whether I ever return to my lair, or am sent whithersoever it may please your lordship to send me, you and the whole gaping world may now know who Stephen Barrow is.

"Mary Morell is dead, but her body is not at Lynmeet. It is in a mausoleum in the home she loved, and where she lived—and where I want her. But her works live—and will live—and may even still go on; for it is only Mary Morell, the secretary, who is dead. Mary Morell, the writer, still lives! I—am Mary Morell!"

He continued, his voice immediately subduing the clamor which his amazing revelation created.

"Stephen Barrow, the son of a stevedore, was born in Limehouse, London, a twisted and gnarled one of God's leftovers. I had always to shun the light of day, for mothers feared I would cast the evil eye on their children, and many times have I been stoned.

"But when God gave me a brain and intelligence to make up for my hideousness, He forgot to give me an outlet for them. How could this monstrosity go out into the world to seek interviews with publishers and editors? And if he did, how, think you, would he be received? But Mary Morell came—she was about to emigrate—with compassion in her heart, and helped me.

"I used her name and herself, and they brought me success—perhaps as great as has ever before been achieved by a writer. But in all my success I could never, for one instant, forget my affliction, and I never forgave the God who made me what I am.

"I used the gift He gave me and turned it against Himself in a lifelong fight. For I'd give all my genius and success to be able to do the work that my father did, and crave no higher aim in life than what his brain and intelligence could demand.

"Mary became my inspiration. To her I was not unsightly—I was even beautiful, for she looked deeper than the skin and

saw into my mind and soul. She loved me as a mother loves; and I loved her with the faith and fidelity of a dog. It was all I dared hope ever to be allowed to do, for the love that a maid gives to her man was never intended for—this!

"She had been ailing for some time, and I purchased for her her old home in Lynmeet, and it gave her great pleasure sometimes to go there. She at last went there to die. Here, again, eternal vengeance followed me and struck at me through her. I had to watch her die, and every pang she suffered cut into my soul.

"So great was her agony at times that she died sixty deaths in an hour, and twenty-four times sixty in a day. For months she had prayed that I would put an end to her sufferings, for her tender body was in the clutches of the tentacles of that devil-octopus, cancer. At last I could stand it no longer—I mercifully consented.

"You now know all. Till to-day I thought I had poisoned her, having first given her the usual sleeping draft. I then left her the tabloid, for I could not stay to see her die. When I returned some minutes later she was dead. Now I know she had never swallowed the tabloid; and, thank God, I am not the murderer of the one being that ever loved me and gave up her life to me.

"God, I thank You," and he lifted his arms and eyes to heaven. "My fight is now over, and I commit myself into Your hands!"

There was a tense silence after he had finished, broken only by the sobbing of highly strung women.

"And all this to save a human soul! It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes!"

It was the Lynmeet rector who had risen in his seat. He could no longer contain himself.

There is an honored name on the register of the Jailbirds' Club. It is the name of a member who has never entered its doors. He may do so some day. The name is that of Stephen Barrow.

RECORDING CRIMINAL INTENT

THE part played by photography in crime detection cannot be overrated. At the same time it must be recognized that much that has been accomplished by the camera has been in a sense accidental. A famous instance follows:

You will remember that President McKinley was assassinated during a visit to the famous Buffalo Exposition. Before the fatal shot was fired, he was, of course, the lion of the occasion. He delivered an address; he posed often for cameramen.

Meanwhile the moving-picture people were following his every move.

A few days after the assassination these films were developed and studied at the Edison laboratories. And a significant discovery was made.

Among the crowds packed about the President, over and over again one face and figure stood out strikingly. It was Czolgosz, the assassin.

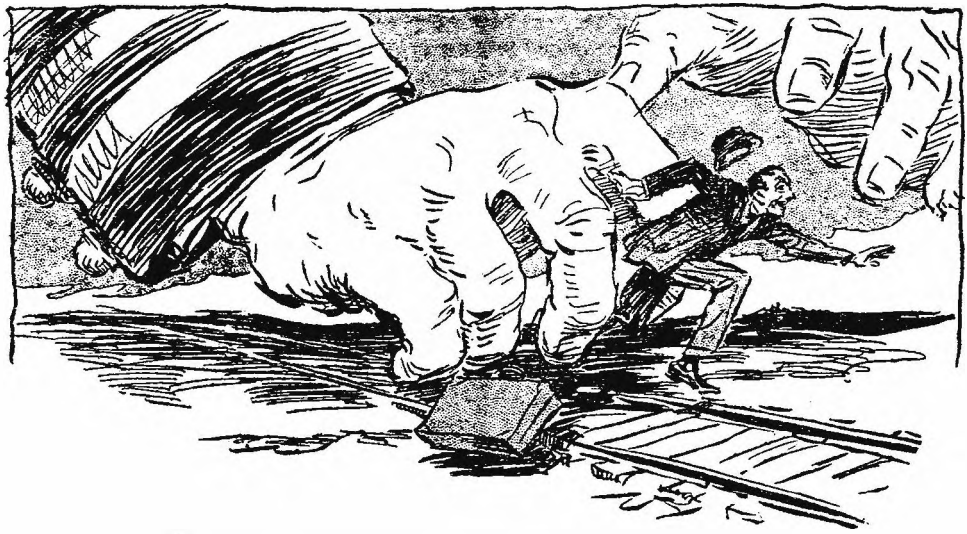
As the President mounts the platform for the big speech of the occasion, a man is seen forcing his way through the crowd. Everywhere he is followed by angry looks. For a moment he stands still and faces the camera. Diabolical determination is unmistakable on his face.

Again he pushes and thrusts forward, heedless of the rights of others. And again he turns for a second toward the camera. He is agitated and excited. His hat has been pushed over his eyes. He rights it and looks wildly around.

Of the multitude around him, almost all have their backs to the camera. And of those who turned, the features have been recorded for all time.

Later, in the Edison laboratories, their faces are studied too. There is a possibility that an accomplice will be discovered.

If there had been no other evidence of President McKinley's assassination, that of the camera would have been enough.



He doubled and raced in and out through the clutches of the law

THE TWISTED TRAIL

By Frank Blighton

NEAL, ADVENTURER, HERO, LOVER, BANDIT, SLID LIKE A SLIPPERY EEL FROM COAST TO COAST JUST AHEAD OF THE LAW

A Story of Fact

PERHAPS once a century one comes across a character whose career in general is of the same sort as that of Neal, whom Mr. Blighton discusses here.

It isn't so much the magnitude of his depredations that stands out; nor is it any criminal genius for committing crime.

Neal will be remembered longest for his uncanny, seemingly miraculous ability for dodging all pursuit. We can wonder at his personal qualities of character, so woefully perverted, his bravery, his chivalry, his capacity for right doing.

And we may be shocked to see such talents so miserably employed.

But above all that in this man's record we are fascinated and impressed by his almost superhuman wariness. He could stick his head in what seemed a trap without an exit. But somewhere he would find the broken link in the chain, the weak spot in the net, and Neal would be at large again.

With hundreds of policemen and private detectives following his every move, Neal contrived for a long time to show them his heels. He flitted from town to town and State to State and at times ran right under the noses of his pursuers; yet they couldn't catch him. And all this time he was continuing his robberies of country post offices and railroad stations.

At first blush we are likely to belittle the sagacity of the pursuit to feel that better detectives would have cornered him sooner. We hate to give an avowed outlaw credit for his patently remarkable deeds.

That, of course, is a mistake. The detectives who followed him were the peers

of any in the nation. They had records for steadfastness on the trail, for imaginative resourcefulness when that quality was needed.

That ability to elude the bloodhounds of the law was Neal's peculiar genius. Seldom has there been a man with greater talents for shaking off the arms that would enfold him.

That's all. That was Neal's peculiar greatness. Perverse? Of course! We offer it merely as a statement of fact—as an interesting historical case.

CHAPTER I

OFF TO THE WARS

THIS is the amazing story of Richard Clarence Neal, a boy who started life as a hero and who finished it as a bandit. In it the reader will find mingled elements of the most astonishing bravery and derring do, enlisted first on the side of law and later against it.

Neal made the deeds of the Jesse James and Cole and Bob Younger gangs look childish in comparison to the number of his illicit operations, the extent of territory traveled, and the brief amount of time consumed, although his loot was petty compared to theirs.

Within the space of two months Neal robbed thirty-nine rural post offices and railroad stations, committed one murder which he tried to conceal by firing the building in which it was perpetrated, and covered nine thousand miles in his efforts to elude pursuit.

With scores of trained man hunters on his trail, local police officers, railroad detectives, post office inspectors, and lesser sleuths, he evaded them all. Not until an official of a great railway system directed the chief of his secret service force to "get that fellow, regardless of expense," was his capture effected.

The man who caught him at last declared that "he led me the merriest chase any detective ever had."

Neal's confession to a post office inspector was so voluminous that it took months to verify the various sidelights of his life; yet, oddly enough, they were all found to be true. He went to prison for life; then he went mad. From his cell this astounding young chap was taken to Washington, District of Columbia, and confined in a United States government hospital for examination as to his mental condition.

One night he took French leave, and again the man hunters were thrown into a panic at the thought of his being at large. However, their fears were not realized, as will be seen, since Neal's career, fantastic in its evil and romantic in its good, came to an abrupt end.

As lives go, Neal's is barely a bubble thrown up from the viciousness of the underworld, yet an iridescent bubble, since Neal, as said, was not always a bandit. Before he began that he was a lover, adventurer, hero of a war.

He began life in Texas, his parents were irreproachable folk, and at first he was a normal although somewhat headstrong and ambitious lad with an unappeasable appetite for adventure.

As a boy he was rather sharp-featured, careless, and impudent; but his smile bewitched those who saw it, especially the girl of his heart. He was in some ways a typical Texan, with abundant dark hair and gray eyes, keen, restless, bold.

He had no doubts, save that he felt his father did not understand him. He chafed at the weight of parental authority, and he often communed with the girl of his dreams.

She was a slim, winsome creature with hair of a dusty golden hue, sun-tanned skin, and jade green eyes which opened wide with admiration as her schoolboy lover confided in her his hopes and plans for the future on Texas nights when the breeze sifted through the umbrella trees, the crickets chirped, and the beaming moon showered them with silver light.

On one such night before he was yet

seventeen years old Richard Clarence Neal slipped his arm through the girl's and they strolled down the road together out of earshot of any one.

Although she was then hardly more than a child, as he turned to look into her quiet, deep eyes, they suddenly seemed to him to have a new and strange self-possession, a nameless dignity which baffled him. He had long loved her with the tempestuous love of a boy just waking to the world and its scope of untrammeled action for the high-spirited and chivalrous. To-night, sight of her gave him a new and fiercer surge of ambition.

"I'm going away," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"You know why," said the lad. "This poky place is too slow. I want my freedom and I want to marry you."

They sat down. She was very collected. She looked down at her folded hands in her lap. Then she raised her eyes.

"You will leave me here?"

"I hate to. But what can I do?" asked the lad. "Father is not in sympathy with my ambitions. He holds such a tight rein over me that I feel like a fly corked in a bottle."

"Where are you going?" she inquired.

"To war," he said simply, yet with an undertone of determination that both charmed and alarmed her.

"To war?" she echoed. "Where?"

"There is fighting in South Africa," said he, again as naïvely as if he were already looking upon the carnage. "Wish me luck?"

The assumed airiness of his tone broke down her reserve.

"Oh, you know I do!" she cried, flinging her arm around his neck and kissing him again and again. "When are you going?"

"To-night," he replied somberly. "I can't stand it here any longer. Here is a letter to father. Mail it when you get one from me."

"You'll come back to me?" she asked.

"I sure will."

He rose. A half hour he tarried. They strolled back toward the houses. In a friendly shadow he kissed her good-by.

"Wait!" She stooped and plucked a little flower and put it in his buttonhole. "Wear this for me."

He promised. He set out as blithely as any knight of old who wore his lady's glove to combat.

He made his way to New Orleans and stalked down to the wharf. Fortune favors the brave. A steamship with a cargo of horses for South Africa, to be used by the British army, was about to leave. He got a job on it to care for the animals. At the voyage's end he kept on with the horses to the firing line. There he enlisted.

CHAPTER II

A WHISPER THAT SPOKE TRUTH

ON the South African veldt the sun beat with such intensity that men curled up and withered. The flies were maddening.

Richard Clarence Neal, however, was accustomed to the scarcely less burning rays of the same sun in far-off Texas. Under the sky of brass, across an almost treeless plain, he rode on as neatly as one long acquainted with the saddle.

Safe in a little diary where he sometimes found time to set down a few brief words he carried the flower his sweetheart had given him. He could still see her deep but sweet eyes, her pretty and pure face. It danced at him across parched and blistered vistas when the unwinking sun was high and while insects native to the place skulked under shelters. In the deadly stillness of the silent plain, save for the hoof-beats, the creak of his saddle, and the whinny of the herd, served by the sixth sense of the born adventurer, he rode on an on, alone with his thoughts.

He was taciturn with his associates, although cordial. His brevity and casual manner won him friends. If there is one thing an Englishman admires it is a Yankee who is not loquacious. Neal kept his tongue in his cheek even when the nameless thrill of ecstasy surged through him in his first skirmish with the doughty and determined Boers.

Under fire he was cool but enthusiastic.

His eyes gleamed. He demeaned himself modestly but intrepidly.

"My word!" said his commanding officer *sotto voce*. "The lad has courage."

Neal always had courage, in war or afterward. His unassuming gallantry in battle was too conspicuous to be ignored. He was an exceptionally muscular chap, and well developed for his age. This last had aided him in his enlistment.

When his regiment entered its third major engagement he fought with such verve and élan that he was decorated on the field. Then he stepped modestly back into the ranks and kept fighting.

Neal, the Conquering Hero

Next he saved a severely wounded staff officer under galling fire. Again the British officers noted his conspicuous but self-effacing courage. He was in the cavalry, the Third Imperial Horse. He was promoted to a lieutenancy and kept on fighting.

Then an eagle-eyed bunch of Boer sharpshooters singled him out for their leaden compliments, a little habit which the Boers had of knocking off officers. He went down, desperately wounded, with three bullets in him. His horse was shot dead.

Choking with the blood which swept up into his throat and the brittle flourlike dust of the sun-baked plain, Neal struggled to his knees, waved his saber, and pointed ahead.

A tremendous cheer broke from his comrades in arms. The regiment swept past, a cavalcade scarcely less inspiring to see than the famous "Six Hundred" at the historic battle of Balaklava.

The thunder of passing hoofs came fainter and fainter to his ears. Then the great dark pall swept down over the lad.

They found him, still lying prone. The commanding officers saw to it that he had the best of medical attention.

"Hang on, old top!" said the chief surgeon. "We can't spare you just yet. The war is still on!"

Neal nodded. He could not speak. They found the diary and the faded flower. They kept them for him, scrupulously, for he was an officer and a gentleman.

By degrees he grew better. When he was able to be moved, despite his entreaties to be sent back to the front, they placed him on a British transport with other wounded, and it steamed to London.

Here he made a full recovery after months had elapsed.

Then he was transferred to the British War Office and given what was considered a snug berth. His example was so inspiriting that his story was told by recruiting sergeants for the British army. If a Yankee could demean himself so intrepidly, the British youth could not lag behind.

After a few months more, however, Neal became homesick. He longed for his sweetheart's presence. Destiny, temporarily, had outpaced him. He had failed to find a fortune, but he had enough money to go home as befits an officer's rank.

So he asked for and received an honorable discharge and set sail for the "good old U. S. A." once more.

The tale of his adventures had preceded him. He had no doubts of his welcome home, for his irate parent had long since forgiven him. He could hardly restrain his impatience as the speeding train took him south.

There was no rift in the glorious joy of his homecoming, at first. His sweetheart was with his family and fellow townsmen to greet him at the train. He had not seen her for two years.

And two years is a long, long time in the life of a budding girl, a typical Texas beauty. She now had a Circe's eyes, the face of a Helen, and the figure of an Aphrodite.

Neal Turns His Back on Texas

Her dusty golden hair was a thing of beauty, as of yore, to the battle-worn youth now not yet twenty years of age. Its shimmering strands had long ago caught and held his heart and he found it again on his return.

With one hand he clasped her close. With the other he received the handshake of his father. Nothing mattered now. The agony of wounds, the nostalgia of his protracted absence, the slow crawl from the dark and dismal doorsill of death back to

this vivid and supremely happy moment faded out like a dream.

She was a woman now, and ravishing to the eye. Irresistible, and yet somehow mystifying. Still, she had always been that.

When they were alone she said to him: "Where is the flower I gave to you?"

"I have it safe in my luggage," said Neal. He kissed her fondly. "Did you think I could ever part with it?"

"I hoped you would keep it," said she. She looked down at her folded hands, the same as the night he had bade her farewell. "Oh, Dick, I'm so glad that you're back. I'm ready to marry you at any time."

"That was the one big reason why I came back," said her lover. "I'm ready, too. When shall we be married?"

They set the date almost at once. Their honeymoon was idyllic. Neal had settled down, and for nearly two months it is doubtful if a happier youngster existed on this troubled planet.

Then one day he heard a bit of gossip. A malicious, whispered word regarding his young bride. He sought her detractor, a larger and much older man, and his blazing eyes testified to his terrible wrath.

The man would not retract.

Neal wasted no words. He did not have a weapon fortunately. He knocked the gossiper down: then he knocked him down again. He went home. His girl bride ran to kiss him.

"Wait!" said Neal. "Tell me something. Do you know a man named ——"

As he spoke he saw a furtive gleam of alarm deep down in her jade-green eyes. They wavered for the first time since he had known her.

Far, far down in the twin windows of her soul he caught a lethal glint. The African sunlight had glinted on the Boer rifle barrels just like that ere he had been shot from his saddle, as his command had rung out to his men in the Third Imperial Horse.

Again he felt a terrible pang. It was not from his old wounds. More like the agony from a stealthy poignard.

Her own countenance underwent a swift transition. Her eyes drooped.

"They said you were dead," she faltered.

As she looked at her husband again her face paled with extreme terror. She was on her feet, but no longer the supple, seductive girl whose fragrance had made the cruel veldt a paradise for him. She was rigid. Her countenance was so white that it looked empty of eyes. Her face was a mask.

He was numb. He could hear her words. But they were incoherent until she said:

"I must go where you go! Oh, Dick, don't leave me!"

He grinned as a dog grins. His lips curled back over his teeth.

His bride sobbed. Neal now understood why her detractor refused to apologize. Something snapped in his brain. He walked away into the ghastly night. The place that had known him knew him no more.

CHAPTER III

NEAL HAS A DOUBLE

FROM that hour on this former sturdy youth who had actually looked into unthinkable places, and found the incredible in his desire for adventure, was a changed man.

Hitherto his conduct had been upright. Hereafter it wavered.

He retained his courage. He thirsted for new scenes and turbulent ones to assuage the dreadful sorrow he had sustained. There was no war to which he might bend his energies, save desultory fighting in the far-off Philippines.

With a changed nature he also changed his name. He became James A. Baker. He came North. Heart-broken, bitter, he left the straight and narrow path to enter the oblique but always futile road of the lawbreaker.

As the magnet draws to itself iron filings, so Neal was drawn almost at once into the society of evil companions. Among them was Martin H. Rugen, a notorious safe robber or yegg. Rugen tutored the former British army officer in the niceties of his illicit profession.

Neal traveled with Rugen and his ilk for nearly five years. Their depredations were numerous. James A. Baker's native intelligence, his suave manners, his air of modest self-confidence, made him a valuable "front man" for these jobs. He could go on ahead and spy out the location of tempting places to be robbed.

He Becomes a Lone Wolf

This gave free scope to his energies and satisfied his longing for combat. That almost every individual he met during these advance forays was a potential enemy lent zest and flavor to his existence. Besides, he profited by the operations of Rugen and the rest of the gang. Occasional brushes with forces of law and order heightened the danger.

Neal was also becoming more and more proficient in the subtle art of safe robbery and burglary by night.

For some time these various jobs were carried out with a finesse that enabled members of the gang to escape arrest. Yet, since the pitcher that goes too often to the well is at last broken, one by one the lesser members were apprehended or shot, until the day finally came when Rugen was also in the toils of the law.

By this time, however, Neal's novitiate was complete. So he started out by himself, and his individual operations were thereafter carried out with amazing speed and even more nefarious success than when he had been with the other yeggs.

Detective Miles S. Rigor, then at the head of the secret police of the Pennsylvania Railroad, was the first man to take accurate note of Neal's depredations, when his attention was called to a series of robberies along the lines of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, in November 1907. The first of these occurred at Thompson, West Virginia.

As it was Rigor who afterward pursued and caught Neal—as James A. Baker, of course—and finally induced him to make a complete confession to himself and former Post Office Inspector Elmer Kincaid, Rigor's statement as to Neal's career prior to late autumn of 1907 is an authoritative one.

"From the time that he left Texas until the afternoon of his capture hardly a day passed that Neal did not commit a robbery of some sort," said this detective in a personally signed statement made public on March 24, 1912.

"The railway station at Thompson, West Virginia, was robbed of cash, checks, and express money orders. These checks and express orders were cashed in Wheeling the next day by a young man calling himself James A. Baker.

"The next night the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad station at Hederwood, West Virginia, was robbed. Cash and express orders were taken and cashed at near-by points, none for less than fifty dollars.

"Then followed the robbery of the post office and railway station at Brucetown, Pennsylvania, followed again, almost immediately, by looting of the Pennsylvania Railroad station at Hays, Pennsylvania.

"It was when our station at Hays was robbed that I got into the game," went on the detective, "believing that the same yeggs, or gang of yeggs, who had been looting the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad stations were now operating on our railroad line."

Rigor's vivid narrative of what afterward happened and the chase for the lone hero-bandit across the continent and back and forth, is a dramatic experience and such as falls to the lot of but few sleuths.

Murder in His Trail

"A few days after the robbery at Hays, we heard of the robbery of a railway station at Clarington, West Virginia. After forcing his way into the station, the thief was confronted by Hutchinson, the night operator, who slept on the premises.

"Hutchinson drew his gun and backed this unknown burglar into a corner, but the thief leaped out upon his captor, wrested the gun from his grasp and, as it exploded, Hutchinson fell mortally wounded.

"Neal, after his capture, declared that he worked over the wounded man for more than an hour, but when Hutchinson expired in his arms, he first sacked the office of all of its valuables, then sprinkled the body and premises with kerosene oil and next

ignited it, hoping in this way to cover up his crime."

A grisly experience for a chivalrous youth whose flaming and buoyant heart carried him from the sedate monotony of a Texas town to the thick of the battles in the Boer war! Still, as said, Neal was always courageous as his encounter, while unarmed, which the night operator proved.

Not many mere yeggs would have summoned the resolution to come to grips with a captor whose pistol menaced their liberty. For yeggs are yellow as a rule.

"It was when this murder came to light," continued Detective Rigor, "that George W. Boyd, general passenger agent of the Pennsylvania Railroad, ordered me to get the murderer no matter what the expense of running him down might be.

"Then began a chase which included two trips to the Pacific Coast and back again. Once I saw Neal in Oregon, I later learned. He knew me as a detective and made tracks East as fast as he could.

"Going at once to Pittsburgh after the robbery at Hays, I traced, by means of the stolen mileage books, the movements of the thief. There I obtained a good description of the bandit, and as day after day new robberies kept coming to light, I was kept pretty busy. The trail finally led me to East Liverpool, Ohio."

In that city, as Rigor himself avers, came the strangest experience of his long career as a detective. He ran across Jack Lewis, a one-time yeggman. Lewis tallied so closely with the description of James A. Baker that Rigor immediately put him under arrest.

Elated, Rigor took his prisoner back to the scene of some of the depredations that Neal, alias Baker, had committed. As the unsavory career of Lewis had never been noted for any high degree of punctilio when he was on the warpath, the detective's feeling of felicity grew considerably larger the moment that three men who had seen the bandit cashing checks positively identified Lewis as the culprit!

Since the murder of Hutchinson had not been marked by any traces of magnanimity, the former yegg in Rigor's custody then and there began paying in genuine trepidation for any of his own as yet unpunished crimes. Just ahead of him hung a hangman's noose.

"And he was as guiltless of the crimes as Neal had been of any committed in the United States when he was a gallant and devoted cavalry lieutenant in South Africa with the Third Imperial Horse!

"A fourth man partially identified Lewis," continued Detective Rigor, "but the fifth declared he was not the man. I knew Lewis well and while he was a crook, he wasn't altogether a bad sort.

"So after a long talk with him, I told him he was held for murder, arson and robbery."

CHAPTER IV

"THE KID'S IN LOVE!"

LEWIS looked Detective Rigor in the eye.

"Mark, I never thought you'd frame a man," said the former yegg.

"Jack, I never framed a man in my life and I am not trying to frame you," said the sleuth.

"When was this here three-way job pulled off?" demanded the prisoner

Rigor told him the place and date and the name of the dead night telegraph operator and station agent.

"You're on a cold card," said Lewis, "so far's I'm concerned. I was never in that town in me whole life."

"But you've been identified for the other robberies," said the detective, "by three men. And you were in East Liverpool when that job was pulled off there."

"All bosh!" scoffed the ex-yegg. "I quit the game a long whiles back. I been on the level. And if you're on the level, you're going to take me right back to East Liverpool and I'll prove to you that you got the wrong pig by the ear."

"Why not prove it here?" asked the detective.

"I can't prove it without my diary," said Lewis. "I keep a diary and it's in East Liverpool. I got everything set down in it, day and date. I wasn't out of Ohio for a month and I can bring an army of

good people, some of them bankers, to prove it."

While Rigor was not wholly convinced that Lewis was the man, he was partially sure of it. However, there was something far more compelling about the unmoved attitude of Jack Lewis than his mere assertion of any lack of knowledge of the offenses. This was his behavior. He was sincere, straightforward, plain spoken.

Detective Rigor Works at a Puzzle

Detectives frequently have to be expert psychologists and Rigor had fresh doubts as he studied the prisoner.

"In that case," said Rigor, after a little study of the situation, "I'll take you back to Liverpool. But mind you, Jack, no monkey business."

Lewis grinned. "I'll stick to you closer than a brother," said he, "for you're only taking me back to freedom. Never mind you trying to prove me guilty. Turn it upside down for once and the constitution be hanged. I'll prove to you I'm dead innercent!"

The truth, for once in the former yegg's rather ill-starred career, was on his side. And luck was also with him, for if his methodical habit of keeping that diary hadn't been carried on for some years, Lewis would not have remembered when and where he was on the date of Hutchinson's murder He produced the diary.

"Look it over," said he, tossing it to Rigor.

The detective did. On the date of the murder at Clarington, Lewis had made an entry. "Signed papers as a witness today in a real estate deal for a banker."

Rigor left Lewis in jail and hunted up the banker. He could not afford to be "wide open" on an alibi in which a respectable citizen of East Liverpool was concerned. The banker remembered the incident. So did two of his clerks.

All three of them came to the jail to look at and talk with Jack Lewis. All three assured the detective that Lewis was certainly the witness to the real estate deal.

This eliminated Lewis from the last shred of suspicion of the murder. His diary also showed places where he had been when other robberies were committed. Rigor investigated several. The little record stood up. Lewis was released with Rigor's apologies and the sleuth again took the trail of the still unidentified "James A. Baker."

Fortunately, it was not a cold trail as yet, for the bandit was still piling up robberies at such an amazing rate as to make the most hardened thief-taker gasp with amazement. Father Time could not tick off a day without the ex-British army officer getting in his handiwork somewhere, it seemed.

Rigor sat down, lit a cigar and looked over the locations of a new series of similar robberies which had been effected after he had arrested Lewis. It was not by chance or by pull that Rigor had risen to the command of the secret police of this great railway system.

In his climb to the top he had displayed sterling qualities in personal encounters and astonishing acumen in his ability to outthink and outwit crooks who pitted their craft against the property of the railroad he protected.

Yet there were things about these robberies which puzzled the detective, and it was this puzzle that he sat down to work out in his mind ere again pursuing the chap who was constantly committing fresh depredations.

Where Sentiment Leads

That was the first queer thing about the affair. For the yegg who murders usually lays off a given section of the country and moves on to pastures new, lest he be apprehended for the capital offense he has committed and thus incur the supreme penalty of the law.

This fellow, whoever he was, didn't do that. So Rigor asked himself: "Why?"

Of course, Rigor was, as yet, entirely in ignorance of the real identity of the man calling himself "James A. Baker." Rigor as yet knew nothing at all about Neal's previous career, nor that his real name was Neal.

So he did not know of Neal's experience in wedlock nor that his love had turned into at least half hatred, much less that it had been sprinkled into Neal's life in such a

strange and tragic manner as to create a wound which would never wholly heal.

"No oldtimer would dare keep on in this way," thought the detective. "He must be hardly more than a kid. But even a kid has some sense. The same man is pulling all of these jobs.

"If it is a kid, and the descriptions of Baker all show he is very young, then he must know that his killing of Hutchinson is a very dangerous challenge to the police. Why, then, does he keep on taking such long chances, when he's likely to be caught at work at any time or picked up by the description we've got of him at any railroad station he may walk into? Is he crazy or what?"

Rigor kept on smoking. The more he thought the less he knew. Then he smiled a long, slow smile, tossed aside the cigar and left the reverie.

"This kid is in love with some woman," said he confidently. "He's grabbing off coin for her. Now, if I can find that woman, I can find James A. Baker. And that's just what I'm going to do!"

Bizarre as it sounds, that is just what Rigor did do. For even a broken-hearted man who turns saferobber finds his occupation one that palls after a time; and it was the love of his Texas sweetheart which first made Richard Clarence Neal start impulsively out into the arena of world events.

There was one secret to Mark S. Rigor's success as a detective. He was a thinking, reasoning man. With only a misty fact or two, he established the motive of Baker's ceaseless jobs.

What Rigor next did was also typical of a very shrewd police officer. He figured it out. Baker was as elusive as a Mexican jumping bean tied to a wireless wave. He came and went. Hither and yon his jimmy pried open windows and his juice blew the doors of safes.

It would be a huge task to outguess Baker and determine where he might next appear, too huge even for a veteran detective. But Rigor had abundant samples of Baker's handwriting on the checks he had cashed. He also had a splendid description of the same young bandit.

Armed only with these he conferred with Post Office Inspector Kincaid. Between these two veteran thief takers, an invisible net was spread for the unwary bandit.

Every post office in large Eastern cities was covered and all mail in that particular and characteristic handwriting was closely scanned. Many false clews developed and were run down to end in futility.

But detective business requires tenacity as well as other qualities. One day the young bandit was traced into Pittsburgh, and the letter he had written led to the home of a young lady of irreproachable character and antecedents.

CHAPTER V

A NARROW SQUEAK

AFTER Detective Rigor had laid this very subtle trap, he still had plenty to do. Fresh robberies in the vicinity of Wheeling, West Virginia, sent him scurrying back into that part of the country.

First the railroad station at Powhattan, in that State, was looted. Baker reaped a nice stake from the fruits of this, cashing—as usual—the stolen express money orders in Parkersburg, West Virginia. All were for fifty dollars each.

Between December 30, 1907, and January 2, 1908, Baker made a flying trip to Washington, D. C. He was traced to that city by use of a stolen mileage book. He always took these books as well as the checks and money orders.

But until some railroad conductor who did not know the book had been stolen—since Baker used it at once, and stamped it in regular form with the indice of the last railroad station looted—had made his trip report and until the ticket auditors had spotted the stolen book by its number, the wily bandit was always safe in using mileage.

On the trip back from Washington, while en route to Philadelphia, Baker made a bad error. While passing through Chester, Pennsylvania, he tossed one of the mileage books stolen from the robbery at Clarington—where Hutchinson had been murdered—out of the window. This was picked up by a railroad man who thought it very odd

that a passenger would throw away good money.

The same night the railroad station at Boothwyn, Pennsylvania, was robbed. Railroad detectives in scores, under Rigor's command, were already prowling around every suburban railway station in this section, owing to the tip which the mileage book had given of Baker's presence in the vicinity of Chester.

Rigor's Ace in the Hole

Somehow, however, Baker managed to elude all the traps set for him although every detective on the job had a very accurate description of him. He came and went like a phantom. The sleuths were chagrined but not discouraged.

The same qualities of nonchalant self-assurance which had won ungrudging admiration from British army staff officers in far off Africa were next manifested in Baker's contempt for his pursuers or for the potential danger always lurking in a new job.

The night of January 3, 1908, he appeared at Ogden, another Baltimore and Ohio railroad station, burglarized the office, blew the safe, robbed it of cash, express checks and money orders, pulled the semaphore signal, stopped a fast train, presented a ticket reading for passage to Philadelphia and rode into the Quaker City on it.

In this journey he passed scores of resolute and armed detectives on the parallel line of the Pennsylvania railroad, who were even then moving Heaven and earth to get trace of him.

Daybreak revealed the Ogden robbery. Baker was already cashing the express checks and money orders in Philadelphia stores, hotels and restaurants!

All of this time the wily Rigor had his ace in the hole. He already knew that Baker was wildly infatuated with a girl in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and that his debonair manners, intrepid air, modesty and apparent affluence had made a considerable impression upon the young lady. Of course, neither the girl nor her parents had the remotest idea of Baker's true identity or felonies.

Rigor had been extremely careful in his inquiries not to divulge that the slightest suspicions attached themselves to the young man. Instead, for weeks, the girl's home was shadowed day and night with unremitting vigilance. But Baker crossed Rigor.

Perhaps his sixth sense told him that until he was in the clear he had best refrain from visits to this young lady, charming as he had found her. She was an enchanting girl with the grace of a swan, well educated, refined.

This cautious trait of Baker helped prolong his career of crime. There were many times when Rigor and his men were so hot on Baker's trail that his capture seemed to be only a question of hours, since detectives under Rigor's command now patrolled railway trains and stations continually and enlisted the aid of police detectives, postal inspectors and hotel sleuths in their quest.

Despite all of which the wily young desperado actually committed several more robberies almost under the noses of Rigor's men, as well as that of regular police officers, in the vicinity of places covered so thoroughly that it seemed impossible for any human being whose identity was now so well known to come and go without being challenged and arrested.

All of which was distinctly not soothing to Rigor's feelings. But he repressed his wrath and redoubled his quest for this human eel.

The Law Draws Near

Again Baker crossed him. On the night of January 12, 1908, he transferred his robberies to a new railroad line, the Erie. This time the Jersey City station was tapped for one hundred thirty-three dollars and twenty-five cents in cash.

During the next few days, one Erie railroad station was robbed each night. On January 17, the flying yegg robbed the Carlton Hill, New Jersey, station of the Erie and procured a number of Wells Fargo express money orders. This robbery proved, eventually, to be the most important lead in his ultimate capture, according to Detective Rigor.

On January 18, Baker walked boldly into the American Express Company's office on

lower Broadway to cash one of these orders from Carlton Hill but was directed to the Wells Fargo office at 51 Canal Street.

With astonishing effontery he went directly to this second place. But J. W. Lynch, the cashier, had been warned to look out for these stolen orders from Carlton Hill.

When Baker presented one for fifty dollars and in the name of J. A. Baker, as was his invariable custom, Lynch stepped to the back of his cashier's cage to get his pistol and effect the yegg's arrest. Baker, however, did not wait. He darted out of the door and escaped.

Mr. Baker Is Annoyed

When Lynch had asked the caller to identify himself as Baker and while the agent was also waiting for an opportunity to get his pistol, Baker showed Lynch pawn tickets for a ring, a revolver, and some clothing, all of which he had already stolen from railway stations which he had robbed at Fairview, Garfield, and Ramsey, respectively. His maladroit move with these Carlton Hill, Wells Fargo express orders made it imperative for Baker to get out of New York, immediately, since every detective and uniformed officer in the metropolis was immediately warned, a general alarm sent out for him with an accurate description, and a new horde of manhunters was trying to effect his arrest.

Again he eluded them all. How, no one knows to this day. But he faded out. Finally a rumor reached Rigor that a man answering Baker's general description had been seen boarding a Pennsylvania train for Philadelphia.

Rigor wired his men to be on the lookout and personally followed on the next train, barely an hour and a half behind him. He arrived in the Quaker City a very much chagrined man. Baker had already cashed several of the stolen Carlton Hill, Wells Fargo orders and was again on the wing!

Although now in relatively ample funds and able to make a journey across the continent, if need arose, Baker scorned the detectives he had eluded. That same night he robbed two railway stations, one at Boston Mill and the other at Brockville.

He was now equipped with fresh mileage books, more express orders and checks, and quite a tidy sum in cash from the two last robberies, besides the sums secured by cashing the Wells Fargo checks in Philadelphia.

The astonishing nerve of the young ex-army officer was now at its zenith. He must have been in high fettle at thus skirting the precipice of an apparently certain capture, since he next reappeared in Wheeling, West Virginia, on January 21, just three days later. Here he called on an express agent named Dick, and tried to cash one of the stolen orders. Dick counted over the money in his cash drawer.

"Sorry, Mr. Baker," said he affably, "but I haven't quite enough. I will have though, very shortly. The drivers will be in with the collections and if you'll come back, I'll fix you up."

Dick had no suspicion whatever that he was then looking at the badly wanted bandit and murderer. His friendly manner, however, instead of reassuring the caller, aroused his suspicions.

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Baker, "that this company hasn't fifty dollars in cash in the office, with which to honor one of its own orders?"

"Yes," said Dick. "You see, it's just after banking hours and I sent every penny except enough to make change with to the bank a half hour before you called. There was a lot of robberies around this section some few weeks ago and we agents have to watch our step.

A Minute Too Late

"That's why we bank the money every day, for this robber, whoever he is, blows a safe the way you or me would crack a peanut shell. But, come back later and I'll be glad to fix you up."

"Thank you," dryly returned Baker, as he left the office.

As he went out, the mail carrier came in.

"Letter for you, Mr. Dick, marked important!" said the carrier.

"Get out," scoffed Agent Dick. "I ain't important. It must be a mistake. All I'm good for is to lug around heavy packages. Let's see the letter!"

He took it and opened it. Within was a circular containing an amplified descrip-

tion of a man under the name of James A. or J. A. Baker, a bandit and murderer, wanted for killing Operator Hutchinson at Clarington and for a long string of other offenses.

Dick looked at it for a moment. He was in a daze. Then he leaped across the office, grasped his pistol from its holster, and leaped past the astonished mail carrier for the door. The mail carrier thought Dick had suddenly become insane and scooted out of the office the back way.

He met a policeman. The policeman listened to the mail carrier's short but pungent tale. Then he sought Dick, who was running up the street like a wild man, holding his naked pistol at a belligerent angle.

"Hey, you!" The cop grabbed Dick by the collar. A man some distance away turned around. He saw the little drama. That was Baker. He didn't wait to hear Dick's explanation. He just lammed! It was another close squeak.

And, as before, luck was with him. He disappeared, again!

CHAPTER VI

ACROSS COUNTRY AND BACK

THE speed of the youthful bandit was not abated, nor was his composure more than temporarily ruffled at this latest episode. But that seems to have been characteristic of the criminal career of the young Texan, no less than its heroic prelude. He speeded up the tempo of existence. He enjoyed it.

The average man's life, in comparison, looks much like sections from a slow moving motion picture.

The next trace of Baker came two nights later. He robbed two more railway stations, this time at Justice and Strasburg, Ohio. Frantic detectives converged into the state which Jack Lewis, the former yegg, had picked out for a permanent abode.

They came in on the swiftest trains, telegraphing and telephoning ahead, as usual, the oft-uttered and oftener repeated warnings to keep an eye out for James A. Baker.

Baker, being no fool, knew of course that they would come, as well as telegraph and telephone. Just to show that he esteemed their motives but held their abilities, joint or several, in high disdain, the next night, which fell on January 25, Baker robbed the railroad station at Ezra, Ohio.

This time he again made a clean sweep of all the money orders, checks, mileage books, and cash.

This time, Detective Rigor outguessed his quarry for once, at least. While his men were cleaning up on such clews as Baker had left behind, Rigor hurried to the nearest large city, which proved to be Columbus, Ohio.

He went straight to the post office and with assistants began frisking the mail for a letter he felt might be there and addressed to the girl in Pittsburgh. He found it, intercepted and read it, and then sent it on its way.

Immediately, Rigor hurried to Chicago on the first available train. He arrived there and found that Baker had been putting up at the Auditorium Hotel, that he had raised several hundred dollars on the stolen express orders, spent it in a wild debauch and departed, leaving his hotel bill unpaid.

There was no clew until Rigor again found that by using stolen mileage books Baker had started for the Pacific Coast. Evidently, he was bent on enjoying some of the stolen stuff by getting out of the zone of his continual operations, until this time.

"He's tired," Rigor told himself. "The poor chap has to work all night and then duck around all day, trying to dispose of his goods. Well, I'll go West, myself. Won't cost me much.

"My passes are good on all railroads and I can get what money I need by wiring the office at any time. Mr. Baker has got to steal his money or else raise it on stolen express checks and orders. He hasn't got so much the best of it, at that!"

Just to make sure that Baker didn't have quite all the edge on the detective now pounding resolutely after him, Rigor sent off a sheaf of telegrams to the chiefs of police and detective bureaus in all large Western cities, as well as notified the rail-

road detectives to keep an eye out for the elusive bandit and murderer.

Hence, in far less than sixty days of time, Baker had created such furor with his depredations that the chase for him was now, without exaggeration, nation wide. The net was spread from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon. Medicine Hat, Canada, and Peapack, New Jersey, with several other places in between, were also on the *qui vive!*

Rigor Sticks Doggedly

He was the most wanted man in the United States. Jesse James, in his palmiest days, never had quite so many earnest and honest citizens alert. The humblest of express and railway detectives might wind the clock and put out the cat, as usual, but he also took a little walk around the village with a keen expression on his face, hoping to gather in this astonishing desperado and thus reap a large financial award.

How many pistols were polished and cleaned, reloaded and carried in the fond hope of catching this extraordinarily sinuous and subtle bandit, will never be known. Broadcasting by radio was not yet born: the motion pictures was as yet rather crude.

Rigor, therefore, could not avail himself of either of these ultramodern mechanical devices to help arrest his man.

He was limited to the oldtime rule of thumb description and his own dogged pertinacity. The faster Baker fled, the more doggedly Rigor stuck to his trail.

Baker's ticket gave him a stop-over privilege at Alberquerque, New Mexico. Reaching that city, he represented himself as a wine salesman. Here his affable manner and possession of many express money orders were again utilized. He spent liberally.

The parasites of the city who hung around the bars—for this was before Volstead, remember—will never forget the liberality of the charming young gentleman who honored them by inviting all hands to have a drink.

Nor will the owners of the erstwhile thirst emporiums ever be able to efface entirely from recollection the numbing shock of Detective Mark S. Rigor's arrival in their midst, just three hours after Baker's departure, when he found all the convivial ones still under the influence and all the proprietors holding the bag with the fraudulent checks and express money orders.

"Well, which way did he go?" asked Rigor, when the still sober element sought to drown their sorrow in potent alcoholic beverages.

"West!" replied one bartender, as he poured himself out a liberal portion. "He went West, damn his nice gray eyes! Well, Mr. Rigor, here's hoping!" He tossed the drink down his throat.

Baker, however, again crossed the detective. He went East instead of West. He again cleaned up several railway stations in New Jersey and when the now irate subordinate detectives who had also gone West to try to intercept him returned to scenes of his latest forays, Baker calmly went West again.

He reappeared in Chicago with a new sheaf of express orders and from that city sent his still unsuspecting sweetheart in Pittsburgh a nice letter.

Then he kept on to Omaha, Nebraska, with Rigor still clinging like a leech to his trail. At Omaha he robbed a small railroad station on the outskirts of the city. With fresh Western mileage at his command and a new sheaf of express money orders, Baker kept on much farther West than before.

A Meeting in Portland

Through train auditors and conductors, the indefatigable Rigor ascertained that he was heading for Portland, Oregon. And to that thriving Western coast city of roses the ruthless sleuth also went.

Concentrations were made of every available police and railroad detective in or around Portland, for Rigor felt that he now had Baker scared. Otherwise, he would not be winging so far and so fast as formerly. He did not stop to pull jobs in succession. He continued his flights as if anxious to shake off his pursuer.

Curiously enough, the measures taken to intercept Baker at Portland had an effect directly opposite that intended. Rigor did not see Baker in that city but Baker saw

Rigor, instead. It was their first sight of each other.

As of yore, the mystical sixth sense of the bandit enabled him to outguess the detective. Rigor, of course, did not know Baker had caught a glimpse of him and never dreamed that the bandit would know him for a detective even if that contingency arose.

There was every reason to believe that it would be the other way round. Yet, after Rigor did finally capture his man, Baker told him that he had seen him in Portland, named the day, the street intersection, and the time of the day.

"How did you know I was a detective?" Rigor asked.

"Just a hunch," said the bandit indifferently.

On seeing Rigor in Portland, Baker immediately vamosed. He was next heard of in Waterloo, Nebraska, nearly halfway across the continent. Rigor went to that city on learning that his quarry had gone to San Francisco, but he merely alighted from one train to take another Eastward.

En route, he read that the railroad station at Waterloo had been robbed. This time Rigor concluded that Baker was again heading for Chicago and the East. He kept on for the windy city.

As usual, Baker had been there and left.

CHAPTER VII.

ENMESHED IN THE WEB

RIGOR was chagrined, of course, at the repeated failures to land the bandit murderer. In Chicago, railways offered Baker a choice of a score of States for fresh depredations. So his human Nemesis, Rigor, had to get down to brass tacks before he could do anything else, and obtain some reliable, tangible evidence as to what general direction Baker had now chosen in his newest flight.

He found that numerous more money orders had been cashed and that the proceeds of the Waterloo, Nebraska, station robbery had supplied Baker with still newer mileage books. Rigor made the rounds of offices of cut rate ticket brokers who then did a thriving trade in large cities. They have since been abolished by law, everywhere.

At one place he found where Baker had unloaded some of the latest stolen mileage. At another broker's he found the bandit had traded one of the mileage books for a ticket to Pittsburgh. This had been about forty-eight hours before.

Rigor had scant hope of intercepting Baker in the smoky city, since the detectives who had been shadowing the home of his sweetheart had been called off to aid in the active pursuit of Baker in other places.

But this chief of secret police of a great railway system was always best when hardest pressed. Baffled, repeatedly, he now evolved a new expedient.

Through the assistance of Postoffice Inspector Kincaid, he had arranged to not only have the Pittsburgh post office watched for letters from Baker to his sweetheart, but from his sweetheart to James A. Baker. So the girl's handwriting had been carefully studied and all mail from her residential section of Pittsburgh was daily scrutinized by the indefatigable postal sleuths, to aid Rigor in his quest.

And here for the first time, luck was with the brainy sleuth.

It was, indeed, high time. For, if Baker could elude such a pursuit as Miles S. Rigor had organized and conducted, then a dozen bandits of his ability could practically disorganize society, roaming, plundering, murdering at their own sweet will. The expense of the chase was now very large.

But nothing mattered except to capture Baker. It was imperative that he should be captured and punished to the full extent of the law for his crimes.

Here is Rigor's own statement of how the arrest was finally achieved, after such protracted efforts and such heartbreaking disappointments.

"Baker spent only a day in Pittsburgh and continued on to Washington. From then on I was so close on his heels that I felt sure I'd have him at a moment's notice. I had my brother, E. S. Rigor, and W. C. Nuss, another of my men, planted at the New York post office building at

Broadway and Park Row, knowing there was mail waiting there for Baker.

"When I learned in Washington that Baker had again started East, I wired to another of my brothers to follow on to Boston and Providence. He was close behind Baker in both cities. After Baker had raised money in both of them, he again started back toward New York."

Three Rigors Close in

Three Rigors, instead of one, were now converging on the fugitive. One from the South, one from the East, and one waiting as patiently as a spider for a particularly luscious fly, in the web spun long before to entrap the murderer bandit.

A sparkling situation, indeed, and the more particularly so since Baker had no idea whatever that Rigor had done anything of this sort. For aught Baker knew to the contrary, Mark S. Rigor was still frisking Pacific Coast cities for him.

"I hurried on from Washington," continued Rigor, "stopped off and looked around in Philadelphia a bit and then came on to New York. As I entered the post office and failed to see either my brother or Nuss on guard there, I realized that they had either got their man or else were trailing him.

"A few minutes later I heard that they had seized him at the general delivery window and were then holding him in the office of the postal inspectors on an upper floor, so I went there."

Inspector Kincaid was also there as well as E. S. Rigor and Nuss when the detective who had never yet relinquished hope or effort first saw Richard Clarence Neal, alias James A. Baker, in legal custody.

It was a highly dramatic moment. Baker, however, was very cool. Rigor arranged to have Inspector Kincaid make a charge against the prisoner for robbery of one of the West Virginia post offices, so that he might be taken into that State under the Federal statutes for an offense against the United States government and thus avoid the technicalities otherwise incidental to his extradition for the crime of murdering Hutchinson, which was an offense against the State laws.

If the bandit had moved fast, the wheels of justice now moved faster. Baker was not yet known as Neal. He was not the sort easily to be intimidated, even after arrest.

He knew his legal rights and he had the same boundless courage and self-assurance as when at large. He was not told at first that he would be tried for murder.

Rigor and Kincaid asked him many questions. At the end of an interview which lasted eight hours, Baker said that he guessed he had better make a confession. He said he preferred to dictate it.

It is an extraordinary document and contains minute details of his various robberies and how he was able to outwit the cops who were either pursuing him or trying to catch him in his burglaries. The most important part of the confession, however, came afterward as a result of a question Rigor asked.

That question of Detective Mark S. Rigor's was this:

"You haven't mentioned your robbery of a station at Clarington, West Virginia. What did you do while there?"

"I was never in that station in all my life," said Baker.

"Think again," said Rigor. "I have the proof of eyewitnesses that you were there."

For an hour Baker denied this.

"Why not come clean with the truth?" asked Rigor. "You know you were there. You know that I can prove you were there."

"Lend me a half dollar a minute," said Baker, at length.

Neal Loses the Toss

Rigor gave him the coin.

"Always, before entering a town or leaving a town after robbing a railway station, I decide my next action on the toss of a coin, and will decide this question that way, too."

With the words, he tossed the spinning coin into the air.

It alighted on the floor, with the engraved head of the "goddess of liberty" uppermost. The prisoner stared at it a long, long time. No one in the room spoke a word.

They knew that he had lost the usual toss, "heads you win, tails I win."

Grotesque and improbable as it sounds, it was typical of the impulsive, highstrung, headstrong young Texan, who had started barely seven years before for a war spurred by his restless ambition and his love for a faithless girl!

CHAPTER VIII

THE FLOWER A GIRL HAD GIVEN

JAMES A. BAKER looked up at the four detectives.

"I will tell you the story," said he.

"I went to Clarington on December 29, 1907, arriving there on the train about 7.24 P.M. I went down the track for a while, and about two hours later I entered the post office, which was also in the station building. I did not know there was any one in the railroad station at that time.

"At this time, I went out to commit a robbery with about twenty-five cents in my pockets. When I arrived, I saw the station agent. But I thought he would wait on that train and then leave the station.

"When I returned to the station I did not see anybody about. I went to the back and got into the baggage room, opened the door into the post office and saw the night operator lying on the bench asleep.

"I saw the money drawer and thought that I could get it without waking him. I opened the drawer and the agent woke up. He drew a gun and backed me over to the other side of the station with my hands up.

"He went to use the telegraph instrument with one hand when I jumped for him, grabbed his hand holding the gun, and we struggled. However, I held his hand in such a position that the gun always pointed away from me.

"In the shuffle, the gun went off and he was injured, badly. I hurriedly left the station, went up the road and then turned back to see what I could do for him, as I thought I could help him if he were not dead. I made up my mind to call for help if he was not dead.

"I felt his pulse and found no signs of life. I went over his heart and found that he was dead and beyond all help. I took the revolver and some stamps. I set the building on fire to cover what had happened, as I was in a terrible state of mind.

"The postage stamps I took I afterward sold on the Bowery in New York. I pawned the revolver in Philadelphia, but do not know where. I got some registered mail letters and about fifteen dollars in cash from the money drawer."

When Rigor found Neal's baggage, he discovered that Baker was also Neal. In his effects were some photographs and commissions, as well as war decorations from the British government.

It was then only that the previous romantic story was revealed. He was taken to Moundsville, Virginia, tried and convicted for the murder of Operator Hutchinson. He was then sentenced for life to Leavenworth Prison.

Within the forbidding walls of this terrible place he remained upward of four years. Before his transfer to that place he confided to his captor that he had only one regret in life.

"What's that?" asked Mark S. Rigor, curiously.

"The notoriety I brought on an innocent Pittsburgh girl," said the bandit. "I really loved her. She was as stately as a swan and simply perfection.

"If I had met her first, you and I would never have struck up an acquaintance. I intended to marry her, and settle down when I had enough money from these robberies."

Yet Neal took to prison with him a few little keepsakes which he jealously guarded from all prying eyes. Gone were the nobly heroic days of his dashing conflicts with the Third Imperial Horse in South Africa; and of the charming London society which had lionized him after his convalescence, there remained nothing but the one photograph of himself aside from his vagrant memories, and the diary he kept while in the British army.

In that photograph there was the countenance of a youth with fair, beardless face, cool, gray eyes, and an air of detachment,

as if what he saw was rather a bore, and his thoughts were on a girl in the far-off "Lone Star State."

Prison routine always runs over a sanguine temperament with horrid macerating wheels. And Neal was condemned for life, not only to the prison, but to deathless and torturing memories of his pristine innocence, his illusions, his disillusions, and his savage fight against the whole of organized society.

Is it any wonder that he finally went mad?

Prison opinion was divided. Some officers and physicians felt that he was shamming. Be that as it may, his hopeless mental condition evinced such symptoms that it could not be said whether or not he was feigning insanity. To decide, he was taken to a hospital for government prisoners at Washington, District of Columbia. Here his condition was studied, as said.

And it was here that he escaped. Officials would not tell details, but it is known that Neal made a mighty leap for liberty one night from a window high up in the building.

Out the Hospital Window

He was immediately lost to view. No trace of him could be found for more than two whole days. He had vanished as mysteriously as he had formerly done, time and again, when robbing railway stations and post offices.

The entire nation flashed with warning: "Neal Escapes! Desperado at Large!" Millions read it. Among them the thief-takers. They were not the sort of men who forget an exceptional criminal.

And here was Neal, alias Baker, the man who had blazed the lurid trail of murder, arson, and nearly twoscore of robberies in the shortest space of time that was ever known and blazed it from Pennsylvania clear across to the Pacific Coast—Neal was again at large.

One man who had clung desperately to that nine-thousand-mile trail among the entire army that had sought this fugitive also read the news.

"We were all in a panic," frankly admitted Miles S. Rigor, chief of the Pennsylvania secret police. "We were prepared for the worst and our nerves were at the snapping point!"

And, meanwhile, where was Neal? He was lying in a bit of underbrush near the hospital, out of sight of every human eye, with a broken leg and a broken arm. Exposed to the inclemency of winter weather, in agony from the fractured bones which his leap for liberty had cost him, with but scanty clothing, he never uttered a moan or a groan, while conscious.

The Stout Heart Stops

In that last statement is the true measure of the native courage of Richard Clarence Neal, the boy hero of a war, an officer and a gentleman, an adventurer, a fond and loyal lover, ere he became a bandit scourge, a firebug and a murderer.

When he finally became unconscious, his moans were heard. Then they found him. They took him back into the hospital. The broken bones were carefully reset. He was revived with stimulants. But the exposure supervened, and he became very, very ill.

His temperature rose. They made the usual scientific tests.

"Pneumonia!" laconically reported the chief bacteriologist.

All the time, from the moment he was first discovered, Neal had frantically clung to a tiny book. He would not relinquish it at all.

"He's beyond our skill," said the physicians, "for the bacillus Friedlander has got him!" It had. That mighty microscopic force paralyzed and forever stilled the stout heart of the former boy bandit.

His body was prepared for burial. Then the little book was taken from his dead hand for the first time. It proved to be the diary of the adventures in South Africa.

And, pressed between the leaves, were the dried fragments of a flower. The moment the book was opened, they crumbled into dust, as if to waft the departed soul of the former hero on to a new and nobler fate than had been his on earth.

This was the same flower his childhood sweetheart had given him when he set out on his first quest and who among us shall say that it was not fitting that it should accompany him on his last?

THE OPIUM SQUAD AT WORK

AFTER one of the roughest voyages in her career, the steamship Hyson, a freighter engaged in the Asiatic trade, nosed her way through the Narrows as winter was on the wane, 'amazed Chinese coolies at her deck rails, their slant eyes marveling at the torch-bearing goddess in the harbor and the sky-scraping palaces of lower Manhattan.

The crew had little to do, as the vessel was being towed to her dock in South Brooklyn. So sightseeing, for the time, was the order of the day.

Freighters are slow. They do not move as fast as mail carrying ships. And, of course, a wireless message concerning even the speediest of liners can be sent to the port for which she is bound in the time that it takes the crew to raise the hawsers from the dock at her point of departure.

Some one of these things had happened. At least, that is a pardonable conjecture, since those who know won't tell.

There were the usual Customs officials waiting at the dock to go over the cargo when she was berthed.

There also boarded the Hyson another batch of Uncle Sam's servants. These were wearing overalls.

When the first of the second group reached the top of the gangplank he showed his gold shield to an amazed ship's officer. His companions did likewise.

The dungareed customs men made their way through knots of Chinese coolies to an opening voiding that weird never-to-be-forgotten blended odor of stench from soft coal, smell of heated oil, and odor of burning salt caked on the exposed parts of engines when the spindrift was "flying free."

They clambered down the narrow iron ladders which led into the bowels of the ship. Soon they were amid a scene few landsmen have witnessed—the stokehole. Here men were stripped to the waist, their nakedness intensified by the coarse cotton "sweat rags" knotted round their necks. Inhuman they appeared in the lurid glare of the opened fire-box doors. Whether they were white, or brown, or black, or yellow, it was impossible to tell from their skins, for their faces and bodies were begrimed with coal dust, caked from sweat.

The Customs men, members of the Port of New York's searching party, paid no attention to their surroundings. They were used to this sort of thing. Mechanically, like the stokers themselves, they shufiled across the steel floor to the coal bunkers.

They had equipped themselves with shovels taken from the ship's complement. They began shoveling away as though their lives depended on it. Aimlessly they seemed to shovel, their efforts accompanied by grunts and groans.

Suddenly their labored inarticulations gave way to shouts of joy.

They had found it!

Tons of coal on the off-side mutely testified to their labor.

But gleaming objects in the coal still unshoveled were their reward!

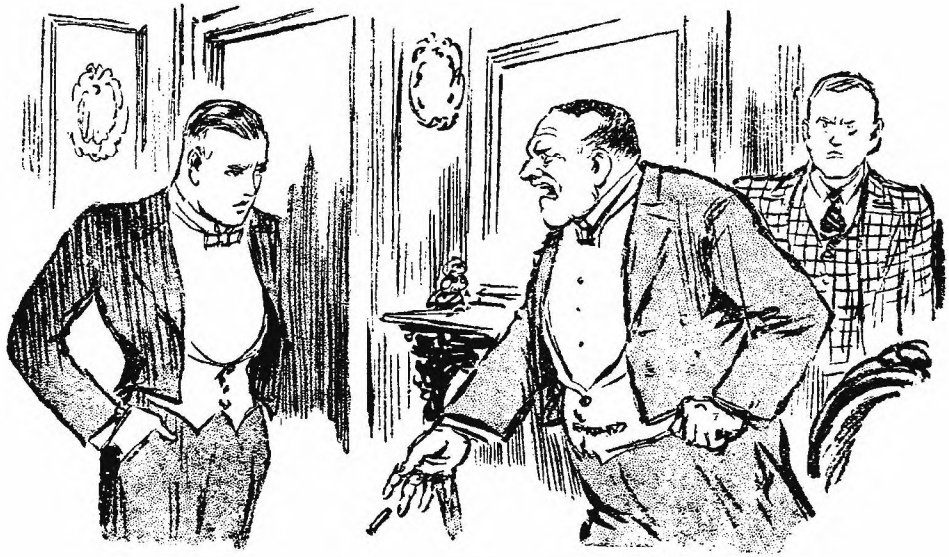
The protective coverings were torn away revealing tins and tins of Lam Kee Hop, in their quaint, Chinese-charactered labels.

There were one hundred tins of Lam Kee Hop, fetching when the market is low two hundred and fifty dollars a tin, and at other times worth its weight in gold.

This is the last word in smoking opium, the coveted drug of the unfortunate addicts who barter away body and mind for the visions of rose gardens and fields of fighting dragons conjured up by the fumes of the death-dealing smoke.

But these hundred tins of Lam Kee Hop, valued at twenty-five thousand dollars, will never be rolled into dream-making pills for the little silver bowls of the pipes of the epicures among the opium smokers.

The seizure, one of the most important made in New York Harbor in months, was the chief topic of conversation in Manhattan's Chinatown that night. Chop sticks clicked as tongues clacked the doleful news of the afternoon's work of Uncle Sam's raiders.



" You filthy little devil, you didn't make the substitution at all!"

SNOW

By Rufus King

A SNAKE-IN-THE-GRASS HAS DESIGNS ON DAN DOOLEY WHEN BATTLING BEAUCAIRE ENTERS THE GAME

FLAKES, soft and cold and fine as white lace, swirled from the lead of gray skies and drifted in chill beauty down the deep-towered walls of lower Broadway. The blizzard was at its height, and the streets of New York lay hushed and at unnatural rest within its grip.

The windows of the private office of Martin O'Day's detective agency were patterned opaquely with a beauty more rare than the filet of Brussels or Bruges, but the eyes of O'Day, which were large and brown and looked smoky colored whenever he felt sad, had no time for the graces of nature. They were thoughtfully fixed on the plain, wrinkled face of Maggie Dooley as it peeped like a white china saucer from between a black bonnet, where flowered surprised velvet violets, and the collar of a cape composed of skins which indifferently imitated the sleek elegance of a seal.

And cold as was the snow that fell in great rushing waves past the windows from heaven, it was no colder than the chill that worked its misery in Maggie Dooley's tired heart.

" So you will not whale him, nor will you put the matter in the hands of the police, nor yet will you urge him by force, when we get him, to go back to you. You're a determined woman, Maggie Dooley," said O'Day, while his eyes, which were smoky, grew cloudier still as they noted the attempt on the part of his visitor to stiffen the carriage of her weary old body. " And," he continued, " there is little sense left in you. It is not by coaxing that you'll get the young lad to come home."

"There's small sense in yourself, O'Day, that you cannot be seeing how little would be the use of me getting my Danny"—the velvet violets on her bonnet were very quiet and still—"unless my Danny wants me."

"Very well." O'Day, who was afraid of tears, for fear of a too willing accompaniment on his own part which would give the lie to the stern impressiveness which was due, as he felt, as a complement to the thick-set heaviness of his build and the hard nature of his calling, stood up. "You will go back to your room in the hotel and will leave this matter to me."

Maggie Dooley extended a black-mittened hand. "It's a lonesome washing that there's not a man's shirt in," she said, as she vanished almost entirely within the folds of the cape whose skin might have deceived the eyes of a snapper but of no fish of a greater size, "and most lonesome of all it is for a widdy woman when the man is her only son."

II

COLD and fine and soft were the flakes that fell before the heavily curtained windows of an unobtrusive house that offered a discreet brownstone front to a street in the West Seventies. Inside, there were warmth, an ostentatious bedazzlement of furnishings and an artificial glitter of crystal and of ornaments leafed with gold.

But there were no mirrors to reflect its brilliances nor, being none, could they reflect the strained white faces of the people who were accustomed to whisper, to shrill, and to laugh before its ornate walls.

Mr. Felix Harim, full-chested, muscular, swart and built like an ox, but with jet button eyes that slumbered with the negligence of a fat cobra's, surveyed the emptiness of the establishment's most brilliant salon and turned, with a nervous twitch, to his manager, Hop Sinn.

"How's the stuff holding out?" he asked, from between lips that did not move.

"Plenty."

"There'll be a crowd to-night."

"We're ready."

"Six new ones."

"Ah!"

"Including that Dooley kid from the sticks."

"Ripe?"

Mr. Felix Harim gave a cold apology of a smile. "Yes," he said. "He's ripe."

"Ah-h!" said Hop Sinn.

III

"SIT down," said O'Day, as he carefully dusted with his handkerchief the chair drawn alongside his desk before his operative, young Reginald de Puyster, should do so with his own.

Thank you," said de Puyster and, after having tested with a chamois-gloved finger the woodwork of the arms and found it satisfactory, complied.

"The cast in our plot," said O'Day, eying the young millionaire, and keeping the pressure of his blood down by sheer strength of will, "is young Daniel, the son of Maggie Dooley, whose Pat was the friend of my youth and who has now been dead these ten years, may God rest his soul, and a slick-bellied snake-in-the-grass who goes by the name of Felix Harim."

Young de Puyster politely covered, but made no effort whatsoever to suppress a yawn. "A malefactor, I presume, of sorts," he said.

"He is that," said O'Day. "His specialty is snow."

"I gather that you refer to drugs?"

"I do, and to heroin in particular."

"Then might I be so pertinent as to inquire why you failed to telephone the narcotic squad of the police department instead of having telephoned me?" asked young de Puyster, who only dilletanted with detecting when some particular case touched his heart or his brain, as he advanced one hand toward his hat.

"You might," said O'Day, as he shoved the hat just beyond reach. "You will listen to this story that I have to tell and then, if you wish, you can go back to your flesh pots and your box at the opera which I think, if I know you, which I do, you will not use this night."

"Pray proceed."

O'Day steadied his nerves with a brutal pinching of the edge of his desk between a large forefinger and thumb.

"Dan Dooley is nineteen years old and country bred. He is husky and tough and stands five feet ten in his stocking feet when he has them on. He is not much to look at for beauty, as his nose is a button and rides on the front of his face like the tip-tilted bow of a fast boat with a bone in its teeth, and his browned skin is that covered with freckles it looks like a map of the heavens on a clear, black night.

"But to Maggie, his mother, he is a prize who could expose himself out on the sands of Palm Beach and well hold his own. Have you now a picture of the lad?"

"I dare say I might recognize him."

"Then as to his home. In a frame cottage among Polaks at the outskirts of South Hampton did Maggie Dooley raise him from a child, lining his back and his stomach both inside and out by the washing of linen from the countryside around."

"A *blanchisseuse*."

"Yes, yes," said O'Day, "but don't let her know that. Now, for the past summer or two, both for diversion and profit, has Danny hacked passengers to and fro from points around in a flivver that was bought by the suds of his mother's profession. And so agreeable was his manner that enough silver came his way to make life considerably easier for herself. She could afford to give up blankets and dungarees."

"Then he entered, I presume, that phase in youth when one is impelled by an overmastering urge to seek adventure in an environment opposed to one's locality."

"You have taken the thought, if not the words, from my mouth, and the villain in the case is this Felix Harim, who conducts a refined hop joint in the West Seventies with such two-fisted discretion that nothing but faint breaths of suspicion can be whiffed by the authorities and no shred of evidence have the boys been able to obtain, though they've tried again and again hard enough."

"I need not reiterate my opinions of the capabilities of the designated boys."

"You need not," said O'Day, trying to loosen his collar by sticking one finger down in it. "So clever is this snake that I would not now be poking into his pie were it not for Maggie Dooley whose Pat, as I mentioned, was my friend when a child and whose Daniel is now within reach of Harim's dirty fangs.

"What Harim wants the lad for is to make him an addict and then turn him loose among the natives of his home town, so making a winter as well as a summer market for his foul commodities."

"He found young Dooley agreeable?"

"That he did—not to the main issue, mind you, for his hand was well concealed—for with no discredit to Maggie, who as a colleen had red hair and what goes with it, a wild goose never yet laid a tame egg, and only too ready was her Daniel for the deviltry which Harim spread out in his way."

"Is there still a chance, or has the mischief already been done?"

O'Day's eyes grew smoky as dark soot. "God grant it has not. For it's the first few times that destroy," he said bitterly. "There's no harm at all in the last."

"Precisely what facts are there?"

"None. All that we know is that young Dooley hacked Harim to and fro. And restless and irritable did the boy become, so much so that Maggie could scarce speak a pleasant word but he'd be all for snapping what's left of her old gray head off with his mouth, which was getting tight and hard as a bowstring instead of cracked open in the wide grin which had made it the pleasant adornment that it was by nature shaped to be. Harim left. A day later, Danny left. Danny did not come back. We are left with our conclusions, and Maggie with her breaking heart."

"What can I do?"

O'Day shrugged hopelessly. He shoved a slip of paper across the desk.

"Harim's joint," he said, "is there."

IV

THE navy and buff limousine of expensive foreign make, and its deep-chested hood that was brilliant with burnished silver, which did its unmodest best to transport young de Puyster from point to point in the manner to which he had been

born, sped swiftly like a gleaming eyed planet along the snowbound roads of Central Park, while its lights diffused soft brilliance against the gently falling curtains of flake white.

Past heavy armed trees done in plaster, past occasional lamps, past curves and windings did it fly, but past no single human soul. Out into the span of Seventy-Second Street it came and swung north, then after a block or two turned its hood to the west and drew up along the curb before the heavily curtained windows of the unobtrusive house that offered its discreet brownstone front to the street.

"You will return to Eighth Avenue," said young de Puyster to Maximillian, his chauffeur, being conscious the while of unseen eyes that stared down from a slot in the door at the top of the brownstone stoop and that were drinking in and appraising the turnout of his rig, "and will wait just around the corner. I do not know how long I shall be.

"I will not be alone when I find you there, and you are not to be surprised at any action that I may be called upon to take."

"Very good, sir."

"It is conceivable that you may be required to wait there all night."

"Yes, sir."

"And it is imperative that not for a single second do you leave your post."

Then with leisurely tread young de Puyster mounted the short flight of steps that was carpeted in white, and on the surface he read the story made by many tracks; tracks that all led within, but none of which again came out.

"Mr. Felix Harim," he said to the gorilla armed attendant who opened the outer door and permitted him to enter a vestibule, the second door of which was fast closed.

"Your card, sir?"

"Young de Puyster presented one from his case.

"Not your personal one, sir—your invitation is the one I wish."

"My personal one," said young de Puyster in tones as remote as the snows on distant mountain tops, "will suffice."

"One moment, sir."

The attendant passed through the second door and closed it behind him. In a few minutes he had returned and was accompanied by Felix Harim.

"Mr. Reginald de Puyster?"

And Harim's voice had the quality of a chilled purr.

"Just so."

"I believe that we have not met. You are well known to me, of course—but might I inquire what induced you to honor me with this visit?"

"I have been told," said de Puyster, not making the mistake of offering his prospective host either a smile or his hand, but keeping the latter disdainfully enclosed in a pocket, "that your dances are able to relieve certain ailments of the head."

"Might I further inquire the name of our mutual acquaintance who flatters my poor efforts at entertainment to such an extent?"

"You may not."

Harim shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"You place me in a quandary," he said.

"From which I shall, in that case, extricate you at once."

With the trace of a bow, young de Puyster took two steps toward the street door and placed his hand upon its old-fashioned silver knob. Harim's eyes narrowed to slits while his fingers clenched with greed.

"Mr. de Puyster," he said, "surely you must understand the difficulty of the position I am in. The name of our mutual acquaintance, I assure you, would be enough."

Young de Puyster did not withdraw his hand from the silver knob. "Good night," he said.

With a repetition of his graceful shrug, Harim tossed discretion to the winds.

"The hospitality of my house is at your disposal."

A great surge of perfumed warmth struck de Puyster as he passed through the second and then through a third doorway, and his eyes were smitten by a dazzle of lights.

On a lounge of scarlet brocade sat a thin woman in a metal dress, whose hair was the color of dead ink and whose bright, pin-pointed eyes were framed in kohl. Her lips made crimson twitches in the white paste of her face.

A youngster of twenty-two who had gray pouches beneath two tragic eyes talked to her ear at a feverish rate in an inspired effort to convince her that he was God.

Before a buffet stood a uniformed butler, the breadth of whose shoulders would have done credit to the watchman of a bank, serving champagne, liquor and *hors d'œuvres* to three laughing girls of twenty and to a man of sixty with a disarranged toupee and saffron eyes set in pink.

And in a corner more secluded and less brilliant than the rest sat young Dan Dooley, with a blush on his cheek and with eyes that were wide with pleasure at the thought of the company he was in.

She was a buxom lady, the company, trapped through some occult machinations in black velvet and owning a smooth, chiseled face that rested on a sagged neck of wrinkles. Her fingers were a blaze of jewels.

"Not many of my guests have arrived." said Harim.

"It is early."

"Shall I present you?" He indicated the woman in the metal dress.

Young de Puyster raised his eyebrows that might have seemed, at a snap guess, penciled, in the manner to which they had been trained for twelve generations.

"Certainly not," he said.

Harim smiled, bowed, and withdrew. He felt reassured. His new victim was running to form. For a while, perhaps an hour, there would be hidden nervousness. Then acclimatization. Then Harim would return and suggest a remedy for the slight aching of a head.

The de Puyster millions ranged, he knew, roughly around twenty. He would handle their possessor with care. He wanted him to live for many years. For as many years as it took to dispose of twenty millions. Then Harim felt he would be willing to retire.

V

YOUNG de Puyster crossed to the buffet. He stood removed from the three laughing girls and the old man with the saffron eyes. He drank champagne. It was good champagne. He drank five glasses, Harim noted it and was pleased. Dutch courage. Not only Dutch courage but, what was more agreeable still, American befuddlement.

Harim's sleepy eyes saw each faint stagger as young de Puyster crossed to the corner that was darker than the rest and seated himself thoughtfully on the lounge, with a cold, distant bow, between the astonished and angry eyes of Dan Dooley and the hard, brittle, appraising ones of the woman in black.

"Really!" said the woman. "I don't believe I've had the pleasure?"

"Shall I give 'm the gate, miss?" asked Dan Dooley.

"Silly boy!" said the woman, as she caught the slight gesture that was speedily shot her by Harim. "Why should we? There's luck in three." The smile that she turned upon young de Puyster had the correct lines of an instrument of precision. "Comfy, dearie?"

The flush on Dan Dooley's freckled cheeks grew bolder. His muscles tightened beneath the checked cloth of the suit that Harim had advanced him the money to buy. He scowled at the lovely young cake-eater beside him.

"Make yourself right to home, sweetie," he invited, in what he fondly hoped was a whisper of discretion.

The bundle in black caught it and at once flashed signals of distress toward the hovering Harim. They were transferred by him in the flick of an eye to the broad shouldered butler. But not quickly enough.

"I'm inclined to believe," said young de Puyster to Dan Dooley, "that your observation was intended to be construed in the nature of an insult. If so, I am not at all adverse to stepping outside upon the public thoroughfare and receiving satisfaction."

"Hell, yes." said young Dan Dooley. "Let's go."

The signals of distress grew frantic; they amounted, almost, to an exercise. Harim, flanked by the butler, steered swiftly to port and confronted the two rivals as they rose to their feet.

"Gentlemen—let me suggest a glass of wine."

"Don't bother me, buddie, I'm busy."

"We are both of us temporarily occu-

pied, Mr. Harim. We will rejoin you later. In, I dare say, five minutes."

"Sure. Don't worry, buddie—I'll drag him back in with me again."

Harim read the obstinacy of the grape in the eyes of each. He felt twin stabs of doubt and regret. Some sixth, seventh, or eighth sense gave subtle warning that all was not well. But there the psychic manifestation stopped.

Before his troubled mental vision spread South Hampton and the de Puyster millions. South Hampton was sure. But millions were millions, even if not so sure. Must he give one up? Certainly not. Neither.

Young de Puyster eyed, without looking at either, Harim and the butler. He eyed, and gaged, young Dooley. He steadied the slight wavering propensities of his body by resting the tips of his fingers upon the back of a chair.

"Fighting," he said, "is vulgar and passée. I will lay you a wager, my good young fellow, that I can beat you drink for drink at whatever our host sees fit to offer. The prize will be the favor of this fair young lady."

The fair young lady smiled metallically with a jingle of her fifty merry years. Harim smiled. The butler smiled. Young Dooley continued to scowl. He turned doubtful eyes in the direction of his sponsor.

Harim nodded his head the fraction of an inch and closed the left eye a fraction less than that. Then Dooley smiled.

"You're on," he said. Then added for his opponent's private information, in the least public of his stock of whispers, "but that ain't sayin' I won't beat you up the first time I catch you outside!"

Young de Puyster acknowledged the information with a hiccup.

They closed in upon the buffet. The fair young lady of the tilt retained the securer fastness of her shadowed corner. She felt amazingly pepped up. Not more than forty if a day. She composed mental testimonials to Doré's *Sang de la Rose*. Besides being waterproof, she decided, it certainly was the cat's. Even the strain on her multiple hooks and eyes seemed less.

While the butler occupied, as he pleasantly imagined, the attention of young de Puyster, Harim moved Dan Dooley a foot or two aside. He pressed in his hand a phial.

"Take this," he whispered, "just before you swallow your first drink. It will fix your stomach so that you could drink the ocean and it wouldn't affect you."

Dan Dooley thanked him and grinned. Harim was a good scout: a true pal if there ever was one.

The butler had moved young de Puyster a similar step or two to the offing. He pressed a small phial in his hand.

"Take this, sir," he said in the trace of a whisper, "just before you swallow your first drink. It will fix your stomach so that you could drink the ocean and it wouldn't affect you."

Young de Puyster thanked him and smiled. He took a bill from his pocket and pressed it into the butler's hand. The butler, catching a professional glimpse of the bill's denomination, developed a symptom of heart failure for the first time in his healthy life.

"Shall it be cocktails, gentlemen, or champagne?" asked Harim as he closed in the gap between the two jousters.

"It is the privilege of the challenged party to have the choice of weapons," said de Puyster.

Three sets of eyes batteried upon young Dooley. His husky young chest grew as large as the checks that concealed it. This was life. What an earful to spill at Maretta's barber emporium and pool parlor back home!

"Bubbles," he said shortly and with an air, albeit a salty one.

A cork popped as a prelude to golden froth. Harim winked knowingly at young Dooley and then flicked his eye to the hand enclosing the phial. The butler winked respectfully and knowingly at young de Puyster and dropped a suggestive glance at the hand enclosing the phial.

Young de Puyster drew a large cambric handkerchief from its pocket, raised it, and under cover of its folds jerked his head slightly back. He removed it with a flourish and the butler's keen eye was reassured by the slight ripple of a swallow.

For an instant young Dooley was at a

loss what to do. He was far from being an adept at guiles. He searched for a hint in the eyes of his sponsor. Harim took a step between and masked young Dooley with his heavy back. For an instant.

But in that instant young de Puyster had slipped around and taken young Dooley's rising hand in his own.

"We must shake," he said, "before the round begins."

The brittle glass cut deep in his smooth white palm. It had no effect at all on the tough leather of young Dooley's.

"I think," said de Puyster, looking down at the trickles of crimson that ran toward the tips of his fingers, "that that is blood. Treachery!" His voice rose to a shriek.

With an ease that was beautiful if difficult to see, he raised his left fist from his side and pasted young Dooley a hot one on the chin. The lady in whose honor the bout was held plunged deeply enough into her rôle to give a throaty scream.

Young Dooley shook off the effects of the tap and with blood in his eye started a haymaker from the ground up. But its intended home was gone. Was moving nimbly toward the door. Was escaping.

He rushed in pursuit. One door. Two doors. Before the third stood the gorilla guard. The dandy was bidding him a calm, a cool, a polished, a collected good night. The gorilla was looking with the shocked eyes of a stunned child at a yellow-backed bill. The dandy was gone. And young Daniel was after him.

Around the corner he ran and into two arms which checked his flight and hurled him bodily into the dark recesses of a limousine, a limousine that shot forward with the swiftness of a deer and left in its trail a wondering and puzzled man.

VI

IN a small room in a great house in the hills of Westchester County raged young Dan Dooley. The swift rush through the past few hours had brought the night to the edge of dawn. From his window was a sheer drop of forty feet to the hard, frozen surface of the pale gray snow.

The window was unlatched. He could open it or close it as he liked. There were no bars. But there was no material in the room with which he could construct a rope. And he did not want to commit suicide.

He wanted to commit murder. On young de Puyster. The door to the room, on the other hand, was locked and its panels were of good stout timber upon which he had already, to his subsequent discomfort, shattered the two chairs that comprised the sole furnishings of the room.

In the living room below stood de Puyster and a very old man. A man whose sunken lips betrayed the toothlessness of his gums. A man in soiled tatters of odds and ends. A man with pale wisps of matted hair that arranged their fancy in fringe above his thatched brows. A man with hollow cheeks of age and hunger. A man whose skin was pinched and blue with cold, and sallow from the bruises of hard luck. A man whose clear gray eyes were still, somehow, kind.

"You need not be perturbed about overplaying your part," said young de Puyster. "In fact, I would advise leaning rather more heavily in the direction of bombast than repression. He will expect it and your acting will seem the more convincing."

"I am of the Old School, sir. I shall not disappoint you. I remember playing such a rôle as this one thirty years ago upon the boards at Daly's. I drew tears, sir—tears. There was not a dry eye in the house. Tree himself congratulated me upon it."

"Of course, you understand that the phial you will snatch from the pocket of my waistcoat contains a harmless substitute and not heroin."

"Naturally."

"Then I will bring him down."

De Puyster went up three flights of stairs and along a carpeted hall. He unlocked and opened a door and faced Dan Dooley. He checked the youngster's rush and pinned his flaying arms firmly to his sides.

"Permit me to explain," he said.

Young Dooley looked through red hazes into de Puyster's beautiful blue eyes. The

strength of the grip on his arms amazed him. The sobriety of his opponent, whom he had thought completely drunk, amazed him. Curiosity conquered his rage. It was all in keeping anyway with the mad whirl of the past week.

Another lurid chapter added to the book of knowledge that was being edited for him by Harim.

"Explain what?" he asked.

"My kidnaping of your person. Did Mr. Felix Harim ever before to-night supply you with a phial similar to the one I crushed in your hand?"

"No."

"Then we were in time."

"Waddye mean you was on time?"

"You have no conception as to the true contents of that phial?"

"No."

"Heroin."

"Dope?"

"Yes."

"You're cuckoo, kid. Harim's my pal. He's a good scout and square clean through. You tell another dirty lie about him like that and I'll paste you the dozen that's comin' your way anyhow."

"Tut! Apart from the fact that you can paste nothing until I release you, pray do your best to attain an open mind and listen to me. I appreciate your attitude entirely. I even admire your loyalty, regardless of my private opinion of its idol.

"It amazes me that a man of your intelligence can so blind himself to the truth of the situation. Demand of yourself frankly the question of what a man of the world, the underworld, is doing when he devotes his time and money to an ignorant —I employ the term in reference to worldly matters—youngster from the country.

"Men do not step outside their class and mingle with either lower or higher strata unless they want something. Very rarely the desired thing is good. In the heavy preponderance of cases it is evil. Harim is using you for his own selfish ends.

"He will make an addict of you, then an agent—an agent to peddle his wares among the natives of South Hampton. Why, otherwise, should he bother with you? You will pardon my frankness, but it is essential that I make my point clear. You do not speak his language, you do not think his thoughts, you are as far removed from him as the poles.

"He wants to use you. To break you. To make you the sort of filthy object that is the result of his trade. I could never convince you through the medium of words, therefore I shall attempt to do so through sight.

"There is a man downstairs who is in the last stages of degeneration from dope. He will serve as a glass. A glass that will portray with meticulous accuracy a reflection of yourself in three or four years from now if you persist in remaining in the hands of Mr. Felix Harim.

"I have here a phial, similar to the one given you by Harim, which was given to me by the butler."

De Puyster exhibited the phial and then replaced it in his right hand vest pocket. In the left hand pocket lay the substitute phial he had prepared.

"There is no foul or unclean thing," he went on, "no act of violence or of crime, no physical infliction of self-torture that that man would not do in order to obtain the contents of this phial to satisfy the craving that is, sending him swiftly to a crazed death. Come down with me and observe this glass.

"Remember, while you are looking, that so others come to look at you. That so will your mother, if she lives, some day look at you. Let us descend."

His curiosity strongly piqued, his belief consciously wavering, young Dooley followed de Puyster down the stairs. Together they entered the living room and faced its single occupant. Mr. Felix Harim.

VII

"LO, buddie," said young Dooley, walking over and taking his stand by Harim. "This cuckoo here's been fillin' me with a lot of hot nuthin'. Shall we turn him in or beat it? I guess Miss de Veevoor's given up waiting by now."

"I can fathom neither your intentions, Mr. de Puyster, nor the condition of your

mind," said Harim, as he stood up. "In my opinion it is unbalanced. I could not find you at your city home so I followed you here. I felt that an explanation was at once due.

"I have been in this house for the past half hour. I overheard your amazing conversation with the old tramp and, after you had left the room, persuaded him with a monetary consideration to go away rather than to have any further dealings with a lunatic.

"I gather that you have been trying to persuade Mr. Dooley, for purposes of your own which I am free to confess I cannot fathom, that it is my business to peddle dope. That my intention was to make him an addict and then an agent.

"I listened to your deliberate plot to deceive young Dooley through the connivance of the tramp, who was to act the part of a dope fiend and get from you the phial that you undoubtedly bribed the butler to give you at my house. That its contents are harmless I shall now prove to Mr. Dooley by taking them myself. It will convince him, I trust, of the complete absurdity of all the statements that you have made."

Harim crossed like an agile panther to young de Puyster. He topped him by a good five inches and, in muscular weight, held the advantage of an easy sixty pounds.

Young de Puyster made no effort to restrain him; no effort as Harim inserted his thick fingers into the right hand pocket of his vest and withdrew the phial it contained; no effort beyond saying in a quiet voice, "That phial contains heroin, Mr. Harim. I warn you not to take it."

Harim smiled unpleasantly. He felt quite secure. Had his own ears not overheard that a substitution had been made? It was quite true that otherwise not even de Puyster's twenty million dollars would have persuaded him to take the contents of the phial.

Ten years ago he had himself been an addict. For ten fearful years he had fought the craving with a will of iron. And he believed that it was conquered, but he realized very well that but one slip would send him hurtling back into the abyss and he would never have the strength to climb out again.

"If there was heroin in this," he said to young Dooley, "you couldn't make me take it at the point of a gun. I'd choose the bullet."

And he meant every word he said. He raised the phial to his thick lips. He swallowed its contents. De Puyster watched him with a strange, fatalistic look in his beautiful blue eyes. He made no effort to check Harim. The punishment was too just.

He felt that to do so would be but a futile attempt to circumvent the unalterable decrees of Fate. A look of doubt, of recognition, of dawning horror came over Harim.

"Heroin!" The word leaped from his lips like the clang of a harsh bell. "You filthy little devil, you didn't make the substitution at all!"

White fury swept the least trace of reason from his mind. He hurled himself with his greater strength upon de Puyster who met him squarely with three whistling drives to his heavy jaw that sent him back upon his heels. But the advantage was short-lived.

Harim, with a sharp hiss of his breath, sent over a few wicked chops to the chin. They clinched, and hot black eyes, clouded with the distortion of a baleful hate, glared close into clear blue ones. And deep in the glares lurked the forces of evil and of good, clashing swords again in the ageless contest that has waged since there had been a heaven and a hell. And the prize, as the prize has always been, was the saving or damnation of a human soul.

To Harim's crazed and fear-stricken mind there was but one thought—to kill. He employed the clinch to rip home short, terrific drives to de Puyster's body.

A swift break and a hurtling jab opened a cut over Harim's left eye and a trickle of blood crept down the harsh whiteness of his face and added to the grotesqueness of his features. He shot across a wild smash to de Puyster's chin and sent him crashing across the room to a heap on the floor.

De Puyster was on his feet in an instant and whipped his right through an inviting

opening that staggered the big man and confused him into dropping, for a second, his guard. With all the power and all the science that were in his lithe, taut young body, de Puyster pressed his advantage home and packed a blow against the point of Harim's chin that sent him sprawling to the floor. He lay quite still.

De Puyster turned his back upon the motionless body. He walked a few steps away. He thoughtfully regarded the bruised knuckles of his right hand. He raised his eyes until, in a mirror hanging upon the wall, they took in young Dooley and the quiet Harim.

Young Dooley was staring down at his fallen idol, standing very still about six feet away. Was the idol shattered, de Puyster wondered, or would it be set upon its pedestal again. He felt that there would be no victory unless the youngster's allegiance should go to the conqueror. To himself.

Then he looked in the mirror at Harim. He saw the first evil flicker of the man's eyes. He watched his hand creep inch by inch to a pocket within his coat. He watched him draw from it a blunt, short-nosed revolver. He glanced for a flash at young Dooley. Young Dooley had noticed the action too.

He was standing and watching Harim's rising hand with a transfixed fascination. De Puyster tried to read the message forming upon his face. Would he shout—would he jump and seize the weapon—or did his allegiance to Harim still hold fast, and would he stay quiet and still until the bullet had found its mark?

There was not a quiver, not a motion of a single muscle from young de Puyster as the gun crept into line. The matter was out of his hands. It would be futile to jump—to dodge—even if he wanted to. And he didn't want to. He wanted to leave it up to young Dooley.

The leer on Harim's face was a mask of evil, as if the rotten sinks of his soul had crept through its pores and glazed it into unspeakable distortions. The hand that held the gun was now in line. With quiet eyes de Puyster watched the hammer begin to move.

A shot rang out just at the moment that Dan Dooley leaped.

VIII

"A CLOSE call, my boy," said O'Day, stepping from the portiered threshold with a gun in his hand, "as the turtle said when he tucked the last of his extremities into his shell and the lobster went away very much disappointed.

"A lucky thing it is I've been hot on your trail, and 'tis a better death my bullet gave to that snake in the grass than the living one he would have suffered had my finger not pulled the trigger. Now I'll thank the two of you lads just to step this way.

De Puyster and Dan Dooley, who was pale and trembling like a leaf with horror and wretchedness in his startled young eyes at this strange climax to the viewing of the great world that he had left his mother and his cot in the country to see, followed O'Day into a morning room the windows of which were ablaze with the colors that herald the sun; colors that formed a bright halo in back of the plain, wrinkled face of Maggie Dooley as it blurred in faint white beneath the black bonnet with its velvet violets and above the collar of the cape whose skins strove so bravely to imitate the sleek elegance of the seal.

Not a word did she say or a move did she make, but stood waiting, her heart of two minds—either to stop beating for good or to go racing away like the waters that run by a mill.

She did not move her tired old body so much as one inch, until Dan Dooley's tough young arms were folded tight around its little frame. Then she closed her eyes upon the outlandish cheeks that bedecked it, and pressed her nose into his chest.

"Sure, and long as the night may be," said O'Day as he tried to pretend that his two eyes, which were banked with as much moisture as can be found in a London fog, were admiring through the windows such beauties as nature prepared, "dawn comes at last."

On the floor lay the struggling forms of the husband and the Very Young Man

WHEN ROSA CONFESSED

By Ray Cummings

THE SCIENTIFIC CLUB ATTENDS THE PRESENTATION OF AN ACTUAL MURDER WHEN ROSA BECOMES SUSPICIOUSLY MUM

"YOU say this Rosa Vitelli has confessed to the murder," exclaimed the Banker. "There's no mystery when you have a—"

The Doctor nodded. "Quite so. But, gentlemen, though she admits having killed the girl Angelina, she will not tell how she did it. There is considerable mystery about that."

The Doctor gazed around the small private club room, with its group of interested members; and then indicated the two visitors beside him. He added: "Mr. Green and Sergeant Marberry here are puzzled. More than that—"

"Suppose you give us an outline of the case," the Chemist interrupted. "If you think we can be of any help—"

"I will. As I told you, Sergeant Marberry, a good friend of mine, has been assigned to this Vitelli affair. Because of his knowledge of Italian he is very frequently given such cases. And Mr. Green, one of the assistant district attorneys, has the case in his office for prosecution."

The Banker raised his hand impatiently. "The murder, Frank—"

"Quite so," smiled the Doctor. "Briefly, the circumstances are these: Some three weeks ago—on the early morning of January 10th, to be exact—a young Italian girl was found dead. She lived in the Italian section south of Greenwich Village. Name, Angelina Tomo. Age, twenty-three. Unmarried. An extremely pretty girl—a factory worker.

"With another girl roommate, she occupied a small flat on the third floor of a tenement building. This other girl does not

enter the case—she had been on Staten Island with a sick mother for several weeks, leaving Angelina alone in the flat.

"On the early morning of January 10th, one of the fourth floor tenants came downstairs, and in the dim, badly ventilated third floor hallway, smelled gas. There is no electric light in this building; all gas. Angelina did not answer thumps upon her door. It was later broken in. Her flat was found flooded with gas, and the girl in bed—dead."

"Suicide!" murmured the Banker. "You said murder—"

The Doctor smiled grimly. "Wait, George. It was murder, not suicide. The night of January 9th and 10th was extremely cold—you all remember that three-day cold spell we had. Angelina slept that night with all her windows closed—even the transom over her door to the public hall was closed. All the doors and windows closed and locked on the inside.

"The outside temperature was down to zero that night. It was perfectly natural for an Italian girl to shut herself up without fresh air and go to bed.

"But it was murder, not suicide, for though the little flat was full of gas and the girl dead of asphyxiation, every gas cock in the flat was turned off securely. That was not suicide, gentlemen. You don't kill yourself by turning on the gas and then get up and turn it off."

The Astronomer murmured: "But how—"

"Exactly so." The Doctor glanced at his watch. "I must hasten—Jack, are you and Professor Walton ready with everything?"

The Very Young Man nodded eagerly. "Yes, sir. Everything's ready."

"Good. Gentlemen, this Rosa Vitelli is in custody. Mr. Green has ordered her brought here to-night—they will have her here any moment. In a word, the Vitellis occupied the third floor flat acroos the hall from Angelina. A young, rather well educated Italian-American couple. Rosa eighteen, and Georgio twenty-six. Married just over a year. No children.

"Sergeant Marberry here was assigned to the case. Marberry established at once that young Vitelli had been paying undue attention to the Torno girl—so much so that he and his wife had had violent quarrels over it.

"After the murder, when the Vitellis were about to be arrested, Rosa gave way under Mr. Green's questioning and confessed. Jealousy was her motive. She was afraid she would lose her husband to the other girl. And doubtless she had good reason to suppose so.

"All that is clear enough. The queer part is that Rosa absolutely refuses to tell how she committed the murder. Nothing can break down that refusal. If, by some unknown method she got into Angelina's flat, turned on the gas, and then turned it off and got out again, how she could leave the doors and windows locked on the inside, with a key on the inside lock of the only hall door—all this she refuses to explain."

"Why won't she explain?" the Alienist demanded.

"There you have it! Why won't she? That also, we do do not know. But she will not. Her husband possibly could tell how she did it, but he maintains only a stubborn, sullen silence and says he does not know."

Sergeant Marberry, a slender, dark-haired man nearing forty, said abruptly: "You have not told them, Dr. Adams, that we think we know how the crime was committed. This Rosa Vitelli—"

The Doctor interrupted. "Sergeant Marberry has unearthed a few other facts which might be used against the Vitelli girl to break her down. But it is only theory—not proof—and the difficulty is that if he and Mr. Green used them and Rosa did not break down, nothing could ever be accomplished."

"I don't understand," the Banker exclaimed. "This girl has confessed to a murder. Why not go ahead and sentence her? Why bother with *how* she did it?"

"You'll see in a moment, George. It is a problem Mr. Green has several times had to face, particularly in dealing with Italians. Let me go on. Three significant facts were brought to light. One, a fourth floor tenant over the Vitelli flat, noticed

that night a peculiar smell coming up. Something burning—a stench—"

"Burning a body!" the Banker ejaculated.

"George, don't be absurd. Angelina's body was found peacefully in bed—asphyxiated. The second fact, gentlemen: Whenever a peculiar, novel and yet simple crime is committed, other criminals imitate it.

"You remember the 'poison needle' craze that swept over the country some years ago? And when bichloride of mercury once got publicity as a comfortable means of suicide, it was used widely."

"You mean that somebody has already imitated this crime?" the Banker demanded.

"I do not. I mean that Sergeant Marberry felt at once that this crime might be in imitation of a previous one. Where would Rosa Vitelli get the ingenuity to plan it? To originate it? Sergeant Marberry guessed that she did not. Purely a guess, but on the chance, he searched all the New York newspapers of the previous few days.

"He found what he was looking for. On January 7th, in the Bronx, an attempted murder almost asphyxiated a whole family. Understand me, I don't mean to imply that this had any connection with the Vitellis—except to give Rosa the inspiration as to how she might murder Angelina. This Bronx affair concerned obscure people—and since no one was injured it occupied very little news space.

"None of you gentlemen noticed it, perhaps. But Sergeant Marberry did, and he saw in it an explanation of this murder."

Several of the club members interrupted with questions, but the Doctor ignored them.

II

"IF Rosa Vitelli read that little news item—and possibly she did since it was also run in the Italian paper which the Vitellis are in the habit of buying—then we can assume that she might easily have been prompted to imitate it. The circumstances were the same, and—"

"What circumstances?" demanded the Chemist. "You don't mean the motives?"

"No, I mean the method by which the murder was committed." The Doctor took a newspaper clipping from his pocket. "Here it is, read it. And then I'll tell you a surprising suspicion which Mr. Green and Sergeant Marberry feel is close to the real truth."

A knock sounded on the club room door. The Doctor hastily disposed of his clipping. "No more now, gentlemen. You'll have to wait. Just sit quietly and watch. They're here, Sergeant Marberry."

The door had opened. Two policemen and a blond, stocky young man in civilian clothes entered with the girl Rosa Vitelli. And with them another young man, tall and dark, Georgio Vitelli, husband of Rosa.

The blond young man from the assistant district attorney's office greeted his superior, and with a low command seated Rosa in a chair facing the Doctor. Her husband sat near her; the two policemen retired unobtrusively to the other side of the room and sat down, staring around curiously.

Very briefly the Doctor introduced the newcomers; and then standing over Rosa, he abruptly demanded:

"We want to know how you killed Angelina. Will you tell us now?"

"No," she said sullenly, with her gaze on the floor. She was a small, dark-haired girl, typically Italian-American. Pretty in a pale, bedraggled fashion. She sat hunched in her chair, staring stolidly at the floor by the Doctor's feet.

"You won't?" he reiterated sharply.

No answer.

"Rosa, look up here."

Her gaze came reluctantly up to his face.

"Rosa, why won't you?"

Still no answer. The Doctor shifted his question; his tone became less harsh.

"*Why* did you kill Angelina? You'll tell these gentlemen *that*, won't you?"

"Yes," she said. Her dark eyes flashed; color flooded into her pale cheeks. She burst out passionately: "Angelina steal my Georgio. You know that! Everybody knows it. And so I kill her!"

The girl's eyes turned toward her handsome young husband and they softened with tenderness. "She—that Angelina—make love to my Georgio. And so I kill her."

"Gad," murmured the Astronomer to the man beside him. "She may have had good reason, from her viewpoint, to kill that other girl. The sympathetic type—it's lucky she confessed, you'd never get a jury to convict a girl like that. And where are you going to get a judge to sentence her very heavily?"

The Assistant District Attorney heard the comments and flashed a warning glance. The Doctor was persisting:

"Yes, Rosa, we understand that. But you know it's wrong to kill, don't you?"

Her gaze again had fallen.

"Don't you?"

She burst out: "No! That Angelina do wrong—she steal my husband. I tol' her to let him alone."

"How did you kill her, Rosa? You planned it ahead of time, didn't you? I say you planned it very carefully, didn't you?"

Silence.

"You won't tell?"

"No."

"Why not? Why are you afraid to let us know how you did it?"

Still no answer. And abruptly the girl looked up with a glance almost of appeal.

"Why won't you tell, Rosa?"

The Astronomer leaned toward the Assistant District Attorney. "She's been advised against it. Knows you're trying to establish premeditation."

"Yes—of course. But that doesn't apply to the first moment of her confession. She was almost hysterical—and she isn't clever enough to think of a thing like that. Sh!"

"We're going to make you tell," the Doctor was saying gruffly. "That's why we brought you here."

It startled the girl. She gripped the sides of her chair with her small white hands.

Georgio exclaimed: "You let my Rosa alone! I will get her lawyer." He started to his feet toward a telephone across the room, but the Doctor waved him back.

"Sit down, Vitelli. Your lawyer wouldn't have time to get here now. Besides, I think we won't question Rosa any further." He added abruptly:

"Gentlemen, I want you all to listen to me very carefully. And you two also, Rosa and Georgio. You, Rosa! You think we know nothing about this except what you've told us, don't you? Well, you're mistaken. We know a great deal about it." A grim smile pulled at the Doctor's lips.

"This is the New York Scientific Club—you know that. You were both born in New York—you're both intelligent enough to know what science is—what it can do. We brought you here, Rosa Vitelli, to *show you* with your own eyes how you killed Angelina Torno.

"We guessed how you did it—Sergeant Marberry guessed it—but it was only a guess. Not proof. Then, last week, we of the Scientific Club—using apparatus which you will see working in a moment—we *proved* it. Ah! That interests you, Rosa?

"Well, you watch and you will see." His tone grew ironical. "If we show you anything wrong, you can tell us." He whirled on Georgio.

"You, Vitelli, you'd better watch closely also. You'll want to repeat it all to your wife's lawyer. By the way, gentlemen, I have not yet told you that Rosa Vitelli's father is a fairly wealthy contractor down on Staten Island. He has retained quite able counsel to defend his daughter."

The Vitellis sat silent under this swift tirade. Several of the club members were murmuring to each other and the Doctor raised his hand for silence.

III

"YOU gentlemen will be interested in this demonstration. It involves a well known scientific principle which only recently has been brought to its present practical perfection. Professor Walton here—" the Doctor indicated a frail, gray-haired man who sat apart with the excited Very Young Man—"Professor Walton has perfected an apparatus which he and Jack Bruce are shortly to operate for us—and which will show Rosa Vitelli in the very act of murdering Angelina Torno.

"Sit down, Rosa! We're not going to hurt you. No, Vitelli, you don't need the lawyer—you can tell him all about it."

The Doctor gazed over the room and, when he resumed, his tone was quieter.

" Gentlemen, the scientific principle involved is that of light rays. Light, as you know, is a vibration—of the ether let us say for convenience. A vibration which travels at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand three hundred and twenty-four miles a second.

" A little boy once asked me a very naïve question which I am going to ask you gentlemen. He demanded of me: ' Dr. Adams, where does light go when it goes *out?*' You need not smile—I am quite serious." The Doctor was watching Rosa narrowly without appearing to do so.

A few of the club members had smiled, but Rosa and her husband sat stolid—the young Italian listening intently and with apparent intelligence to the Doctor's words; and Rosa staring sullenly at the floor.

" I repeat that, gentlemen. Where does light go when it goes out? Let me show you something." He signaled to the Very Young Man who produced a candle and placed it upright on the center table. Rosa turned to face it, staring fascinated while the Very Young Man lighted it.

" Now, Jack."

The Very Young Man switched off the center electrolier; the room was plunged into gloom—flickering yellow candle light which disclosed little more than the table-top and the Doctor's standing figure.

The Doctor went on: " Light rays from this candle are bringing the image of it to your eyes at the rate of 186,000 miles a second. An inconceivable velocity measured over so short a distance. You see my hand reaching toward the candle? I touch it with my finger—so. Now, gentlemen, understand me. You did not see me touch that candle at the *exact* instant I actually touched it. There was a tiny interval of time in between—the time it took those light rays to carry the image ten or fifteen feet.

" Is that clear? I assure you it has a bearing upon the murder of Angelina Torno! I perform an act in this candle light; I touch the candle—so. And a tiny fraction of a second *after* I touch it, you see me touch it. A very tiny fraction of a second over such a short distance. But suppose you are ten times as far away, it will then be a tenfold greater interval of time.

" Then assume that you are on the moon, with a telescope powerful enough to observe me. I put a finger on the candle, and it is well over a second later that you see me do it. On the sun, some eight or nine minutes would have elapsed.

" On the nearest of the fixed stars you would not see my action until more than four years after I performed it. And observing me from one of the more distant stars, you would have to wait several hundred years!

" To go back to the child's question—watch my hand now, snuffing out the candle." The Doctor pinched out the wick; the room was black. Amid a shuffling of feet and a startled cry from Rosa, the Doctor's voice cried, " Lights, Jack!"

The lights flashed on. The Doctor resumed quietly: " You saw me snuff the candle. Those light rays brought the image to you at that tremendous velocity. They went on past you. Where? Out! Quite so. But not obliterated, gentlemen. Not lost. Remember that, for it is important. We are accustomed to a mode of reasoning which says that my act of snuffing that candle is *in the past,* dead and irrevocably gone. Not so!

" If you were watching me from the sun, at this present moment you would observe the candle still lighted and several minutes yet to wait before you would see me snuff it! To an observer on the sun, therefore, that particular act *has not yet been performed.* It is not in the past, but in the future.

" Do I make myself entirely clear? What I'm getting at, specifically, is this. The visual representation of every act ever performed is in existence at this present moment. Light does not go out—in the sense of being destroyed. It goes away.

" The light-rays that shone upon the white sands of San Salvador when Columbus knelt there, have not yet reached some of the distant stars. If you were on one of those stars, mechanically equipped to receive that image upon the retina of your

eye, you could watch to-night and see Columbus discovering America!

"Thus no act can be accurately termed *of the past*, without reference to the equipment of the observer. Let me be still more specific. We think of the murder of Angelina Torno as an act of the past. It is not.

"If we could equip ourselves to receive the light rays carrying it. I said light rays did not go out, but away. They do that—but they also come back. Reflected light. Rosa, are you listening to all this?"

The girl raised her eyes from the floor. "Yes," she said sullenly. "I kill Angelina. Why you bother about me? I kill her, I tol' you."

"Yes," agreed the Doctor. "But I want you to listen and in a moment, watch closely what we're going to show you." He flashed a look at the young husband. "You're listening too, Vitelli?"

"Yes, I listen, but—"

"But you don't make much out of it?"

"No. Rosa's lawyer, he—"

"You can tell him," the Doctor interrupted. "You'll have a lot to tell him before we're finished. I was speaking of reflected light, gentlemen. It is reflected everywhere. Sunlight goes to the moon, and is reflected back to the earth. Our own light—itself mainly sunlight—goes to the moon and comes back to us again—and we call it moonlight.

"And here on earth, light is everywhere reflected back and forth. From the ceiling to the floor of this very room—from each of its walls to the other. Reflected constantly back and forth, like the reverberating echoes of sound."

IV

THE Doctor paused momentarily, then resumed. "I come now to the crux of the whole matter. Light rays, you must realize, are never lost. Their velocity never changes. Nor do they in their entirety, necessarily leave the neighborhood of their source.

"The sound of my voice—also vibrations which travel at something more than a thousand feet a second—will echo back and forth across this room for theoretically a limitless period. Growing dimmer—yes. Almost instantly, far below the very narrow range of our human hearing.

"And so it is with light vibrations. The light-vibrations that candle sent out are still reverberating across this room. Altered in form. Dimmer—yes. Almost instantly far below the narrow range of our human sight. But, gentlemen, they are still here. And we could still see that candle being snuffed if we could isolate those light vibrations and again make them visible!"

There was no one who spoke when the Doctor halted. Rosa still kept her gaze on the floor. But though the girl's mentality could not follow the Doctor's reasoning, Georgio evidently understood to what this scientific analysis might lead. He gazed at his wife with an obvious, growing fear, and then back to the Doctor.

The Doctor continued: "In principle, gentlemen, I have told you it all. Some of you even, are familiar with the detailed workings of Professor Walton's apparatus. To the rest of you I need only add that he has succeeded—crudely, still with much to perfect—in isolating and magnifying let me say, otherwise invisible light vibrations. The modern radio does something of the kind with otherwise inaudible vibration of sound.

"To use popular language, Professor Walton 'tunes back' amid the mingled vibrations of light until he has isolated those he is seeking. They become crudely visible. The past, in so far as that particular scene is concerned, becomes the present."

The Doctor's voice rose to sudden vehemence. "In that tenement building where Angelina Torno lived, there are still vibrations of light carrying the scene of the murder. Professor Walton's apparatus is connected at this moment, with that building. Gentlemen, you are about to witness—not a representation of the murder—but the actual murder itself!"

As though his words were a signal, the Very Young Man without warning switched off the electrolier. The room went black. For a second or two only, and then a purple beam of light sprang from an unnoticed orifice in the wall. It bathed the room in its deep, lurid glare.

The thing was startling. Rosa screamed. Georgio was on his feet, but the Detective pulled him back to his chair. Over the confusion the Doctor's voice sounded.

"Quiet, gentlemen. We did not mean to startle you."

The Very Young Man, sprung suddenly into action, was lowering a cord. Professor Walton hurried past him—and unnoticed in the purple glare, went through a side door and out of the room. The cord which the Very Young Man was operating, lowered from the ceiling a shimmering veil—a rectangle some ten feet wide and eight feet high. It hung from the ceiling almost to the floor.

The occupants of the room all turned to face it. The purple beam of light from the wall orifice struck it from behind. It glowed—purple, then dissolving into scarlet. A blood-red veil, still quivering from the movement of its descent.

The Doctor's voice said: "The fabric of that veil is finely woven wire. The light is from Professor Walton's apparatus in the adjoining room. Vitelli, I want you to watch closely. Your lawyer will be interested in this. You, Rosa! You hear me? You watch this! I am going to show you yourself, in the very act of murdering Angelina Torno!"

A silence fell over the room. The club members, the Vitellis, the Detective and Assistant District Attorney and the two policemen—all staring with a silent, awed fascination. The veil, blood-red, was creeping and crawling with color. Spots of shadow seemed forming upon it. Vague, distorted—formless blurs of movement, shifting slowly as a cloud bank—shapes dissolving formlessly one into the other.

A hum now filled the room. Low at first, then louder—a penetrating electrical hum. The Doctor raised his voice above it.

"Those blurs which you see are scenes in the third-floor hallway of the tenement building in question. Professor Walton's observing station is erected there. To the left is the door to the Vitelli flat. Angelina's door is directly across the hall to the right. Formless blurs, gentlemen, as yet.

"But wait a moment. Professor Walton is 'tuning back,' so to speak. Back through the mingled light vibrations until he reaches those of the murder scene. Watch, Rosa! Soon you will see!"

No need for his admonition. In the glare of red light the girl's figure showed as she sat in her chair, staring at the blood-red veil. The shadows there grew denser. Moving shapes—condensing, taking form.

The hum in the room went up an ascending scale, then struck a level. Like an accelerating dynamo, reaching its pitch and holding it. The Doctor spoke louder.

"Now! You see? We are back to the morning after the murder."

The blurred outlines of a tenement hallway became visible. To the left a wooden door—old-fashioned, dingy, with a glass transom above it. To the right, a similar door. A dingy flight of stairs in the background, leading upward. In the center, depending from the low ceiling, a ramshackle chandelier. On the floor, worn, ragged oilcloth.

People—half a dozen men in uniform—Detective Marberry—moved about the scene—opened Angelina's door to the right—entered and emerged. The whole a deep crimson. Blurred, occasionally grotesquely distorted; then again clearly distinguishable.

"The morning after the murder," the Doctor repeated. "Imperfect—as imperfect an apparatus as were our first, unimproved radios. And now—Look, Rosa! Now we are going back to the murder itself!"

The crimson scene blurred again into formless crawling patches of light and shade. The hum slid upward to still a higher pitch; held even and the blurs clarified. The hallway again. Empty and dark—so dark that only the stairs and the dim outlines of the doors left and right, were visible. An empty, motionless scene. Sinister, expectant.

And then, very slowly, the left-hand door was opening. There was no light behind it; only a dark rectangle of shadow there. Then a flare. A pencil-point of light showed. Moved. Came out of the doorway; resolved itself into a human hand holding a lighted candle.

For a moment nothing else in the blood-

red gloom was visible. The hand with the candle advanced slowly into the center of the hallway. And now a dim blur of human shape beside it seemed almost distinguishable.

The hand with the candle stopped. The candle-light seemed unnaturally to disclose nothing. Then the other hand appeared—a hand reaching upward, holding a long rubber pipe of the sort used to connect small gas heaters. The hand slipped the rubber pipe over the hallway gas-jet; fumbled there, then moved away; carrying the other end of the pipe to the transom above Angelina's door; pushing the transom open cautiously; sticking the pipe-end through, and closing the transom close upon it.

All blurred, dark-red, and barely distinguishable. Swiftly done; a few seconds only. And then abruptly the scene brightened and clarified further. The outlines of the figure adjusting the pipe—turning on the gas—suddenly became plainly visible. Not a woman's figure! Not Rose Vitelli. The figure of a tall, slender, dark-haired man. Georgio Vitelli! Unmistakable!

V

IT was so abruptly disclosed that a gasp ran over the onlookers. The hum ceased. The blood-light went out. From the darkness of the club room came the sounds of scuffling feet; an out-cry from Rosa; her terrified, despairing moan in Italian: "They know I did not do it! Georgio! Beloved! Run! Run! Run!"

Her wild burst of sobbing; pattering footsteps; the clatter of a chair overturned; a thump; a body falling; an oath from the Very Young Man; and then his voice rising above the tumult:

"Light the lights! I've got him! Light the lights, somebody! I tell you I've got him!"

The lights flashed on. Rosa sat in her chair, sobbing. On the floor by the door lay the struggling form of Georgio Vitelli with the muscular Very Young Man upon him.

The Detective leaped to Rosa, gripping her by the shoulders, shaking her. "You saw that, Rosa! Why did you tell us you killed Angelina? You didn't kill her!"

"No! No!"

Still shaking her. "Why did you say you did? Why?"

"My Georgio—he—he tol' me to say I did it."

She was sobbing, oblivious to what was going on around her. The Assistant District Attorney rushed up to them. The Detective shook the girl again.

"He told you to confess! Why? Why did you do it?"

"He tol' me to say I did it—because I'm a girl. I get off. He tol' me that. And you—you try always to make me to say how I kill Angelina." She broke into an hysterical flood of Italian. The Detective released her. He said swiftly:

"As we thought. Says she never knew how or why her husband killed Angelina. She didn't know how it was done, so of course she couldn't tell us. It's obvious that he was afraid to let her know—afraid she might be clumsy and say something that would arouse our suspicions—incriminate him. Is *he* talking? Now's the psychological moment—we must *make* him talk!"

But the Very Young Man had already made Vitelli talk. Cuffed him on the head, choked him—until the Doctor and others pulled them apart. And in the confusion, hearing Rosa blurt out the truth and before he could gather his wits, Vitelli had confessed.

When the room had quieted, with Vitelli in charge of the two policemen and Rosa still sobbing softly to herself, the Doctor spoke.

"We have been successful, gentlemen—and I think that you probably understand almost everything which has transpired. Professor Walton would have me tell you that in fundamental principle every theory of light which I gave you is quite correct. Indeed, it is a hope of his that some day an apparatus such as I described will be perfected.

"But for our ignorant present, we had to use a motion picture. That was what you saw, gentlemen. A purposely crude

and jumbled motion picture tinted red, made a few days ago with a young Italian actor playing the part of Vitelli. The scene so blurred and dark, it was easy to catch the likeness.

" For the c.'me itself: Sergeant Marberry unearthed that newspaper clipping. I chanced to see it myself the day it was published. A rubber tube was discovered in a hallway, a tube leading gas from the hallway jet through a transom into a flat. A whole family narrowly escaped asphyxiation. No motive, no criminal was located—and the thing went by the board.

" But it gave Vitelli his inspiration—and reading it, Sergeant Marberry saw at once that the Torno girl could have been murdered in similar fashion.

" Other facts which Marberry brought to light, made that assumption still more probable. The gas-jet in the hallway on the Vitelli-Torno floor was *lighted* the night before; and in the morning the janitor found it turned out. Also: On the oilcloth floor of the hallway, Marberry found drippings of red wax. They suggested that a candle had been used by the criminal to furnish light. Red wax.

" Perhaps one of those small Christmas candles of which the Italians are so fond. And it was only a few weeks after Christmas. As a matter of fact, the stump of a red-wax Christmas candle was found in the Vitelli kitchen.

" Another fact. Above the Vitellis, the tenants smelled a peculiar burning smell that night. Burning rubber! They recognized it at once. We knew then that the gas tube had probably been burned in the Vitelli grate—and now Rosa tells us this moment that her husband did burn something in the grate that night, and would not let her know what it was. This grate, by the way, is an unique feature of the Vitelli flat—the only grate in the whole building.

" All this indicated to us that either one, or perhaps both of the Vitellis, was guilty. Especially in view of their turbulent relations with Angelina. Then, before any of the evidence had been used against them, Rosa confessed. It is obvious now that Georgio soon realized that one or both of them would be arrested. And so he made her confess, to save himself. And she obviously loved him little short of idolatry.

" To us, even then, it seemed a dubious confession for two reasons. First: Rosa would not tell how she committed the murder. Her lawyer soon counseled silence; but in the first hysteria when she confessed, we were convinced that she had no such counsel. And her response to questions was such, that we felt right along she had no knowledge of how gas was introduced into that flat. We made several cautious tests. For instance, to the sudden smell of burning rubber Rosa reacted much more innocently than did her husband.

" All this we could reason out. But with Rosa confessing to the murder—and in the hands of able counsel—what could Mr. Green do? Nothing, but what we did here to-night."

LOOT'S LABOR LOST

ON the night of March 10 of this year a gang of thieves descended on a furniture warehouse at 411 West Thirty-Ninth Street, New York. A stone's throw away blazed the dazzling lights of the Great White Way. The immediate neighborhood, partly residential, and in part conquered by commerce, is never deserted. People are always passing through these streets.

The police estimate that a dozen at least were in the band. That the thieves were comparatively numerous was obvious from their achievements. The boldness of the crooks, their almost unexampled energy, and the luck they played in made their adventure the subject of underworld jest for days.

The furniture concern kept its choicest specimens on the second floor. The huskiest of the gang made their way to this section of the building while the others were posted at strategic points as lookouts.

The gang, or at least a member or two of the mob, knew good furniture when they saw it. They proved this. They selected some of the choicest and most expensive examples on the floor, favoring especially overstuffed armchairs, cozy, roomy, wing chairs, and divans patterned after rare period pieces. Each article chosen by the thieves was covered with some of the finest modern tapestry.

Their selection made, the thieves carried the pieces to the freight elevator, a distance of fifty feet. The furniture shifted to the elevator shaft weighed upward of a ton.

This, however, was only the first lap in a long and tedious route. The thieves next loaded the furniture on the elevator and lifted it to the top floor. Here again they unloaded the furniture, and piece by piece carried six of the cream of their selection up a flight of stairs to the roof. It was hard work and they had barely begun.

This back-breaking portion of their journey ended, the thieves struggled with their loot across the roof of the warehouse until they could look down on the roof of the adjoining building seven feet below. Here was the next step.

But even here the thieves had not made any great progress toward their goal. They brought a ladder into play to aid them in chuting the furniture down to the roof next door. This over, they breathed for a space. They needed it.

This second roof was the first all over again. The furniture must needs be trundled across its width. When they had accomplished this, thieves and furniture were face to face with a stone wall of an adjoining building, which towered twenty feet above them.

Again they brought the ladder into play. Propping it against the twenty-foot wall, one of the thieves ascended. When he clambered over the coping a second thief followed him up the ladder. His confederate carried block and tackle. The first thief relieved him of it.

This labor-saving device was affixed to a convenient chimney. Then the thieves hoisted the furniture, piece by piece.

Thus far the thieves had laboriously shifted the furniture across the roof of 411, lowered it to the roof of 413, and after navigating their loot to the party wall of 415, hoisted it to the roof of the third building.

Here they found that they would have to shove, carry, and tug the two heavy armchairs, two bulky wing chairs, and two weighty divans across the third roof. This done, they found themselves looking down into the street some seventy feet below.

Once more the faithful block and tackle was brought into play and the pieces of furniture began to descend into the street, or more properly to a courtyard opening on the street. Some of the gang were waiting below, and as each piece completed its seventy-foot fall, it was released from the tackle and carefully taken to one side to give a free road to the next article to come down.

The thieves worked openly. People saw them and regarded them as honest furniture movers working late.

After the six choice pieces arrived safely in the courtyard something happened.

What it was, the police can only conjecture.

Just how soon before dawn this mysterious something happened is likewise unknown to the police.

It was at the time when the first streaks of light were seen in the east that Patrolman William Young, of the West Thirtieth Street police station, while patrolling his beat, saw the furniture in the courtyard. He immediately informed the desk lieutenant of his discovery, and an auto filled with detectives and reserves hastened to the scene.

The entire neighborhood was combed, but nowhere was there a trace of a furniture thief.

It is surmised that the thieves were either frightened off or else the truck that was to cart away the loot was driven to a wrong address.

I brought up in a tough little thicket on the cliffside

WHEN DEATH RODE THE AIR

By Jack Bechdolt

ENID, FROM ZENITH, SEEKS THE LAUREL ON BROADWAY AND NEARLY PLUCKS THE DEADLY NIGHTSHADE

CHAPTER XI—(*Continued*)

I AM MADE PRISONER

BEFORE I discovered that this bed was a different bed, an old-fashioned four-poster with carved mahogany pineapples crowning its posts, it did not seem strange to find myself there. So I lay staring upward and wondering what Jethro Parr had been doing to his ceiling.

The ceiling above me was quite low and it sloped at a sharp angle. Furthermore it was covered with an old-fashioned figured paper, pink roses and knots of blue and silver ribbon alternating all over it.

While I puzzled over this and the absence of the glaring skylight that used to hurt my eyes, my ear caught a strange sound, a scratch-scratching on the roof so close above me, an intermittent performance of taps and scratches I could in no way account for. And then, with a rush, the continuity of events came back, my last hour in Parr's studio, the new doctor, the ether cone and my hopeless struggle against his strength and his drug.

I raised myself in bed with a start. I was weak and very giddy.

It was in a strange room, one with a dormer under the eaves, to judge from the recess that held a shuttered window. Somebody had carried me out of the studio and brought me here, of course. This Dr. Kennedy had a hand in it. That much was susceptible to reasoning. The rest was a blank.

This story began in FLYNN'S for May 2

I put my feet on the hook rug that covered the floor and found I could stand, if I was careful to keep hold of something. The room had one door and it was locked.

It was a small room, furnished for a bed chamber and it was not a city room. No matter how quiet a city house may be, there is always a vibration through it from the street traffic that crowds Manhattan Island. Like the constant, steady throb of engines in a big liner, it is the sort of thing one never notices until it ceases.

I noticed at once that this house was not only void of sounds, but it was still. Obviously it stood on quieter ground than New York's island. And everything in the room had that fresh smell, and absence of gritty deposits that marks your city house.

I went to the one window. The shutters had been closed, but the slats sagged apart. Through them I could take narrow, sectional views of the world. I saw blue sky and sunshine on bare trees.

Angling farther I made out fields, bare and brown with winter, fields marked off with stone fences into numerous quadrangles. Near the house a road passed. I heard a wagon rattle along it and caught a glimpse of horses' heads.

The country! Why was I there?

The sash of the window, I saw, had been opened an inch or two to give ventilation, but it would not move under my hands. Closer examination showed it had been nailed that way. A nailed window and a locked door! I was a prisoner now!

I must have made some stir, trying the window. A key rattled in the lock of my door. Evidently my jailors were aroused. I hastily crawled back into bed. With the covers drawn up around me I huddled there, staring in amazement at the last person in the world I expected to see—no other than that sedate, respectable middle-aged housekeeper, Mrs. Shannon.

Mrs. Shannon met my startled gaze in her best professional manner, which was the manner of a skilled and dignified old servant, who can be put out by nothing. She spoke and she might have been my own personal maid for the past thirty years to judge by her tone.

"Good morning, Miss Drake. Can I get you something?"

For a minute I gaped, then I got mad. "You can let me out of here! And you can explain—maybe—what this outrage means!"

Mrs. Shannon shook her head to both demands. Her manner was perfectly respectful and quite firm.

"I'm afraid you still feel badly. You were very ill. Perhaps just a slice of dry toast—and some weak tea with a lemon in it—"

"You!" I gasped. "You—you—I never in my life heard of anything to match your impudence! Get me my clothes. I'm going out of this place—wherever it is."

She shook her head again. "Sorry, Miss Drake. We can't allow anything like that—"

"We can't! Who are *we?* Do you mean that man Brownrigg's got a hand in my being here?"

She looked just a trifle put out by her slip of the tongue. "My dear young lady, take a little advice from me. Don't ask questions I'm not allowed to answer. It wastes your breath—"

"Well, I like that for impudence—"

"It's not impudence." Mrs. Shannon looked somewhat annoyed. "It isn't necessary to treat me like a servant," she said. "I'm not a servant. As for you, you are here because you are necessary to the people who brought you here—"

"Here! Where is *here?*"

"I can't answer that. You are here, in a good, safe, decent place. Nothing hurtful will happen to you if you show common sense. The best way to begin, the sensible way, is to take things as you find them and make the best of it. You won't get out, that's certain! And now," her manner altered to friendly interest, "do let me get you a slice of nice, dry toast and a cup of tea!"

"You might as well," I gasped weakly.

I sipped at the hot, weak tea and munched the dry toast while Mrs. Shannon straightened my bed and dusted the room. She went about the homely task with the trained, efficient skill her appearance suggested she would bring to it.

Her manner was so complacent, so matter of fact that it left my honest indignation tongue-tied. The woman had the capacity of amazing me so I could not think of all the things I had to complain about.

The tea, or the toast, or both must have done me good. I threw off the spell and sitting upright, declared suddenly: "I know about Mrs. Ross's murder, and I've got a pretty good idea who killed her, too. If you—"

I couldn't have thought of anything better calculated to get under the woman's thick skin of reserve.

She straightened as though shot and wheeled on me, her face suffused with color. For a minute I thought she would spring on me and I cowered away.

Mrs. Shannon came to the bedside and her hand caught my shoulder. When she spoke it was in a voice that trembled with earnestness. "If you value your safety, keep your mouth shut about Mrs. Ross. Don't ever mention her name here!"

Her earnestness terrified me. She went on, her stern eyes fastened on mine: "I said you were safe here. You are, if you take care. I warn you to use your common sense, though!

"Did you suppose that anybody would go to all the trouble that bringing you here cost us, without having a pretty strong reason for doing it? There was a mighty powerful reason for that. You look like a sensible girl! Use your head! Not a word about that old woman around here!"

She turned to the door and went out, leaving me pretty sober and not a little frightened.

I had scarcely got my normal breath back before she had the door open again and looked in, her old self. A book was in her hand. "I thought you might care to amuse yourself, Miss Drake," she said pleasantly.

"Do I have to stay in this room?"

"For the present—"

"Can't I have some clothes? I'm sick of a bed—"

"There's a dressing gown. You're at liberty to sit up if you please. And perhaps you would enjoy this. When I was a girl I used to love it."

She handed me the book and locked the door upon me.

I stared at the title and in spite of myself I laughed. She had loaned me Louisa M. Alcott's "Under the Lilacs."

CHAPTER XII

A VOICE ON THE RADIO

"WOULD you like to dress and come downstairs, Miss Drake?"

Mrs. Shannon made that welcome suggestion the afternoon of the second day of my incarceration.

Those had been the longest two days of my life. They passed in a raging fever of impatience, bewilderment and indignation. Most of the time I spent pacing that narrow attic room with its horrible wall paper of roses and ribbon knots.

I was in a torment about my friends, most of all. What would Jethro Parr think? What would Camille think? Even the natural wonder about what would happen to me in this house where I was held did not overshadow those worries.

Once or twice I heard sounds which assured me the house was occupied. Once I heard a man's voice speaking, but it was so distant I could not recognize words or even tone. The rest of the time I walked and wondered, and alternated that by huddling up on the bed and trying to fix my attention on a book, lest I go mad with my own thoughts.

Mrs. Shannon evidently owned a set of Louisa Alcott. "Little Women" and "Jo's Boys" had followed my requests for more reading. I can remember a time when I, too, loved the naïve simplicity of that New England spinister's thin little tales, but I shall never again read her without bitter memories of that attic room and the mysteries that were hounding me.

Then Mrs. Shannon came at last with her suggestion of greater freedom.

"If you will give me your word not to cause any unpleasantness," she went on, "I think you might enjoy a little more opportunity for recreation. There is a radio downstairs, Miss Drake. You can hear all

the New York programs over it. It's just like having all the famous performers visit your own home!"

"Get me some clothes," I said, trying to look grateful. "Heaven knows I'll be glad to get out of this room for a while!"

"I'll be very glad to have you, I'm sure." Mrs. Shannon gave me a polite nod and went after the clothes.

While she was gone, I heard her voice beneath my window and a man's voice answering. I knew that voice. Brownrigg!

I ran to the shutter and tried to peer down through the slats. I could not see, but I heard Brownrigg's assurance, "Late to-night. I'll have to go to the safe deposit vault, of course. That takes time."

A motor car starter buzzed, the engine purred and where the road lay presently I caught the glint of the late sun on the roof of a closed car. My chief jailer was gone. Mrs. Shannon evidently was the more lenient of the two. She wanted the pleasure of my company

"Here are your clothes, Miss Drake," Mrs. Shannon was back, smiling and efficient. She presented me with a bundle of clothing. It was that same costume I had worn in the mysterious house of death—the full skirted, quaint old garb of our grandmothers. Its satin and lace had been laundered and pressed.

The gilt slippers were cleaned anew, the stockings and pantalettes fresh from the wash. It was all there, complete. They had made a thorough job of it when they abducted me from Jethro Parr's, collecting every scrap of evidence of my connection with the death of Mrs. Ross.

Mrs. Shannon answered my amazed stare with a shrug. "It's all there is that would fit you. You couldn't wear my things very well!" True enough. She was a plump, tall, matronly figure, all beef and brawn, and I weigh one hundred and thirty pounds fully clothed.

The costume gave them another advantage which I was to discover later. I donned the absurd thing and shuddered at my reflection in the mirror.

"Miss Drake," said my jailer, "I hope we will pass a pleasant evening together, but I want you to understand something first. You must not try to get away. Do you see this?"

From under her apron the amazing woman brought out an ugly, black automatic pistol. "It is my duty to keep you here," she added, significantly.

The house, what I saw of it, was disappointingly commonplace. An ugly house with yellow pine balustrade and trim and an odd lot of factory-made, cheap furniture, it was evidently a farmhouse done over and made reasonably modern.

Mrs. Shannon led me down to a living room with a large figured carpet, several atrocious Morris chairs, yellow oak tables and stiff chairs and an abundance of cabinets with glass doors, that held books and such curios as pink sea shells, souvenir spoons and pennants and objects made in gilt filigree.

On the walls were several very large pictures. One in a great silver gilt frame was titled, "Departure of the Fishing Fleet," and showed a woman in Breton peasant garb, a child pressed to her side, seated on a log of driftwood, waving a handkerchief at a number of smacks scudding out to sea beneath a stormy sky.

It was a picture chiefly impressive for its size, a print in ugly brown tone and calculated to drive a sensitive person mad. There were others, in frames of silver and gold gilding and one in an elaborate rustic frame made of varnished willow twigs.

They were all about the same period in chromo manufacture. Altogether it was an unhappy, uncomfortable sort of room, but Mrs. Shannon seemed to fit it perfectly. More, she watched me covertly as I glance it over and I fancied a beam of trustful, proprietary pride in her demure espial. Was this Mrs. Shannon's home

"This is our radio," said my hostess, indicating a compact little two-tube set attached to a spring type indoor aërial that hung from a chandelier. "It is said to be a very fine set."

I murmured something polite.

"I'm sorry there is no loud speaker, Miss Drake. It would be nice to have one so everybody could listen, don't you think? But perhaps you'd like to slip on the head

telephone and amuse yourself, while I get some supper.

" Some of the lectures about housekeeping problems and saving money and how leather is prepared are very nice. It's a wonderful instrument to spread education, don't you think? The common people's university, I call it!"

She delivered these amiable platitudes with an interested, lively sort of sincerity that amused me. They contrasted so oddly with that murderous black automatic nestling under her apron, ready to fill me with lead if I started trouble!

I slipped on the head telephone, the first I ever tried. Though I had broadcast over the radio, I knew practically nothing about the listening end of the thing.

Mrs. Shannon leaned over me, showing me how to light up the bulbs and tune with the dial. Then she tiptoed politely into the kitchen, leaving the door between wide open and careful, I never doubted, not to take her eyes off me.

CHAPTER XIII

STRANGE NEWS

THE telephones whined in my ears as I turned the dial idly, catching and losing a strain of jazz, then a snatch of a soprano solo. A man's voice spoke in my ear without warning, the scrap of a sentence:

"—since the disappearance of Enid Drake—"

I was conscious of my loud gasp of astonishment and stole a look at the kitchen. Mrs. Shannon had heard and stopped to watch me. I guessed right away that the woman had no idea I was going to hear any news about myself or I would never have been let near that radio. I gave her a smile and called: " It's wonderful! I never heard so clearly before!"

" I got Detroit last week," Mrs. Shannon volunteered proudly, " and once I got Denver."

While this was said, the voice in the air had been going on steadily. A broadcaster in one of the New York stations was reading the usual evening news bulletin. It was about me and I was in a frenzy, lest I miss a word!

" Miss Drake's connection with the house of mystery has been definitely established," the broadcaster read on. " What part she played in the tragedy enacted there is a puzzle the police have not yet solved. Descriptions of the young woman have been wired to every police agency in the country and there is reason to believe she will be found soon.

" Meantime the introduction of a Broadway star into the cast of characters concerned in the death has further fanned the flame of public curiosity about the weird drama which was played under the direction of the mysterious Mr. Brownrigg—"

So I was a Broadway star! Something told me Camille had a hand in giving me that reputation.

" Enid Drake," said the distant reader, speaking as distinctly in my ear as though he sat beside me, " is the young woman who recently gained fame by broadcasting songs and monologues from this station. Previous to her radio appearance she was a favorite with theater audiences here and in the Middle West.

" From a close friend of the actress, Miss Camille Tarragon, now appearing in " The Cat's Pyjamas," a current Broadway success, the police have obtained valuable information about the missing young woman—"

So, Camille was the author of my legendary stardom. I guessed right. The missing chapter of my adventures was filled out in those next few minutes.

Robinson, who managed the broadcasting studio, had supplied the first clew as to my connection with Brownrigg. Almost simultaneously the police got from Jethro Parr the report of my sudden disappearance.

Parr went to the police, frantic. He had the news from Dr. Blewitt, the man he hired to attend me. Dr. Blewitt had been mysteriously delayed that afternoon. He reached the studio late and found me gone. There was no sign of struggle and no clew to my whereabouts. Camille was called in, and she of course knew nothing.

Police detectives learned that an ambulance had been seen before the old studio building that same afternoon, not more than an hour after Parr went down town. A patient was taken on a stretcher into the ambulance and the vehicle drove away rapidly.

The incident roused a little idle curiosity, but nothing more. The building was not, strictly speaking, an apartment house. The lower floors were rented to small businesses and several architects, artists and professional men rented studios above.

There was no elevator, no regular janitor or anybody to question the coming and going of a doctor and ambulance attendant, and thus I was spirited away under the most plausible circumstances. The revelation left me sick with fright, for it convinced me I was in the hands of a man who not only dared greatly, but combined with his daring a positive genius for crime.

I stole a hasty look toward the kitchen. Mrs. Shannon was tiptoeing toward me, her curiosity roused by my absorption, perhaps by the expression on my face.

I had to contrive a smile for her, while my mind tried to keep its attention on the news I was getting, news so vital to me. "Don't you love jazz?" I grinned, shaking my shoulders and snapping my fingers to an imaginary orchestra.

The woman sniffed loftily. "Oh, is it jazz?"

"A perfect duck of a thing called 'Hot Papa.' Don't you want to listen a minute?" I made as if to remove the head set.

"No, thank you, Miss Drake." She turned away loftily. "The lectures are much more worth while," she said reprovingly, as she went back to her kitchen.

The radio voice had been going on:

"An ambulance answering the description of the vehicle seen at the studio building has been reported passing through Yorktown Heights toward dusk of the day the young woman vanished. There the trail disappears. The police think that Enid Drake was transferred to another car near that point.

"Whether she has been taken north into Canada, or whether she is hidden in one of the more remote communities of Westchester or adjoining counties, is the question that must be solved. State troopers have joined the search, and the State will be thoroughly combed for news of her."

I was aware that Mrs. Shannon was standing over me. I had a guilty feeling that my intent face had told her something. I snatched the telephones off and tried to smile with all the innocent enthusiasm of a radio fan.

"That's a wonderful outfit! I don't see how you get such splendid reception."

Mrs. Shannon extinguished the bulbs and disconnected the thing in ominous silence. "I'm afraid it won't do to have you listening too much. Perhaps, after supper, we will play the phonograph instead. I have some very fine Caruso records and some lovely hymns—though I don't suppose you care for hymns!" She meant that for a dirty dig!

CHAPTER XIV

THE FAMILIAR FACE

THERE was a constraint upon us at supper, and it remained through the evening. I think Mrs. Shannon guessed something. Or it had occurred to her that she was taking greater chances with me than she should. I know she regretted her generous impulse.

But the woman was naturally sociable. She seemed proud of this house I was kept in and anxious to show me her domestic treasures. I got the distinct impression that it was her home and she was fond of it.

I admired and enthused and strained my ingenuity to wiggle myself into her good graces. And all the time my brain was bubbling and boiling with excitement over what I had learned by radio.

Parr and Camille knew of my adventure! What did they think of me? What could they think, except dreadful things?

I had a much more vivid notion of my own danger. Brownrigg had me at his mercy. He had proved himself a daring and desperate criminal, and I understood perfectly that I knew too much about the

events of that tragic night to expect any mercy from such a man.

Where was I, was a question that worried me a lot. The house might have been in New York or Canada so far as I knew. I had only fragmentary glimpses of the landscape outside and that landscape told me nothing, except I was in the country. Mrs. Shannon had drawn the blinds and closed the shutters of the lower floor before releasing me. I doubt if it would have made any difference had I been able to look out.

One thing suggested I was not far from New York. Brownrigg had driven away in a motor car. I heard him speak of visiting a safety deposit vault—presumably that was in the city—and of returning late that night.

What could I do to save myself? I worried over this question, and the only conclusion I reached was that I was going to watch for the first chance to get away, like a cat at a mouse hole. Meantime, I must be a diplomat.

Mrs. Shannon loved her phonograph. She played her favorite hymns for me. And I retaliated by boasting about my triumphs as soloist in our church in Zenith. At her special request I sang for her "Stilly Night" and "Abide With Me."

A grimly humorous pair we must have looked, that curious jailer of mine, clasping the automatic pistol under her apron and listening with moist eyes and sentimental leer to the sacred music I gave her!

My sacred concert ended suddenly and violently.

We both heard an automobile driven hastily up to the house. A heavy hand hammered at the door. Mrs. Shannon sprang up.

"It can't be him, back already!" she muttered.

Her lips pressed into a hard line of determination and she acted briskly. "Miss Drake, you will have to go back to your room. Hurry, please!"

I started obediently up the stairs. In a moment I was back in my prison under the eaves, and the door had locked behind me.

I ran to the window, turning my lamp low in the hope my eyes could make out some glimpse of the caller. I pressed my ear against the gap where the sash was raised and listened intently.

I heard the knocking repeated several times and then the house door opening.

"Well!" It was a curt, grim greeting from Mrs. Shannon.

"Is he here?" The other voice was a man's, a voice I never had heard before, a voice that slurred the "h's" and was just a little querulous and tired. An old man's voice, I judged.

"He's not here. He's in town."

"I've got to see him."

"He's in town. You can't come in here."

"Now, look here, Lydia! I drove out special to see him. I've got to see him, what's more. And if I'm not back there before morning you know what a row they will kick up—"

Mrs. Shannon broke in angrily. "How dare you come out here! Taking chances like that. You may be followed—"

The man's voice answered with sudden irritation: "How dare I? Because I got myself to consider, as well as other parties, that's how." Always that slurring of the "h's," and as his excitement grew he began to drop them altogether, substituting them where they did not belong.

"Listen to me, Lydia. They're making life regular 'ell for me, and Hi'm not going to stand it much longer—"

The woman must have guessed they might be overheard and gave him some sign. His tone grew more cautious, and I caught only an indistinguishable mumble.

I told you that the window sash had been fastened slightly open for ventilation, nailed to the casement so firmly that it would be impossible for anybody lacking tools to get it open or closed. The aperture through which I had been listening was just about wide enough to slip my hand through and the shutters over the windows were locked securely and their catch far out of my reach.

It occurred to me now that the slats of the shutters might be opened wider, allowing me to hear and perhaps to see. I

worked at them with my finger tips, my hand thrust through the slit under the raised window.

I could just touch the slats, but by patience born of my desperation I managed to disturb them little by little, until the entire rank turned on its hinges and opened. I could see the visitor's car.

Its headlights cast a bright illumination across the grass in front of the house, shining straight on me. The pair at the door were too close to the wall for me to make out anything except the tip of a man's hat brim. But I heard better.

" If he finds this out—if he ever guesses you came out here—God have mercy on your soul!" Mrs. Shannon was saying bodingly.

" My soul! My soul, eh? Oh, Hi'll look after my own soul, and thank you kindly, Lydia. 'Ow about your soul—yours and 'is —you two with the blood of that old woman on your 'ands—"

" Shut up, you old fool! Standing here and shouting that out to the world—"

" Ho! And 'oo asked me to stand 'ere in the cold talking over business that 'ad better be discussed hinside?"

" You can't come in. Nobody can come in. It's his orders. Don't you know that—" An unintelligible murmur followed.

" She is! 'Ere, you say—"

" Do talk quieter."

" But what's 'e going to do with 'er, Lydia?"

" How should I know? We couldn't leave her running around town blabbering, could we?"

They were talking over my case! I listened breathlessly.

" Well!" The man chuckled grimly. " Hif you leave it to me, Hi say the only thing we can do is do away with 'er, quietly and neatly. A bit of poison in 'er tea would fix it, and nobody the wiser. Lots of ground to plant 'er in around 'ere!"

I wonder they didn't hear my gasp. I turned to ice all over and for a moment or two I was lost to coherent thought at the shock this cold-blooded rascality gave me. Murder me? Well, why not? Evidently they were in so deep another murder didn't matter.

" . . . 'Ave a 'eart, Lydia!" the man was protesting when I had attention for his words. " It's cold out 'ere and I'm tired. Got a cruel long trip back to town ahead of me, too! Open that door and let me wait inside—"

" What ever did you come for?"

" What did I come for? Hi'll tell you what I came for!" His anger was rising again. " Hi came for a settlement of accounts, that's what. There was a little matter of fifty thousand dollars 'e got off the old lady before—before the other night. And what's more, we were going to share-and-share in whatever was got, hunless I'm much mistaken—"

" You'll have to take that up with him—"

" Hi'm going to take it up with 'im. But Hi've got to see 'im to take it hup with 'im, 'aven't I—"

" Stop that yelling! Do you want to wake up the county—"

" " Yelling? That ain't 'alf as loud as I can yell if something isn't done. Of course you and 'im don't give a 'ang about the likes of me, I suppose? I was just useful, wasn't I? Nobody cares 'ow they are making life 'ell for me, the police badgering and threatening me and the damn newspaper men running wild over my own 'ouse and popping up from behind every bush!

" Well, I give a damn. I come 'ere to collect what 'e owes me. There's no more to be got out of this thing, and I want my settlement before you two go jumping out where I can't reach you. What's more, if you don't let me in I'll stay right 'ere in front of the 'ouse and wait till 'e gets back. If I takes the mind to it, I'll do worse 'n that!"

The threat bore weight. Mrs. Shannon burst out: " Come in. Do! You'll catch it plenty when he gets back."

" I'll put out the lights of that flivver, then," the man grumbled. He turned into the path of light from his car and for a minute I saw his face. I had seen that face before.

That recent afternoon, alone in Jethro Parr's studio, I had examined a newspaper half-tone and felt sorry, in all my own per-

plexity and trouble, for that old man who was fighting alone to preserve the dignity and exclusiveness of the most exclusive old house in New York.

That plump expanse of red countenance, the blue eyes blinking angrily out of their deep sockets—there was no mistaking the well fed dignity of the butler, Jermy Poole, Mrs. Ross's best trusted servant!

The lights died out and the front door slammed behind the two of them. I caught occasional echoes of their voices through the house. Evidently they were quarreling still.

CHAPTER XV

A VISIT FROM FRIENDS

I REMAINED by the window, a blanket off the bed wrapped around me to keep off the chill. Thought of sleep or rest was out of the question. I must watch for Brownrigg's return. Any word, any scrap of information I could gather, might mean the difference between life and death to me.

It must have been near dawn when another car came into the yard and I heard the front door open. Mrs. Shannon came out to meet Brownrigg. I heard her low greeting:

"Jermy Poole's here! I had to let him in—"

"What's he want?"

"He wants his share? Says he's going to get out before he gets into worse trouble."

Brownrigg stopped short and seemed to ponder the news. "Well," he muttered finally, "I'll have to put him off. Don't argue with him. It just makes the old fool worse!"

They went into the house.

Brownrigg must have been an eloquent persuader. It was not a half hour later he came out with the butler, and Jermy Poole was in high good humor.

"I'll 'op along," he declared in the cheery manner of the usual departing guest. "Kept you up late enough—and I got trouble ahead getting this borrowed car to the garage and slipping into the 'ouse—"

"Wednesday, then," said Brownrigg. "You slip out here—"

"I'll find a way, don't worry—"

"Meantime I'll go to the safe deposit vault and get it. It was best to leave it in a safe place, you know—"

"Aye, that's the ticket, my lad. Good night."

"Good night—and be careful," said Brownrigg.

Poole's car turned out of the farm and vanished. The front door opened, casting a beam of light. I saw Brownrigg emerge from his own car, carrying a small black bag. "Good thing you kept him in the house," he murmured to Mrs. Shannon. "If the old fool had stayed outside, he might have met me with the whole pile right in my hands, and that would have cost us money!"

The man had lied to Jermy Poole. I pieced together what I had heard. Brownrigg had gone to town to visit the safe deposit. He brought out this bag he termed "the whole pile." That must have been the money Poole demanded to share, the fifty thousand dollars he said they stole from Mrs. Ross. Brownrigg had put Poole off. If Poole came back Wednesday he would not find Brownrigg, that was my guess.

And if Poole did not find Brownrigg, how about me?

If they left that place would I go along, or would I—as Poole so cheerfully suggested—be in an unmarked grave somewhere on that farm and past all caring!

"Breakfast!"

I had slept, after all. I had fallen into an uneasy doze at least and I had dreamed, for that was Camille's voice booming, "Breakfast!" and startling me bolt upright on my four poster bed. I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes and shuddered as I remembered what I had learned last night.

"Lady! You don't mean you can't give us something simple, like bacon and eggs—and fried potatoes!"

That exclamation in tones poignant with incredulity and growing tragedy boomed up from right below my window. It was Camille!

"We would be glad to pay for any trouble," a man's voice added. Jethro Parr's voice!

Jethro and Camille! They were looking for me!

I threw the blanket off and leaped out of bed with a scream on my lips.

The scream died in utterance and a heavy hand came over my mouth. I was caught by savage strength and thrown back on the bed. A pillow descended over my face. I had one glimpse of the door to my room thrown wide open and of my assailant, Brownrigg.

I gave Brownrigg something to think about for a savage five minutes. I kicked and clawed and bit at the pillow that was suffocating me. But the man's strength was too much for me. I gave up the struggle and lay still.

Brownrigg kept his hold of me, panting with exertion. In the pause there floated from the yard below, bitter mockery of my plight, Camille's parting words: "All right, lady. Be mean! I hope you get hangnails!"

And then to Parr: "And you! You're the bright boy that tells me all these country dames are the soul of hospitality and set out a meal for anybody that comes along! Why, I never was so Ritzed in all my life! The old frozen face!"

There followed the purr of an automobile engine and the click of changing gears. My friends, a moment ago so near at hand and eager to help me, were gone beyond call.

CHAPTER XVI

BETWEEN TWO FATES

BROWNRIGG relaxed his grip. For a few moments I lay panting, glaring up at him. Then I turned my face away and began to sob.

The exquisite cruelty of this waking to find my friends within call—and being unable to call them—was more than I could bear for the moment. Just then it seemed as if there was no hope left.

I heard Mrs. Shannon's voice at the door and Brownrigg left the room. She touched me on the shoulder: "Come, Miss Drake! No sense in that! Wash your face and get dressed. A bite of breakfast will hearten you!"

I choked back my sobs to glare at her. I was beyond thinking of any retort to fit the situation.

Mrs. Shannon construed my silence favorably. She bustled about and even helped me rise.

"What are you going to do with me?" I burst out, trembling between indignation and fear. "I suppose you'll murder me, next—"

"Don't talk like that! You won't be murdered if you behave yourself and show a decent amount of gratitude—"

"Gratitude!" I cried scornfully. "Gratitude—"

"Yes, *gratitude!* Gratitude to people who are trying to be forbearing and merciful toward you in the midst of all their own troubles. If you've got an ounce of sense in your silly head, you'll go down on your knees and thank God that He let you fall into good hands at a time like this!

"If it had been other people you were dealing with—well, I doubt if you'd be here now to make us trouble!" She paused at the door. "After you've had your coffee, he will see you," she added. "He wants to talk to you—"

"Brownrigg?" I gasped.

"*Mr.* Brownrigg," she corrected me grimly. "And if you take my advice, you'll listen to what he says and be mighty glad to do what he thinks is best for you!"

As good as her promise, she led Brownrigg to my prison when I had made a miserable pretense to breakfast.

Brownrigg was his old, imperturbable self, suave, well-dressed, calm. But I was glad to see two small, red scars on his cheek, evidence that my finger nails had done a little damage in that struggle.

I was dressed in that same costume I had grown to loathe and doing my best to maintain a scornful, calm contempt of the man.

He stared at me for a long time, silently, his curious dark eyes widening and holding mine. "Miss Drake," he purred sleepily, "I'm glad to see you more composed."

I scorned to give him an answer. Brownrigg sat down in the one chair and regarded

me steadily, his curious, strong, capable hands touching finger tip to finger tip on his knees. "I come here offering terms," he said finally. "I think, if I were in your position, I would listen carefully—and accept. They are not harsh terms—considering everything—"

"I demand to be let out of this house," I began indignantly. "If you don't let me go, my friends—and the police—will make it hot for you!"

The man smiled sleepily, just a ghost of a scornful flicker on his thin lips. "Really, Miss Drake, you know better than to talk that way! The police! One would think you were talking to a little boy!"

"I'm talking to a man who has mighty good reason to avoid the police!" I reminded him tartly. He gave no sign of hearing me. His suave assurance was maddening. I longed to goad him into some sign of distress.

"Whatever your business is," I went on savagely, my voice beginning to tremble, "remember it has led to one woman's death. Is it worth while adding me to your list?"

"Are you suggesting that I murder you?" Brownrigg purred. "I might even consider that, Miss Drake!"

He continued to stare at me like a graven image, his eyes wide, his expression wooden. And yet, though his face was placid, there was something ominous about that solid chunk of a man seated so calmly before me, his strong hands idle on his knees.

His perfect composure was an indication of a strength of purpose that chilled my blood. I believed what he said so coolly. The man was perfectly capable of considering my murder—and of carrying it out, as well!

I was completely at this man's mercy. What a fool I was to goad him on! And yet a sort of hysteria of fear and loathing made me snarl. "I don't doubt you are considering it. You'll do for me like you did for that poor old woman. Murdering defenseless women seems to be your forte—"

"I did not murder that woman," Brownrigg said evenly. "You know that, as well as I—"

"I know it?"

"You heard the news broadcast over the radio last night—"

"I heard nothing about your innocence! Nothing!" I stopped with a gasp. An indefinable flicker of his placid face told me he had learned what he wanted to know, that I had heard something by radio. Evidently Mrs. Shannon had confided her suspicion to him, along with a full account of her leniency.

Brownrigg considered me intently. What passed through his mind I can't say, but I would guess he was weighing just what I knew and its effect upon him. I had a moment to consider my own course, which so far seemed dictated by pure idiocy.

The man could do what he wanted with me, he was quite capable of murdering me. This was certainly no time to defy him! If ever I was to escape alive from this calm monster, it must be by seeming to do what he wanted. But what did he want?

He spoke at last: "I'm not going to waste time discussing what you think of me. Think anything you please. But I am going to offer you your choice of life, ultimate freedom and a useful sum of money, or—" He shrugged. "You have already put the words in my mouth. We are in a lonely place. Your disappearance would cause no comment where there is nobody to notice it!"

I heard myself saying hoarsely: "What is your—the other—offer?"

"There! That's sensible! We are going away from here soon. We are going to travel. We will go abroad, England, I think. Mrs. Shannon will be with me. We will live quietly for a few months. I want your company during that time—for reasons obvious to you."

"You give me your word I'll be safe "

"Providing you show yourself willing to help me. Providing you do as you are told and keep your mouth shut—"

"For how long?"

"A few months—perhaps a year—whenever I release you—"

"And what do I gain?"

"Your life. That's worth something, isn't it?"

"You mentioned money." I thought it well to give him the impression I was mer-

cenary. And I was curious to see how strong was his motive to insure my silence.

CHAPTER XVII

INFORMING A NEIGHBOR

"I WILL support you, of course," he said. "I'll go further, I'll make you a present of five thousand dollars when our contract ends."

I calculated a little. Five thousand dollars. Ten per cent of that fifty thousand Jermy Poole expected to share equally in. I would come much cheaper than Jermy!

"Why do you make that offer? I've got a right to know what I am going into."

Just the faint ghost of his smile answered me. He maintained his composed silence.

"I don't countenance murder!"

He only looked at me sleepily, his eyes widening like a contented cat gazing into the fire.

"Do I get out of this room at once?"

"As soon as you give me your word—"

"Do I get some decent clothes?"

"I'll attend to that at the first opportunity—"

I drew a long breath and asked God to forgive me for lying. "All right. I accept your terms."

Brownrigg rose leisurely.

"I want you to understand," he said, suddenly, so grim that I drew back frightened, "you have passed your word to me. You will keep that promise. You will do as you are told, always." He fixed his baleful, black eyes on mine and I felt my flesh crawl. "*Don't try to deceive me.*"

If he had launched into a lengthy catalogue of all the horrors he was quite capable of inflicting upon me, he could not have been half so impressive. Those eyes with their basilisk stare seemed to sear themselves into my brain and brand his will upon it. I nodded weakly, unable to get any words past my dry throat.

"You may have the freedom of the house to-day," Brownrigg added more pleasantly. "Come downstairs whenever you wish."

Brownrigg went out and left the door ajar, a sign to me that I was on parole. I was in no hurry to follow him. I had a lot to think about.

They meant to take me away, he said. There might be opportunity in that change, a chance to get out word to the police or to Jethro Parr. I would lose nothing by my bargain and I might gain mightily!

It was encouraging to know that I was worth money to this extraordinary man. Whether he meant eventually to pay for my silence or not, it was worth his while to offer it. He was playing for a big stake, a stake that involved not only his liberty, but that fifty thousand dollars.

I turned to go downstairs, resolved to carry out my pretense of aiding their plans just as thoroughly as they would let me. A noise from the road before the house halted me. I saw a mud covered automobile turn in and a hearty voice hailed the house.

A raw-boned, leather-faced countryman drove the car alone. He looked honest and genuine. Mrs. Shannon opened the door to answer his hail. "'Morning, Mrs. Shannon," he greeted her. "I'm driving into town to-day. Anything I can do for you?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Jackson, nothing—"

"I see yesterday, when I was passing, you just got back. Have a nice stay in the city?"

"It's not the country! I tell Mr. Brown I do wish he could drop all his business, so we could live where folks are neighbors, Mr. Jackson."

"Yes, ma'am! Why, even if we are four miles apart, we know each other. That's what I'm always telling my missus. She wants to live in town. Hunh! Fat chance you'd know folks four miles away in town—let alone next door. That's what I keep dinging at her!"

These remarks interested me not a little. Wherever I was, I knew now that it was no wilderness. The bleak, hilly, sterile back country of one of the counties north of New York, at a guess, but not totally unpopulated.

I saw, too, that Brownrigg and the woman were known. My impression that Mrs. Shannon considered the place home was confirmed. As Mr. Brown and wife, no

doubt the two of them had been accepted as city people with some freedom and a taste for country life.

And, another thing, this Jackson, who looked a decent, honest, simple soul, lived but four miles off! Help was not so far away, if I could find a way to reach it!

Talk of the weather and the soil had been going on. Jackson said he must start his long drive to town. "I'm real sorry I can't ask you in," said the hospitable Mrs. Shannon. "You know Mr. Brown brought his invalid sister out?"

"No! Not the one who is—is—" Jackson lowered his voice and touched his brow significantly.

"Yes, she's with us for a day or so and a constant care to me, I can assure you!"

"No better then?"

"Worse. Her mind is gone, Mr. Jackson. No hope! We had to take her from the sanitarium to move her to a place where they care for the ones that get hopeless."

Jackson stared at the house solemnly. "Too bad, too bad!" he condoled and drove off with many a backward glance.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN ENCOUNTER WITH MRS. SHANNON

I PONDERED this news about a demented sister. If there was any lunatic at large in that house, I had seen no sign of her! Then it dawned on me the simple explanation. I was the lunatic!

Brownrigg had anticipated any chance discovery of my presence there by fabricating this little fiction. It was an easy and plausible lie to account for my imprisonment and I applauded his ingenuity.

But my brain was whirling with greater thoughts than this. I had made up my mind to escape. The Jacksons, four miles away, were a goal worth trying for. If I could once get out of that house there might be hope for me!

Mrs. Shannon was house-cleaning when I went down. On the eve of another guilty flight, with everything at stake, that indefatigable housekeeper must rummage out every bit of linen and check it, get spare clothes into moth proof bags, count and inspect the china and silver, dust thoroughly every bit of furniture and generally "red up." I made myself her useful assistant at once, eager to win her approval.

"We no sooner get into this place than out we must go!" she sighed. "I declare, Miss Drake, it's the one spot in the world I really think of as home, and it seems I never pass more than a few weeks out of the year in it!"

"What a shame!" I agreed heartily. "It's such a lovely home, too."

"I carried out my own ideas here," she said, not a little proudly. "It's almost exactly like my mother's house in Vermont. Lord, I haven't seen the place since I was a little girl. But I remembered, and when the chance came I got things just as near like hers as I could find!" She sighed. "Mr. Brownrigg doesn't like it—"

"How odd!"

"He says it isn't comfortable. But I tell him if he would just try settling down here for a year, he'd never want to have any other home." She added quickly: "Of course, you know Mr. Brownrigg is my husband?" I looked my astonishment and she went on complacently: "Yes, indeed, Miss Drake. We have been married almost twenty-one years."

It was not a thing I would have boasted of, but she regarded Brownrigg with evident pride. Perhaps, to her, he seemed just a real smart business man or a shrewd Yankee trader—a man any woman would be glad to claim!

"I use my first husband's name for business reasons," she added. "But I mustn't talk of that. He wouldn't like it."

She sighed again. "I don't like England. I wish we didn't have to go there. I was there once. The people are very opinionated. I find that all foreigners are queer that way, Miss Drake."

Brownrigg had been gone all day and had not returned when Mrs. Shannon—as I must call her from old habit—and I sat down to an evening meal termed supper.

The day passed in a manner that reminded me forcibly of my aunt's home in Zenith. Together we gave that ugly old

house a thorough going over and tidying for its long rest. A more curious occupation for a dangerous woman criminal and her prisoner, I can't imagine. Yet it was easy to forget Mrs. Shannon's other side in her zeal for housekeeping.

Once during the day, so imbued with the house cleaning spirit I completely forgot myself for the moment, I gathered up a rug and stepped to the outer door, intending to shake it.

"Stop right there!" bade a grim voice.

I wheeled about to face the ugly, black pistol in Mrs. Shannon's hand. By the look in her face I am certain she would have used the weapon—and shot straight, too!

She took the rug from my arms without comment and carried it to the grass just outside the door and beat it, bidding me stay in sight just within.

My parole had very strict limitations.

I was in a torment to escape before Brownrigg got back. With that man about I had little hope of accomplishing anything. I was not even sure that I was a match for Mrs. Shannon—certainly not when she could use that pistol—but I meant to find out!

The day died out and my impatience was feverish. I watched windows and doors and planned situations I could not bring about. Not for a moment was I let out of the woman's sight, and no matter how interested she became in the work in hand, she never forgot to watch me, her prisoner.

The meal was finished and we must wash the dishes.

"We start some time to-night," Mrs. Shannon said grimly, "and I certainly don't mean to leave a dirty dish in my house until God knows when. I won't have it swarming with mice when I come home!"

We carried the dishes to the kitchen sink and filled the pan from the boiling kettle on the range. We washed and polished and put away, Mrs. Shannon ever near my elbow. The kitchen was in apple pie order at last.

"Now," said Mrs. Shannon, standing in the middle of the room and surveying the battlefield, "is there anything else? Yes, there is! Mouse traps!"

A gleam in her eye, she turned toward a door which must have led to a cellar. It was a stout old door and it was held fast by a wooden bar across it, which lay in iron sockets fixed to the wall. She lifted out the bar, opened the door and entered a little passage at the head of the stairs, fumbling with accustomed hand along a shelf where, I suppose, the mouse traps were kept.

In that moment of her absorption I saw my chance and the shock of discovery momentarily paralyzed every muscle in my body. Then I caught that door and slammed it and fumbled at the heavy bar that lay on the floor.

I caught the thick timber in one socket and was dropping it in the other when the woman's body struck the door with terrific force and weight.

I was prepared for that, my own shoulder pressed hard against the door. But her weight was greater than mine. The door sprang outward. Only the thick bar, caught at one end in the socket, prevented the panel flying open and flooring me at her mercy. The bar jammed and held.

I hurled my own weight against hers and got the door shut and the bar dropped into both sockets.

An explosion, that sounded in my ears like a cannon, came promptly and then a volley of them, while the wood of the door erupted into splinters. She was using the pistol at last!

I leaped back from the door, to one side and out of range. Later I found a neat hole through my dress where one of the bullets had clipped the wide skirt.

I wasted no time looking for bullet holes then. The kitchen door to the yard was near at hand. I unlocked it and ran out into the night.

CHAPTER XIX

I MEET A CAR

WHICH way to turn?

I had thought of that all day, trying to fix directions in my mind. Jackson's car had driven from the left and when it turned from the house it continued toward the right. Obviously his home lay somewhere down the road to the left.

Toward the road I ran, tripping over rough ground, falling flat once and into a rose bush at that. The road proved a rough, unpaved path, worn into ruts. I turned my face to the left and ran through the dark, pell mell.

There was danger in holding to the road, but the road was my only hope. I didn't dare risk getting lost in fields. If Brownrigg met me, returning in his car, I would have to take my chance of seeing him first.

I ran on as long as my lungs could stand it. When they ached beyond endurance, I slowed to a walk, but I dared not rest. My heart hammered terrifically. My mouth was dry and my throat burned. The night air was sharp with frost under a hard sky with bright stars, and I realized I was thinly clad. I stumbled on somehow, hoping and praying.

I must have gone on much more than an hour, when the air just before me sprang into misty radiance. I realized I was nearing the brink of a sharp dip in the road and that a car was climbing the hill. I heard its engine and leaped headlong for the ditch. I flattened myself face down among the dry, crumbling stalks of long dead weeds and grass, breaking through a skin of ice into puddles of muddy water.

The automobile, I dared not peer out to see what manner of car it was, roared just over my head and tossed loose gravel over me from its spinning wheels. I had not been seen.

I staggered on again, I don't know how long. One of my gilt slippers was lost. The other rubbed a sore spot on my heel. The muddy water of the ditch froze in folds of my skirt.

Nothing but the thought of Brownrigg and his vengeance kept me from dropping in the middle of the road and losing all hope. But I kept on and had no idea whether my course would lead me to safety or to a miserable death in a ditch.

Then I saw the light, a transitory glimmer at first, lost at once behind some intervening bush, then authentic, the glow of a lighted window. After vain search for a gate, I scrambled over a stone wall, tore my skirt into more shreds on barbed wire and crossed a farmyard to the house.

I stopped and peered in through the window into a kitchen. There, his sock clad feet elevated cosily on the oven bracket of a fat, shining cooking range, sat Jackson.

Jackson clutched the stem of a corncob pipe between his teeth. His eyes were intent on his thick, gray socks. He ran his fingers leisurely and regularly through the tow thatch on his head and wiggled his toes. Regular as clockwork, at fifteen second intervals, a little puff of smoke rose from his pipe bowl.

Facing the man in a low rocker, sat a plump little woman with bright, beady eyes and rosy cheeks that looked like frost-bitten winter apples. She rocked and read from a newspaper, evidently retailing the world's happenings to her lord and master.

That little domestic scene in the bright, shining farmhouse kitchen was just like a glimpse of Heaven to me. I stumbled, half numb with chill, to the kitchen door and beat on it with my fists. I heard Jackson's chair slam to the floor and the door was opened to me. I darted inside.

The two of them stared as though they had seen a ghost. I turned to the woman instinctively. "Will you help me? Will you let me stay here? Will you let me stay here—no matter what they say to you? Do you understand what I'm asking? I'm asking you to save my life!

"They'll murder me if they can! They'll lie to you, if they find me here. They'll tell you I'm insane. I'm not insane. I'm just as sane as you are, but I'm running away from the pair who murdered one woman and won't stop at killing me. You've got to help me!"

All this tumbled out of me, helter skelter. I had no time to plan an explanation or consider the effect of what I told them. For all I knew, Brownrigg might be along at any minute and I had to talk fast—and convincingly.

The pair of them stood stock still and solemn as church, staring at me. I turned again toward the woman, my hands out in appeal. She moved hastily, closer to her husband's side.

"For God's sake!" I cried hoarsely, "don't be afraid of me. There's nothing

the matter with me—except I ran away from them! If you want to do a Christian thing, if you want to help out the police who are scouring the country for them, keep me safely here. Don't let them get me. Don't let Brownrigg get near me!"

"Brownrigg!" Jackson spoke suddenly. "Did you say Brownrigg?"

"Yes, that's the man. They have the place up the road. Oh! You know them as the Browns, of course!"

A glance shot between husband and wife. Mrs. Jackson turned a scared yellow green. Her husband's jaw clicked ominously.

"I know what you think!" I cried, trying hard to keep calm and reassuring. "You think I'm his crazy sister, don't you? I heard the lie she told you this morning, Mr. Jackson—"

"I never said you were crazy!" Jackson assured me hastily. "I never saw you before in my life. How could I say anything like that against you!"

"I'm just as sane as you are, Mr. Jackson."

"Sure! Sure! That's all right—"

I began very earnestly, controlling my voice, doing my best under these weird circumstances to be possessed and natural. "All I ask is that you let me tell you the whole story. You will find it easy enough to corroborate what I say. My name is not Brown and I am no relation to these people you call the Browns. I am Enid Drake, Enid Drake the actress!"

I paused here, waiting what, in the theater, we would call "a hand." I expected them to exhibit signs of feverish interest. They only stared at me.

"You mean you haven't heard of me? You haven't heard of the missing witness in the Ross case in New York?"

Husband and wife looked at each other and shook their heads. "You poor thing!" Mrs. Jackson cried compassionately. "Do sit down! Look Emil, she lost her shoe—and her dress is all torn—"

"You must have heard of Enid Drake! Don't you read the newspapers?"

"Haven't got time," Jackson said curtly.

"But I saw Mrs. Jackson reading one!"

"Oh, that! That's one my son-in-law sent us from Seattle—"

"Then you must ask the state police about me. You must! I tell you it's a matter of life and death, more lives than one at stake! And if you let Brownrigg find me, he'll murder me in cold blood—he or that wife of his—"

Over the kitchen sink a mirror hung, I suppose for the benefit of Mr. Jackson's toilet when he came in from the fields. As I said this, I raised my eyes and saw, for the first time, my reflection.

I saw myself as the Jacksons saw me—my hair in disorder, my face scratched and soiled with mud, my torn dress, the whole weird effect of that fantastic costume and my own natural distress and fatigue.

I saw and stopped short with a groan. No wonder they thought me mad! I turned on them weakly with one more plea: "Please, for the love of God, shelter me and do what I ask—verify my story. Don't send me back to Brownrigg! Don't—"

"There, there," Jackson soothed me, his hand on my shoulder. "Nobody in this house is going to harm you. You just sit down—"

"Sit down, deary," his wife echoed. "Sit down and I'll get a nice, warm blanket to wrap you in."

"Don't you worry," Jackson said, "we won't let anybody hurt you!"

I sank into the chair, fighting against an hysterical impulse to scream. I must make them believe! I must!

"I'll get that blanket," Mrs Jackson said, bustling away.

Her husband followed her to the door that led to inner rooms. He spoke to her earnestly, something I did not catch.

Jackson returned and stood near me, awkwardly. "I guess you had a pretty hard time, miss," he remarked considerately. "My missus will get you comfortable. She's a good hand at nursing."

"Thank you, Mr. Jackson," I went on carefully, "I realize I must look strange to you, running in out of nowhere, in this condition."

"That's all right! You came to the right shop, miss! We'll look after you."

"I want your wife and you to hear my complete story. I'm going to ask you to withhold your judgment until I explain."

"Sure! And meantime nobody's going to hurt you. You just get that idea out of your head. We'll look after you!"

CHAPTER XX

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT

MRS. JACKSON finally returned, a blanket in her arms and a hot-water bottle and pills and a strip of red flannel and a bottle of liniment rolled into it. She went about wrapping me and warming me and dosing me and making me comfortable, so kindly and efficiently I couldn't keep the tears out of my eyes. She saw them.

"You poor, poor little kitten!" the good woman cried and took me in her arms. I sobbed on her comfortable, cushiony bosom and her hands patted my back soothingly. I was dimly conscious of her husband standing by, his mouth open, his face comically concerned.

Under Mrs. Jackson's ministrations my spirits rose. I submitted to all her doctoring like a lamb and sank back, bundled up, in a chair. "Now," I said at last, "I am going to ask you to listen to the whole story—and you must verify every word I tell you."

I launched into my version of the murder of Jeanette Ross trying, by every art I knew, to be rational and convincing. They paid me the compliment of solemn and absorbed attention.

In the midst of the narrative I broke off with a cry and sprang out of my chair. An automobile had stopped before the house.

"It's Brownrigg!" I screamed.

"Easy, miss!" Jackson caught my shoulder and pressed me back. "Nobody's going to hurt you while I'm here. Alice, see who that is." Mrs. Jackson bustled out of the room.

Trembling violently I caught Jackson's hands. "You won't let them get me? You won't—"

"It's all right!" he soothed me. "Everything's just all right, now—"

Simultaneously two doors opened, the door leading to the interior of the house and the door behind me, leading outside. From without came Brownrigg, muffled in a big coat. From the other way came Mrs. Shannon and, peering over her shoulder, I saw Mrs. Jackson's scared face.

"Enid!" Brownrigg cried anxiously. "Enid! My poor sister!"

I flung myself on Jackson. "Don't let him touch me! Don't! They've come to kill me!"

"Enid! You poor child!" Mrs. Shannon caught my arm. Brownrigg closed in from the other side. Gently reassuring me in the most loving terms, they tore me from Jackson.

"Thank God for rural telephones!" said Brownrigg, piously. "Mr. Jackson, you're a neighbor to tie to!"

"No, sir! No, sir!" Jackson protested eagerly. "Give Alice credit! Give her credit! She's got the brains in this family. It was her thought of the telephone, when I was at my wits' end what to do. It takes a woman to handle a case like this, Mr. Brown!"

"God bless you both," cried that monumental fraud, his fingers crushing the flesh of my arms like steel hooks. "You saved us a lot of trouble, this night. I've got the car ready and we'll take her to-night to that asylum, where she'll be looked after properly. Come, Enid. Come dear! Brother isn't going to hurt you!"

Brownrigg drove and he handled the big car with the skill of a professional racer. We tore along a rough, rutted, dirt road, swinging the narrow turns, darting down steep declivities, leaping up the hills, bowlders menacing the wheels, low branches leaping terrifyingly at us in the headlights' glare.

It was a wild, lonely, hilly wilderness we traversed, but Brownrigg seemed to know its crude roads by heart. The moment we were out of ken of the Jacksons, he opened the trottle wide and the big, closed car leaped at its task of annihilating space and time.

I huddled rigid and miserable with fright in the rear seat. Braced in the opposite corner, her eyes never off me, sat Mrs. Shannon. They were traveling light, these two, with a bag apiece at our feet and

Brownrigg's little black leather bag, the one he had brought from the city, tied into the front seat where it never left his eye.

I was in Mrs. Jackson's blanket—the good woman had insisted that it stay around me—and closed my eyes, trying to pray. I was closer to violent death on that ride than I hope to be ever again.

They had said not a word from the moment the car started, but their looks were enough. I expected no mercy from Brownrigg or his wife.

I had no idea where we were going and dared ask no questions. My throat was too constricted with terror to permit a word of any sort. I could only guess that they were on their way out of the country to some port where they expected to take a steamer, no doubt. As for myself, I had no expectation of getting that far.

Brownrigg slowed the car to a stop. He opened the door, swung out on the running board, and in a moment had opened the rear door beside me.

"Get out," he said grimly, addressing me.

My mouth opened and I stared at him, helpless and fascinated.

"Take her arm, Lydia. I'll take this side." His hand caught my shoulder. Between them they had me up and stumbling out of the car.

"Back off the road," Brownrigg muttered. "We don't want to leave any signs around. This brush is thick enough to hide anything."

All the strength went out of me. I hung limp between them, my feet dragged grotesquely as they swung me along. I couldn't scream; I couldn't think coherently enough to pray even in silence. God pity people whose end comes to them like that!

CHAPTER XXI

ON A LONELY ROAD

"DAMNATION!" Brownrigg stopped short and turned his head.

I saw what they saw, far down the long, fairly level stretch of road, the lights of a car that was coming toward us.

My captors wheeled about without a word and bundled me back into our car without ceremony. We leaped ahead again, into the night.

Mrs. Shannon watched through the rear window and so did I. Brownrigg drove like a madman, but the lights of that other car persisted. They would be gone for three or four moments at a time, but always they reappeared.

"If he's after us, we'll soon know!" Brownrigg grunted over his shoulder. The big car started down a particularly atrocious hill, the brakes squealing as it racked its springs, jumping ruts and bowlders. It rounded a sharp, steep turn and rode, suddenly as if on air. We were on pavement.

Then we seemed to fly.

Down the fine stretch of concrete we leaped out as though we had sprouted wings, the engine singing a contented rhythm, the purr of rubber tires its accompaniment.

"He's still there," Mrs. Shannon announced.

Brownrigg grunted. "I see him. It's all right—"

"He's coming fast."

"I know a trick or two, yet! The old detour we used, while they built the river road."

"Yes, yes! But be careful—that mountain road—"

"Let me alone."

I saw Brownrigg's hand touch the button on the instrument board. Our lights vanished. We leaped into darkness. I heard Mrs. Shannon mutter a brief prayer.

How Brownrigg did it, I can't say. He must have known his road like a book. We swerved suddenly off the pavement again and went bouncing up a hill. I had my face pressed to the window and as my eyes grew accustomed to the dark, I made out the silhouettes of another forest that flanked us on the right hand. But on the left the tree tops dropped below the road. We followed a mountain side.

Our car lurched wildly and came to a sudden stop.

"I saw the light," Mrs. Shannon announced suddenly. "We're followed."

"That's all right." Dimly I saw Brown-

rigg's silhouette rise and the car door opened. He spoke rapidly and urgently. "Lydia, keep the girl with you. Use the gun if you have to. Pull her down in the car and keep yourself out of sight."

"Where are you going?"

"It's all right. We'll find what this is. If it's trouble"—Brownrigg chuckled grimly—"I'll look after everything."

I was pulled roughly from the seat and thrust down on the floor of the car, Mrs. Shannon pressing close against me. The barrel of her ugly pistol prodded my ribs.

"You make one squeak," she hissed in my ear, "and I'll fix you! You thought you were pretty smart about that cellar door, didn't you!"

I knew I need expect no mercy from her. We huddled there together, the pistol in my ribs.

The night was silent now, not even a whisper of wind in the branches. The suffocating beat of my heart pounded at my ears like hammers.

There came, after a long wait, the sound of the pursuing car and a sudden burst of light that grew dazzling around our car. We heard the pursuer stop.

Dead silence again, then a man's step scuffing the gravel of the road. I felt Mrs. Shannon craning her neck to peer out and I lifted my own eyes.

The headlights of the car behind us lighted the lonely road and the wildness surrounding it. They showed us one man, running toward our car.

I glimpsed the amazed look on Mrs. Shannon's face as she recognized old Jermy Poole.

Jermy Poole came prepared for trouble. The old butler carried a pistol in his hand.

He surveyed our quiet car and roared out, "Brownrigg! Come out of there!"

When he got no answer, Poole stopped suspiciously. I saw him shake his head and sidle away, trying to get himself out of the light he had foolishly provided.

I gaped at this speechless, expecting every second the crack of a shot from Brownrigg, in his ambush. There was no shot. Brownrigg was too clever to risk unnecessary shooting.

Poole circled the car at a distance, menacing us with the pistol. The silence and lack of any danger was too much for him. He shouted out suddenly, "Brownrigg! You come out of that, my lad! Trying to make a fool out of me! You pup! Try to double cross a pal, will you? I'm on to your tricks, and Hi'll 'ave my share, too, 'swelp me!" The H's began to drop as his excitement rose. "Brownrigg! You 'ear me?"

Not a sound in answer.

"Don't you try any funny business on me, my lad. Run out on me, would you? Telling me to come back Wednesday. Hi can smell a rat as far as the next one. Checked up on you when Hi got back to town, I did! Come out and bring that bloody loot along with you, or by Mighty, Hi'll fetch you out!"

Poole stood staring at the silent car, his round old face working with rage.

In the shadows behind him a fir branch moved suddenly. My eye caught the glint of something—something behind Poole, slipping up under cover of the thicket.

Regardless of Mrs. Shannon, forgetting entirely the gun she held, I snatched open the door of the car and leaped out. "Poole!" I screamed. "Jermy Poole! Behind you! Look behind you—"

The blanket that swathed me tripped my steps. I tore the thing off. "Jermy Poole!" I screamed.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN DAWN CAME

MY effect on Jermy Poole was more than I counted upon.

The old man's jaw dropped. His hands went up as though to ward me off and he staggered back.

"Lola!" Poole quavered. "Miss Lola! Oh, for God's sake—"

"Behind you!" I screamed. "Look out behind! Behind you, Poole!"

The thick brush parted and the stooping, skulking form rose. It was Brownrigg. His right arm flashed up and something in it caught a glint of light as his blow crashed on Poole's skull.

The old man sagged to his knees, wavered and toppled face down.

Brownrigg stood over him, looking curiously at the butt end of the pistol with which he had struck the murderous blow.

It was no volition of mine that made me drop and incidentally saved my life. I swayed forward and simultaneously Mrs. Shannon's gun spat fire and death so close it singed my cheek.

Yet her shot that came so close to ending my life, saved it. There was no faintness in me now! I was on my feet almost before I touched the ground, and I ran as I never ran before, straight across the road, plunging into the brush and the darkness.

Half a dozen shots followed me. The popping seemed continuous. I ran headlong, collided with a tree, reeled back and ran on again. Solid ground dropped from beneath my feet. There was a terrific crashing of branches, one giddy interval of falling through space and one final crash that extinguished my world in a burst of fireworks.

I gained consciousness, aware of the bitter, frosty chill, and aware of a throbbing pain in my side, where evidently some ribs had been broken. Perhaps ten or fifteen minutes had passed. I could only judge by what I heard, and the voices came from directly above me, so close I thought my last minute had come.

"Not a chance!" It was Brownrigg speaking. "It's a sheer drop of fifty—seventy-five feet—and rocks at the bottom."

"You're not sure, I tell you! That looks like a clump of trees just below us. If she isn't dead—"

"Dead or alive, we're not going to waste any more time. That boat sails at ten tomorrow morning. She'll be dead enough by that time. I tell you she jumped right over the cliff. I saw her go—"

"And Poole?"

Brownrigg's voice was sharp with disgust and loathing. Damn it, forget the old man! Don't talk about him. I—Lydia come back to the car and stop wasting time!"

Presently I heard their car starting off.

I lay cramped terribly, my knees under my chin, the stabbing pain in my side making me giddy. I kept telling myself I must do something, that I could not lie here this way and expect to live to tell about it. Everything was in a queer jumble. My thoughts would not focus.

I did not faint again, nor sleep, that I was aware of, but curious things went on, voices speaking in my ear—Jethro Parr's and Camille's, and sometimes Mrs. Shannon's slightly nasal drawl. I seemed to be in Jethro's studio again, in that iron cot, and yet there were solemn stars overhead, too, and rough branches that stabbed my flesh.

I saw the sky pale with morning. It did not seem long in coming, nor did it come quickly, for time ceased to exist. But I watched the change and knew it was another day. And when, in the growing light, I could make out my situation, I sobered very suddenly at the terror of it.

I had gone over the cliff top fair enough, and brought up in a tough little thicket of maples that had anchored their roots where a projecting bowlder collected the dirt and dead leaves that showered down. If I had not been jammed in so tightly between the twining, tough saplings I must surely have rolled out some time in the night and fallen a distance that made me sick to look at.

But it was possible, by gripping the laurel and roots that followed this fault in the rocks to reach the brink above and I did it—did it without stopping to consider my risk. There was no other way out!

I pushed through the thick brush and bowlders and stumbled toward the road, gasping for breath because of the pain of my broken ribs. And on the road, wheeling around at the alarm of my stumbling approach, I saw the sweetest sight I ever hope to meet—two gray uniformed members of the New York State police. Their motorcycles lay beside the ditch, and between them was a huddle of clothing that was poor old Jermy Poole.

In front of me, on my desk as I write, lies a copy of Jermy Poole's deposition. It is transcribed just as the old man talked it to a court stenographer in the hospital

at Peekskill. And at the end is a wavering cross marked in ink, Jermy Poole's last conscious act—the signing of his name under witness—before he died.

Before I tell Poole's story, I must say a word in praise of the State troopers. Had it not been for the keen eyes and quick wits of the State's good men in gray, Brownrigg never would have been caught and I probably would have died of exhaustion, lost in the wilderness of that unused road over the mountain.

The two men I met there in the road beside Poole's body had a regular patrol along the paved highway, the trunk-line down from Canada. They were looking for a gang of bootleggers that was suspected of using the road regularly to run liquor.

The detour Brownrigg took in the dark crawled for a long five miles through desolate, wild country, and had not been used or even thought about by motorists for a matter of three years, since the paved road found a shorter cut around the mountain.

Passing the turn-off that morning, the State men noted little signs—a broken branch, the track of tires in the soft spot where the ditch crossed, a scuffed place in the earth where a wheel had failed to gain traction. They wheeled their cycles over the old road in search of a booze truck—and found Poole and me. I shall never forget my debt to them!

While I lay wrapped around like an Egyptian mummy with layers of bandages meant to protect my broken ribs, Jermy Poole, in the same hospital, talked his last in the presence of a county prosecutor, the State police, and the stenographer.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ODD STORY

I WORKED for Mrs. Jeanette Ross forty-three years. I was the oldest servant in her employ. And I may say, without boasting, I was nearest to the old lady. She used to talk to me about things she would never think of telling anybody else, not even Mr. Carden, her lawyer, who was an old friend, but always kept in his place, you might say.

I was trained for a butler in England, by my father, and I came to Mrs. Ross's employment while she was in England with Mr. Ross, just a few years after she was married to him. They were opening the New York house in style, and they needed a man that knew all the ropes, like me.

I have known the man called Brownrigg for a matter of about twenty-one years, but I first knew him under the name of Weedon. Stanley Weedon was his name then. I can't say which was his right name, but Stanley Weedon he used to call himself, and he cut quite a figure as a sort of actor and magician.

I saw his show one time, it was in a music hall, or vaudeville as you might term it in America. It was a good show. He did things I never could explain, like tying a young girl into a big bag and passing a sword through the bag, cutting it all to shreds, and there wasn't any girl at all, where you expected to see a bleeding corpse.

Then he would make a pass over the bag and untie it, and out would step the young woman, smiling and polite as you please. He did other tricks, too, like hypnotizing people that stepped up out of the audience and making them perform all manner of ridiculous antics.

I have known the woman, Lydia Shannon, for a matter of twenty-five years, as closely as I recollect. She came to our house as Lydia Hearn, and served as a second maid. She married a young fellow, Chester Shannon, our gardener, but he deserted her after a few months, and never was heard from any more.

Lydia Shannon stayed with us all the time she was married to Shannon and after. She was a clever young woman, and quick to learn, and I never heard anything against her. She went to church regularly Sunday evenings, and minded her own business, and was a good, practicing Christian. Next to me she was closest to old Mrs. Ross of any of us.

About Mrs. Ross: She was always a woman of great force of character. In her younger days, when I first went to her, she had what would be termed a nasty temper, if one was to refer to a common person. Of course, being what she was, people just

said Mrs. Ross was very firm, and made the best of it.

Mrs. Ross had another trait that all of us who were near her began to notice more and more, after she was a widow and growing older. I would not tell about such a thing if I was to be hanged for it, except I feel that the oath I have taken to tell the truth bids me make everything clear. And perhaps my old mistress, wherever she is now—and I hope it's a happy place—will look down on me and understand me better.

Mrs. Ross was what might be termed close or stingy or niggardly about money matters. She always kept up the old house, and she paid us servants good wages, and looked after those that was sick or in bad luck; but she was very thrifty about many things. She had no need to be. Colonel Ross had left her a great fortune.

For instance, one of the things she was thrifty about was using up any scraps of food that was left from her table. And she never bought new clothes, turning and mending and darning the old clothes and making them last. And she saved all letters and bills that came to her and used to write on the scraps of unused paper whenever she had anything to write down. Bits of twine and wrapping paper she had the maids save, too.

As she got older, Mrs. Ross used to worry a good deal about her fortune and what would become of it. Many a time she has said to me earnestly, " Poole, don't expect anything! I pay you wages, and if you've been a careful man you've got something put by for your old age. You'll never get a penny out of me when my will is read." She used to say that to all six of her servants, and it was understood that all of her money would go to charity.

Another thing about Mrs. Ross, she had a daughter. I suppose even people who used to know her would be puzzled to remember that. Lola was her only child. I was very fond of Miss Lola, a nice little girl, and a quiet, shy young woman that was held in and kept down by her mother.

When she was seventeen, Lola Ross had an affair with a young man she met at a charity bazaar. She fell in love with him, and they contrived to meet without letting her mother know. They got married in secret, and came together to tell Mrs. Ross —that was after Colonel Ross's death.

Mrs. Ross wouldn't hear of the marriage. She said the young man was a nobody, and his family were nobodies, and no good would ever come out of it. She was in an awful temper, as I well know, being kept in the room all the time it was going on by her express orders.

I can see Miss Lola as if it was yesterday, clinging to the young man she had married and pleading with her mother to forgive them. She didn't look anything but a child, with her yellow hair and big blue eyes. It was very sad. It ended by my being told to show the young people to the door and never admit them again.

I never did anything for the old lady that went more against the grain, as the saying is. That was a long time ago, as near as I remember, it must have been about forty years ago, but I shall never forget it. No, I shall never forget Lola. I heard afterward, through gossip, that she and her husband went West somewhere and were eventually lost at sea in a shipwreck.

I told the news to Mrs. Ross, about Lola's death. It must have been fifteen years after. She didn't say a word. You would have thought she never had any daughter at all. Now that wasn't a healthy state of mind for a lady going on into single old age, and you can't tell me it was!

She never would mention Lola's name for years after, but I know she thought about Lola and how she treated her. She just couldn't help it! Lola was her daughter and she loved her when she was a baby. She was a part of her own flesh and blood, borne out of her own body, and she couldn't forget her. It isn't human or right!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FINAL PLAN

I WILL now speak of the woman Lydia Shannon, who became Mrs. Weedon or Brownrigg, whichever his right name is. Lydia Shannon met this performer and they were married, it must have been all of twenty-one years ago. Then

she left our house. I did not see them again for a matter of some years. Then, hearing they were living quietly on Twenty-Third Street, I called on them on a Monday, which was my evening out.

They lived in a flat in an old house on Twenty-Third Street as Mr. and Mrs. Brownrigg. Lydia explained that Weedon was her husband's stage name. Brownrigg was not on the stage any more. It was a little while before I learned what his occupation was, first calling on them in a purely social way.

Then I found that he was setting up as a spiritualist, claiming he could communicate with persons who have passed on. He had quite a following, I believe, among various people who wanted to talk to their dead loved ones or sought advice from the other world.

At first I was somewhat skeptical about his powers to see things that other people can't see, but one time Brownrigg persuaded me to take a sitting, promising it wouldn't cost me a cent. He went into a sort of trance in that old back parlor down there on Twenty-Third Street and told me things about myself and my life in England when I was a boy that astonished me.

Nobody could have known those things but me, yet in his trance Brownrigg could see them. The second time we had a sitting, still purely in a friendly way as between old acquaintances, my own father, who has been dead many a year, came into that room and spoke to me. I saw him as plainly as I see the faces about me in this hospital.

It was my father to the life. He told me I had been a good son and a good man and he wished to see that my old age was provided for, so I would never have to worry. He said I was worrying about money matters, which was true in a way.

I had saved a few thousand out of my pay from Mrs. Ross, and often wondered when the old lady was gone if it would provide for me. He said if I would invest a thousand dollars in a way he would reveal to me, I would double the money. I was to buy a stock in an oil well that he named.

I thought over my father's advice and took it. He was right. I had had the stock about six months when I got an offer from a broker down in Wall Street and sold out for double the money. After that I went to see Brownrigg oftener in a business way, and he brought my father back from the other side, and I followed the advice my father gave me. I bought some other stocks, and one day I found I was ruined. The stocks were no good. The police and post office people said the companies were frauds and all my savings of a lifetime were wiped out.

I went down to see Brownrigg right away. "Look here," I said, "my own father thought too much of his son to give him bad advice like that! Now I'm ruined and I don't believe it was my father ruined me, either."

"Yes, it was your father," he said. He had a queer way of making a person believe anything, when he looked them right in the eye. "It was your father came to you in this room," Brownrigg said. "But you must not always assume that because a person has passed into the life beyond he can always pick a winner. Was your father a rich man in his lifetime?"

"No," I said, "he was always frittering away his savings on some kind of a scheme."

"There you are," said Brownrigg. "Yet you expect his advice to be better, just because he is dead. Why, it's only on rare occasions conditions are so perfect I can establish communication with the other world, or they with us! How can you expect a man on the other side to be an infallible judge of the stock market?"

Then Brownrigg said to me: "But I will not let you lose a penny through knowing me. I am going to take care of you, Poole. The opportunity will come and you will never regret it!"

I continued to visit Brownrigg and his wife and we used to talk over all the old times at our house and discuss the old lady, Mrs. Ross, and how she would never leave her old servants a cent of her money.

It used to make me bitter, thinking of all the years I had served her—my whole lifetime, you might say—and when she passed on I would be out in the street, too old to find work and without any money to take care of me.

Finally Brownrigg proposed a plan that would make us all rich. He said if I could get the old lady interested in spiritualism and get her to consult him, he could make a lot of money for us. We talked it over many times and he persuaded me to sound out Mrs. Ross.

Mrs. Ross had lived on alone so long and had become so set in her ways I didn't see how it could be done, but Brownrigg told me just how I was to go about things. First, I was to take a book on communication with the life beyond the grave and leave it where she would find it. I did that.

Then I left another book. After some months Mrs. Ross asked me about the books and I said they were mine and I had mislaid them. She had read them both and she seemed very interested. We had many a talk about life and death and what goes on after, and I told her how I had seen my own father as plain as I saw her.

She was very much interested. She wished she could talk to Colonel Ross and settle some things that were troubling her mind. I told her about this man Brownrigg and the upshot of it was a matter of five years or more after the thing began, I got Mrs. Ross to go see him. He refused to come to her.

Altogether the thing went on many years. Mrs. Ross's interest got stronger all the time and she said some of the results and revelations Brownrigg gave her at these sittings were wonderful. One day Brownrigg handed me five hundred dollars and said more would follow.

And more did follow. Little by little I began to get back my savings. I don't know that he got the money from Mrs. Ross. I mean I never saw him take it from her. But he gave me to understand I was getting paid for my services in this matter and I believe I was.

This went on a matter of eight or ten years, Mrs. Ross going to see Brownrigg maybe once a month. They never said how they got the money they gave me, but from things they let drop, I gathered it came from advising her about investing in stocks, just like my father had advised me.

Mrs. Ross always made a great secret out of her visits to Brownrigg and he encouraged her to keep it up. I used to take her myself, going to the corner and hiring a taxi instead of her own carriage and riding with her to his address after dark. Then it all ended for a matter of a few years.

Brownrigg and Lydia went away. They bought a little farm up in Sullivan County and lived there for a time. Mrs. Ross kept pestering me about him and when would he come back and could I persuade him to come back? She must have advice. She was badly worried.

I say it with all due respect, but I think she knew she could not live much longer, her heart was bad, and she hadn't done all the things she ought to have done. There was that matter of Lola, for one! She would never let off asking about Brownrigg and why couldn't I get hold of the man again.

About a year ago I ran into Lydia Shannon quite by accident, on the street. Her husband was in town, and I met them at a hotel and we talked. I told them about Mrs. Ross. Brownrigg said this was too big a chance to miss. We would all make enough so we would never have to worry again.

So the business began all over again, me taking Mrs. Ross at night to the house Brownrigg had rented near Washington Square. We used to go on my night out, so the other servants would think nothing of my absence, and Mrs. Ross fixed it so they would think her in bed.

I did not go into the house with her. I got the taxi and took her to the house and left her there. Brownrigg always put her in a taxi that would drop her at our corner. Then I would be waiting to let her into our yard and house.

About six weeks before Mrs. Ross's death, Brownrigg said to me one day: "Poole, we have a cool little matter of fifty thousand dollars to divide between the three of us. You share equally with Lydia and me."

I wanted the money then. Brownrigg said to wait. "That isn't all," he said. "I have one more idea and it is going to net us fifty thousand more, or I'm a fool! It's the best idea I have had yet."

He didn't tell me what the idea was, but

the night I took Mrs. Ross to his house for the last time, the old lady told me something special was expected. She was terribly excited. I was afraid for her health, she was so wrought up.

As God is my witness, I know nothing of how Mrs. Ross was killed. I know nothing of what happened when the taxi left the door of Brownrigg's house.

I waited for my mistress until two o'clock the morning after that night. Then I got badly scared. I went out and took a taxi to Brownrigg's house. I knocked and rang, but nobody answered the bell. I saw that the only thing for me to do was give an alarm, and I telephoned to Mr. Carden, her lawyer.

After the news of Mrs. Ross's death I was in a bad way. So help me, God, I had no hand in killing her, but if everything got known, I was afraid nobody would believe that. Finally, when I could stand it no longer, I rented a car and drove to Brownrigg's place in the country, knowing he would go there if he was alive.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW IT ENDED

WHAT little remains of Jermy Poole's revelation, you already know. He listened once more to Brownrigg's lies, but when he returned to town the old man got to worrying about his share of the money they had filched from Mrs. Ross. He remembered the incident of his father's ghost and mistrusted the fraud. He returned again to the farm, just in time to pick up the trail of Brownrigg and his flight.

While Jermy Poole lay dying at the Peekskill Hospital and I lay bruised, sore, but happy at last in the company of Jethro and Camille, hurriedly summoned to my side, the police in New York boarded a liner bound for Bermuda and discovered Brownrigg and his wife. At least Brownrigg was a consistent liar. He had never meant to go to England!

Tickets and reservations were made in another name by a man who called at the line's ticket agency. The escaping pair boarded the boat as though to bid this passenger good-by and exchanged places with him. The accomplice was never found. I wonder if he was not the same man who called on me as Dr. Kennedy. He was described as wearing dignified whiskers.

Poole's affidavit and my own direct testimony served to send Brownrigg to prison for life on a charge of murder, but not for the murder of Jeanette Ross. It was for Poole's death Brownrigg is paying that penalty.

The rest of this story I got from Mrs. Shannon, who is living quietly on that farm in Sullivan County, where I spent such wretched days of peril.

Jethro Parr and I had been happily married for a matter of three months when I got a note from Mrs. Shannon asking if I would come to her. We went together, Jethro and I.

The place was unchanged. It preserved its grimy, uncomfortable air throughout, and except for a new panel in the kitchen cellar door, where Mrs. Shannon's shots had splintered the wood, I could see no difference of any kind. Jethro and I went up to look at the little attic bedroom, where I awoke after the ministrations of the bogus doctor Brownrigg sent to the studio.

"To think that beast held you there while Camille and I were so close to saving you!" Jethro cried. "And it was only merest chance of taking a wrong turning that brought us here at all! The police in Wappinger's Falls were holding some poor, unfortunate girl who had been found wandering. Demented, poor thing!

"Camille and I got a rent car and went tearing up there on the chance it might be you. The driver took a wrong turn coming back, and we had to follow the dirt road cross-country to the other highway. If we had ever guessed, Enid!"

Jethro's arm about me was a mighty consolation as we stared together into that room!

Mrs. Shannon tactfully had stayed below while we visited my old prison. The woman was subdued in manner by her grief for Brownrigg. She really loves the scoundrel, and I know she visits him in prison at every opportunity.

"The case is closed," she said to us when

we sat down in the horrible front parlor for a visit. "They can't do any more to my poor, unfortunate husband, the villains! There's no harm in my talking about that old woman now, and I think I owe it to you, Mr. Parr, to explain just what your wife had to do with that—"

Jethro interrupted hastily. "You couldn't convince me Enid had any guilty knowledge of that murder, if you took a year!"

"Do be still!" I implored. "I want to know at last!"

"Mr. Brownrigg was a scientific man," his wife said proudly. "He is a very deep student and has a wonderful mind, and if he had turned his attention to it, I know he would have made a great name for himself.

"Radio interested him from the first and he began experimenting, working out a little sending set by which he could broadcast from one room to another. Then he got this idea of using the scheme on Mrs. Ross.

"Mrs. Ross had grown sort of cool toward him. She did not always follow the advice Mr. Brownrigg was able to pass on as the spirits communicated through his psychic self. 'I'll show that woman something that will convince her!' he said. 'It's a deliberate fake, but it will convince her. Then maybe she'll listen to me!'

"His plan was to use the radio and a big crystal ball. The radio brought voices to the room and the ball, where his sitter looked, showed them a vision of the person speaking. That was done by a camera and a series of mirrors he invented.

"We had never mentioned Lola, Mrs. Ross's daughter, to her. She had no idea I was connected with Mr. Brownrigg, and of course never dreamed Mr. Brownrigg knew of Lola. 'If we can find the right girl,' Mr. Brownrigg said, 'everything will be fine!'

"We hit on this idea of advertising for radio talent, and the moment I saw Miss Drake—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Parr—I was satisfied. When she took her hat off, I was really startled by the resemblance to the old photographs I found once in Mrs. Ross's room. So that was Miss Drake's—I mean Mrs. Parr's—connection with the case."

Mrs. Shannon paused and sighed. There was silence. I cried out: "But who killed her? You haven't told."

Mrs. Shannon's eyes snapped angrily. "We're not murderers, I'll have you know! The woman was not murdered. She had a weak heart and the shock of that vision in my husband's crystal—and your voice reciting those lines, was too much for her. She died of heart failure—and a bad conscience. She was a wicked old woman and it was God's judgment on her."

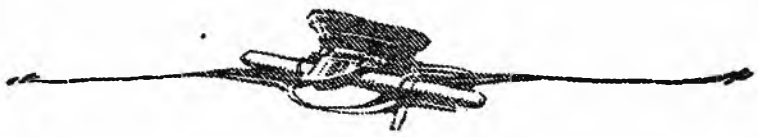
Mrs. Shannon told us more before we left about Brownrigg's alert generalship in the moment of that tragic death. They had gone at once for a man they knew, who had a large covered van. Since they used only four rooms of the house the business of removing all furniture and evidence of their stay was simplified greatly. The work was done in two hours. And in the interval while they were gone, I had slipped out of the studio.

Mrs. Shannon still reproaches herself for neglecting to lock the hall door! I had found that dead woman and been scared into flight at sight of a policeman, whose errand, I am convinced now, was nothing more than to close the area gate left ajar by Brownrigg in his hurry to get the moving van.

The frightened pair discovered my absence on their return. Something had to be done about me and it took Brownrigg several harassed days to guess how I had gone and where.

The rest you know, a story that brought me troubles enough, but came, at last, to a happy ending.

THE END



And now came the second package to shock the Viennese police chief

MURDER BY PIECEMEAL

By Joseph Gollomb

A BIT OF STRING, A FAINT TATTOO, AND HALF A HUNDRED PHYSICIANS BRING A GRISLY MURDER HUNT TO AN END

A Story of Fact

MR. GOLLOMB never fails to tell a real story and an absorbing one. Here he recounts one of his most unusual and grimmest.

As a case that shocked even the calm minds of the Vienna police, when it was brought to their attention it appeared on its face the work of a bestial fiend. The boldness of it set a new precedent for bravado.

And because all other attempts apparently led nowhere, the detective geniuses of Austria were thrown back upon the one resource of imagination. College professors were called in for their expert advice upon a crime that would have to be preconceived before it could be discovered.

Meanwhile the supposed murderer was toying with the police, flaunting his act in their face. It seemed that a life was in all probability being sacrificed slowly to satisfy a savage hatred.

The time element became supreme. The skill and experience of the police might be defied, even in the apprehension of the slayer. He would already have carried out his horrible intention.

The matter of justice was only incidental. Never again might an abnormal personality be able to work itself up to its present bestial frenzy.

The best medical talent of the city was enlisted in the mystery, as further evidence warned that the murderer was still playing his game, according to schedule. The situation became frantic. A woman's life would be the price of further delay. An

inconceivable torture upon a living human body was the means of this continuous warning.

Then the shreds of evidence began to point to a maniacal plan. First a bit of string; then the faint tattoo mark of a snake on human flesh. But delay came again— And half a hundred doctors redoubled their efforts for a more definite trace. Then suddenly the strange story was reported. What it was and the tragic end to which it came are told here.

SELDOM, if ever, do the police chiefs of a great city feel shocked at a crime. But they may feel pity or indignation. A policeman must start life with a certain toughness of sensibilities; or he acquires it. Otherwise he could not stand the daily contact with crime and cruelty that is largely his lot.

One morning, however, the chief of police in Vienna did get a real shock when he opened a package that came through the mail addressed to him. What came in the package was bad enough; but it would not of itself have shocked a veteran police official like himself.

For, unhappily for the human race, murder and desecration of the human body are only too common a phenomenon in the crime annals of a big city. The shock itself was due to something that was strongly implied by the sending of this package.

For, five days earlier, he had received through the mails a similar package. In each case a sheet from the most popular daily in Vienna was wrapped about a cigarette box and tied with a bit of common string. The address had been typed with a new machine, as was apparent from the clearness and cleanness of the type. But in the first package, when opened, was found the index finger of the left hand of a woman.

Thereat the police assumed that a murder had been committed and that for some reason the murderer was exhibiting evidence of the crime to the police. The package was minutely examined for clews. But three hundred thousand people read daily the newspaper which made the wrapper.

Perhaps as many people threw away such empty cigarette boxes as the one in which the finger was sent. The string was just as common a variety. The typewriting of the address, as I have said, indicated that the machine was so new that it had not yet acquired those bits of deterioration that often make typewriting as individual as handwriting.

The address on the package, "Chief of Police, Vienna," certainly offered no clew. The postmark showed that the little package had been mailed at a letter box on the busiest corner in Vienna. The police had nothing, therefore, wherewith to work.

And now, five days later, came the second package, the one that shocked the chief of police. Wrapper, box, string, and typing of the address were practically the same as on the first package. But the finger this time that came in the box was the third of the right hand; again a woman's; undoubtedly the same woman: and this time there was a plain gold marriage ring on the finger.

But what shocked the chief of police was that after examination it was clear that the victim must have been alive four days after the first finger had been cut off; and was alive only the day before the second one was sent. Suppose she was still alive and more such packages should come!

What a picture! Somewhere a fiend was carving by bits a living human being, a woman! With the desperation of human beings working to save another human being from horror worse than death, the Vienna police chiefs bent all their energies on a hunt for clews.

But there was no inscription on the ring. The wrapper, box and string yielded as little information as the first package; the ring was hopelessly lacking in difference from the many thousands of other marriage rings worn by Viennese.

The combination of these factors could have pointed to half a million people in Vienna. One can't go examining half a million people for a single criminal. And never before was time so terribly vital a factor in solving such a gruesome charade as this one.

Every day, every hour, every minute might spell the difference between life and death, horror and rescue. But the police heads felt that with the little scent they had to help them find the trail to the house of the horror, they were beaten even if they had plenty of time.

A Skilled Hand Is Shown

Thereupon they did what they usually did when they came up against a problem beyond their skill. They telephoned to one of several university experts in criminology, who helped them out in such emergencies.

For, as I wrote in the previous article of this series, in Vienna the police have neither the marvelous organization of Scotland Yard, the individual dash and initiative of the Paris police, nor the marvelous man-hunting machine of Berlin.

The Viennese have to depend on what university professors and scientists in their laboratories can do for them. And what these have done for the police of Vienna has put that city on a par with London, Paris, and Berlin in the record for the hunting down of criminals.

When, therefore, the chief of the Vienna police felt that he had reached the limit of his resources in the mystery of the two fingers, he telephoned for help to a certain assistant professor in the department of criminology in a near-by university.

" Bring up the two packages," the scientist ordered over the telephone. " And make speed!"

In a high-powered automobile, racing at emergency speed, the chief of police drove up with the two exhibits in their original wrappings. The scientist was ready for him in his laboratory. Powerful microscopes were there; chemical reagents; a spectroscope; and other instruments. Also waiting for the exhibits was a professor of morbid psychology of the same university.

" Don't waste time, professor, examining the ring for clews," said the police chief, undoing the two small packages. " We've been over it in our own laboratories. Not the slightest shred of a clew! But we've got to make speed just the same!"

With a pair of delicately fashioned pincers the scientist picked up the two fingers and examined them.

" Yes." He shook his head. " It's only too clear that the poor woman was alive four days after the first finger had been amputated. The condition of the second finger shows that. And she was alive only yesterday. She may be alive still. From the character of the finger, I should say she is a woman of refinement."

" We gathered that much," the police chief said. " We must work fast, professor!"

The professor was already on the trail.

" The amputation was so cleanly done that only a skilled hand at such things could have done it," he announced. " A surgeon, a physician, an assistant or demonstrator in a dissecting room."

The police chief had seated himself by the telephone and at the professor's first words took up the instrument. A clear wire to police headquarters had already been arranged. At the other end of the wire waited his assistant.

" Character of amputation indicates a surgeon, a doctor, an assistant or demonstrator in a dissecting room," the chief repeated. " Work on that till further news."

A Love of Cruelty at Bottom

" We'll set Squad Two on it." The assistant turned to issue orders.

In the laboratory the scientist was saying:

" And you realize, of course, that the person guilty of this atrocity did not pick his wrappers, containers, string, and mode of addressing them merely by accident. The fact that you have been able to deduce so little from the two separate packages indicates that there has been at work a student of the technique of crime, or that there has been employed an agent of such a type. Together with the skill shown in amputation, things point to a an experienced hand doing the work."

" There is also a strong indication of love of cruelty and exhibitionism," added the professor of morbid psychology. " It is very likely that this love of cruelty is what has drawn the person to whatever training or pursuit has given him his skill in amputation or dissection."

The police chief telephoned the added hypothesis.

" But, speed, gentlemen!" he murmured.

Analysis by Spectroscope

The examining scientist now turned to the ring and the chief of police thought he was going to waste time examining what the police had already declared devoid of clews. At police headquarters, where the ring was taken off the finger to be examined for any inscription or jeweler's mark that might be found there, a paper tag had been tied about the ring to mark it for identification.

Now the police chief was surprised to find the scientist examining through a magnifying glass, not the ring, but the string.

" What makes you so interested in that string, professor?" he asked. " I myself tied it about the ring. And I can tell you all about its previous history, for it came out of my own desk drawer."

" I am sure you can tell me all about the string up to the moment you tied it about the ring," said the professor. " But can you tell me why the string throughout all its length should retain its original colors of twisted blue and white, and yet change to pale yellow for the quarter of an inch that has touched the inside of the ring?"

The police head stared at the bit of discolored string indicated. It was as the scientist indicated, discolored only at the point of contact with the inside of the ring.

" Why, that must have happened since ten o'clock this morning, while it was in my own pocket!" he exclaimed. " What do you make of it?"

" That there was something—or still is—on the inside of the ring that has acted chemically on the bit of string, where it touched. Let us see if we can find what that something is."

Delicately snipping off the quarter inch of discolored string, he picked it up and placed it on a microscope slide. Then he dropped a single globule of liquid on it. With a bit of absorbent cotton on his pincers he swabbed the inside of the ring with some more of the liquid. Of the resulting smear on the cotton—which had also turned color at the contact with the inside of the ring—he made a solution.

He subjected the two containers of what was on the inside of the ring to several tests. He himself looked at them through the microscope. A colleague from the chemistry department, an expert on qualitative analysis, subjected them to examination by means of the spectroscope.

He did the latter test in the same way that astronomers analyze the chemical composition of planets billions of miles away from the earth. It is known that different substances in a state of ignition give off different kinds of light.

If, then, the light is allowed to pass through a prism and the resultant arrangement of colors is thrown on a screen or paper, a certain characteristic distribution of the spectrum or rainbow appears.

An Acid to Remove Tattooing

Magnesium, for instance, when burned, shows the red stripe of the spectrum so and so wide, blue so and so much narrower, *et cetera*. If, now, the light from some distant planet passed through the telescope and prism shows the same distribution of colors in the resulting spectrum, the scientist knows that there is magnesium in that planet.

He even can tell its approximate proportion in the chemical composition of that planet. It was in this way that the bit of string and the swab of absorbent cotton were analyzed. Finally the chemist announced:

" There was indigotin disulphonic acid on the inside of that ring. Also it was liquid only three or four days ago—perhaps as late as yesterday. It is that which discolored the string."

" And what is that acid used for most frequently?" asked the police chief.

" Well, it can be used to remove tattooing," the chemist said.

"O-ho!" cried the scientist in charge of the analysis. "Then let us take another and closer look at the finger that wore the ring."

He adjusted the microscope for examination of opaque objects, and put the finger on the stand. As he did this he was saying: "This means that our cold-blooded gentleman or lady also may be well acquainted with the use of chemicals. Of course he did not foresee that a string would be tied about the ring and would thus betray the presence of the acid."

"You're a Snake," It Said

Even as he spoke the professor began to put down on paper a series of fine dots.

"You see something, professor?" asked the police chief.

"I think so. The skin is slightly corroded at one place where the ring must have covered it. I detect the following design."

The paper on which he put down the dots now showed what might be interpreted as a conventionalized drawing of a snake coiled. The whole design, drawn the size it showed on the finger, was so small that the width of the marriage ring would cover most of it.

"Undoubtedly meant to indicate a snake, this tattoo," the scientist said.

"If so, who tattooed that finger—who had it done, I mean? What would such a symbol done in tattoo suggest to you, professor?" he asked the alienist.

"It might be the expression of a morbid love for reptiles on the part of the woman," the alienist said. "But if that were the case, she would have had it tattooed large enough to show."

"Instead, it would appear that the woman actually wanted to hide it," the examining scientist concluded. "For she wears her marriage ring on the third instead of the second finger, as is usually the case."

"If she wanted to hide it," added the alienist, "I should guess that the tattooing was not of her own choice. It might have been done to her in spite of her, just as one brands cattle."

"But why so small a tattoo?" asked the police chief.

"Perhaps it was meant only as a reminder of some sort to the woman," the alienist replied. "'You're a snake!' some one may have wanted to remind her; some one who had the power to tattoo that finger—"

"Next to the marriage ring finger," suggested the examining scientist. "Let us play with the supposition. Let's see what emotion might have expressed itself by this compulsory tattooing—if it was compulsory. 'You're a snake!' it said to the woman. Treacherous! And this is put here to remind you of it, to warn you!"

"Aren't we beginning to spin fancies?" asked the chief of police.

"Perhaps," replied the alienist. "But with morbid or psychopathic gentry—as I suspect the author of this atrocity to be—fancies move to action. Fancies to these people are what logic is to reasonable folk. In fact more.

"I may reason to myself that I ought to go to the dentist without delay. But I will probably delay. Whereas, with a morbid mind, fancies, no matter how finely spun, have tremendously compulsive power. With the gentleman we are studying—we can be practically certain it is a man who has done the amputating—the thought that a woman was treacherous as a snake would become an obsession.

A Never-ceasing Reminder

"And it would be one that would not let him rest until he expressed it in some way. He would want that thought branded into the woman's consciousness. The very word 'brand' would probably come into his mind and he would begin thinking how he could bring that about.

"Perhaps he was not yet desperate enough actually to use a brand burned into the flesh. But tattooing it might not be so far away as a thought. Thinking of doing it, he would be strongly impelled to do it. Suppose him acquainted with the use of anæsthetics. What a temptation to overpower the woman, anæsthetize and tattoo her!

"What a constant reminder it would be to her of his thought! 'Here, my lady, is a little reminder of what I know you to be, treacherous as a snake!' he might say after

he had done it. 'A little reminder. So tiny that most people won't notice it, even if they look closely at your finger. As yet it is only for yourself, my dear—this reminder. But unless you mend your ways—'"

The alienist stopped as he saw the dubious look in the face of the chief of police.

But the examining scientist came to his support.

"You must remember that my colleague has specialized in the workings of the morbid mind," he said to the chief of police. "I am interested in his speculation in this case. Suppose we follow his fancy a little. Will you go ahead, professor?"

Hunting an Original of a Picture

"Well," continued the alienist, "we don't know, of course, whether this woman he warned was his wife or another's. It is fairly certain that this marriage ring is hers. Now what kind of treachery does he warn her she must not continue? Infidelity is not usually described in just that way. Treachery means betraying to an enemy. 'You have betrayed me to my enemy—or are about to—I am reminding you of it!' that tattoo seems to say.

"Now, a man's enemy is either an individual or a group of individuals. It may be the police. I am inclined to think so in this case. I think so because of the trouble the man took to send those two exhibits to you, chief. It is as if the man were saying:

"'You'll betray me to the police, eh? You will point me out to them as a man they want? Well, let me help you. I myself will guide your finger to them!'"

The chief of police nodded.

"I must say, professor, you also make it sound plausible—once I grant you your premises."

"Most people," continued the alienist, "think in terms of familiar images or figures. Start saying: 'Cold as—' and most people will finish with: 'ice.' 'Pretty as a picture.' 'Sweet as sugar,' and so on. 'Treacherous' almost inevitably goes with 'snake is the grass.'

"Also a mind like that, joined to a sinister courage, would answer a threat with a savage attack. It would be an attack begun in stealth, but would go on to extreme cruelty. Slow torture, a Satanic irony could be expected. 'We'll send your index finger to the police, my dear!' I can imagine him saying, 'You wanted them to go where it pointed, you know.' And several days later it might have been sent.

"'What! Your friends the police haven't been able to follow where you pointed? Well, we must help them again—'"

The police chief rose.

"All this seems to me pure hypothesis," he said. "But it is better than anything we have. So I shall work on what you gentlemen have furnished me. Meanwhile, if you deduce anything else, please let me know at once."

The police chief hurried back to the city and called a council of his lieutenants. He described for them the hypothetical picture the scientist had drawn. They received it with the utmost respect, for Vienna police have learned to appreciate what science and university trained minds can do in the way of solving mysteries that baffle the naked eye.

Then began a process of elimination. A single surgeon, physician or assistant in a dissection room among tens of thousands of them was sought. The hypothesis that this man probably had some acquaintance with the technique of how to hide traces of crime narrowed the hunt considerably.

Never did the police chief devote so many men to any one hunt or work them so hard. Nevertheless, with the heavy handicap of time and scantiness of clews, the force assigned to the case found itself swamped.

The Professor Proves His Case

Meanwhile publicity was kept at a minimum. The fear was that the man sought would be either warned, frightened, or, what was most probable, infuriated if he imagined that the hunt was drawing nearer; and would either flee or complete his grimly program.

The chief of police then called a secret conference of some fifty men in medical circles. To these he outlined the situation.

"So you see, gentlemen," he concluded, "at best we have little enough to go on,

few men and little time. We must, therefore, draft you. Each one of you will be considered in this case a deputy of mine. You are asked to inquire about quietly, in your schools, lecture and dissection rooms, among your professional friends."

It was a new situation to his audience. But an appalling thing was taking place somewhere; and every one of the fifty willingly accepted service.

In the next few days an increasing body of rumors, gossip, suspicions and a number of well supported accusations poured into the office of the chief of police from the deputy detectives. In this way several physicians were caught for malpractice; and a larger number of charlatans and dangerous quacks were brought in. But they were all by-products of the hunt; none of them the real quarry.

Then one day a keen young surgeon on the staff of one of the big hospitals came to see the chief of police. He was one of those the chief had asked for help.

"I must say in advance that I have very little that is tangible to offer you," he said apologetically. "Nothing but a vague suspicion."

"Let me hear," requested the chief.

"We had on our staff up to two months ago a woman physician, Dr. Anna Weiss, a diagnostician," the surgeon said. "It came to our notice that in her diagnosis of the patients assigned to her she laid too much stress on surgery as the inevitable remedy.

"Then we learned that she made it an almost invariable practice to recommend a certain surgeon, a Dr. Schmitz, not on the staff of the hospital. She told patients in each case that he was highly specialized in the particular operation she urged. Her renomination for a place on the hospital staff did not go through.

"One reason was the following: We found, in tracing the records of the patients sent to Dr. Schmitz for operation, that in a considerable number of cases the operations, ordinarily one-time affairs, were so unfortunate in their outcome that subsequent operations had to be resorted to. These were done also by Dr. Schmitz and paid for, of course, with additional fees.

"Now it is extremely hard to prove that a surgeon deliberately makes another operation necessary. But this occurred so many times that it began to be whispered about that Dr. Schmitz was either a poor surgeon —or worse. But in medical school days he had a brilliant record for surgical work and for the first three years of practice his work more than carried out that promise.

"Then talk began to spread of exorbitant fees which Dr. Schmitz demanded for operations. It looked as though the man were determined to get rich quickly. So much did he ask that in spite of his excellence as a surgeon his practice fell off.

"At that time his work still bore up well. It was then, too, that the woman member of our hospital staff, Dr. Weiss, was seen very frequently in his society. She was married to an unsuccessful business man, but the two did not get along well and seemed to agree to disagree without going to the bother of a divorce.

"At any rate the accepted understanding among their friends was that she was much more interested in Dr. Schmitz. This was largely borne out by the zeal with which she sent patients to him.

"For some time after Dr. Weiss left our hospital—this brings my story up to several weeks ago—she and Dr. Schmitz appeared to be on as friendly a basis as before. Then he was seen to pay attention to another woman, a nurse who helped him in operations. Soon after that there took place a violent quarrel in one of our cafés between Dr. Weiss and Dr. Schmitz.

"Dr. Schmitz is known for his cold-blooded, but unforgiving temperament. He maneuvered the quarrel in such a way that she was left at the table alone, and raving. After that Dr. Weiss was not seen anywhere. That was ten days ago. Her office is closed.

"And Dr. Schmitz seems to have left the city, too. He has not been seen for a week. No one can tell us where either of them is. What makes me think there is something peculiar in all this is that the nurse, Fraulein Gertha, with whom he has been seen on increasingly friendly terms, also is gone. That's all I have to report" the young surgeon concluded.

" I'll take charge of it myself," the chief replied.

In half an hour a squad of his picked men was running about like bloodhounds on the trail of Dr. Schmitz, Fraulein Gertha, the nurse, and the missing Dr. Weiss. In an hour and a half one of them picked up the trail of Dr. Schmitz. He had been seen by his patients boarding the train for Semmerling that morning.

Semmerling is a noted winter resort in the mountains, an hour from Vienna. Several big hotels, a colony of cottages and some boarding houses cluster on a mountain height and overlook a valley, one of the most beautiful in Europe. Here and there are isolated cottages, or tiny chalets, owned and occupied at times by painters and writers in search of quiet for work.

In one of the most isolated of these a light showed, but so dimmed by blinds and shutters that from the big hotels it was scarcely visible. About it the night was as dense as the sky, which showed not even a star, so that any one, even on the lookout for visitors, would have missed the half a dozen or so figures gliding through the dark toward the cottage.

Now they were at the windows and the door of the chalet.

A strange cry rose on the night air, the wail of a woman just outside the chalet. It was such a cry as one would raise in a last extremity of pain. It died out as suddenly as it arose.

A shadow sprang across the dimly lighted window. Another.

The front door creaked. Then it opened. A giant of a man clad in long white smock appeared. In back of him a woman, also in white peered over his shoulder.

Suddenly, stern voices cried: " Throw up your hands, doctor!"

The giant leaped back and pulled the door with him. But some one had thrown a log of wood, and the door catching on it would not close. At the same moment several men hurled themselves on the giant. A woman's scream rang out as a terrific struggle ensued.

It came to an end suddenly when the butt of a revolver crashed down on the skull of the giant and stilled him.

The screaming woman was caught as she tried to escape down the valley. She was the nurse, Fraulein Gertha.

In an inner room on an operating carriage was the bound and half conscious form of a woman whose hands were swathed in thick bandages. The reek of ether filled the room.

She was revived, but it was hours before her mind at all approached sanity. It was not till she was shown Dr. Schmitz and Fraulein Gertha handcuffed and surrounded by detectives that she began to falter out a coherent story.

She confessed to having conspired with Dr. Schmitz to have patients undergo operations when they were not necessary. They coöperated in the grisly business, she as a diagnostician, he as an unscrupulous surgeon, until he became interested in Fraulein Gertha. Then a violent quarrel resulted in the café in which he publicly humiliated her.

Later she called him up on the telephone and said:

" I'll hand you over to the police!"

He was silent for a time; then he pretended to be sorry and suggested that they make up and go up to his cottage in Semmerling for a week end.

When she gladly consented, he took her up there and she suspected nothing until suddenly he clapped a cone of ether over her nostrils. When she recovered consciousness she found herself bound, bandaged, and deathly sick, as after an operation. Fraulein Gertha and the doctor were both there. It was then that she learned what had happened.

" You'll hand me over to the police, will you?" he grinned. " Well, the little warning I gave you when I tattooed that snake on your finger doesn't seem to have affected you. All right, we'll send your hand to your friends, the police—piecemeal!"

The blow Dr. Schmitz received from the revolver butt developed into a skull fracture that finished him. Fraulein Gertha received a long prison term. Dr. Weiss, crippled, was sufficiently punished by her experience.

And the police of Vienna leaned more heavily than ever thereafter on their expert allies in the university laboratories.

Over the nose of the craft we could see the huddled mass

PREY OF THE LAGOON

By Florence M. Pettee

A RASH ACCEPTANCE OF AN INSOLENT DARE, AND TWO FINANCIERS CRY FOR THE PROTECTION OF DIGBY GRESHAM

CHAPTER I

MASKED MOTIVES

I WAS poring over that fascinating pamphlet, "The Chirography of the Criminal." The hour was well advanced. The roar of traffic in the street had long since died down. Digby Gresham was absorbed in the contents of a tiny test-tube which he had just emptied into a glass mortar.

I was suddenly aroused by a rapidly approaching motor. It came to a stop with a squealing of breaks just below our window.

Gresham's head jerked up. He strode over beside me and peered out.

Two figures were emerging from the big limousine. They were easily visible by the the light of the street arc. One was a tall man, slim despite his enveloping motor coat. His collar was turned high, his cap slouched low over his face. The other was short and thickset, clad also in a big motor coat. About his neck a muffler was flung. His soft hat was crushed down over his face.

"What have we here!" murmured Gresham. "Our mysterious arrivals are in great haste. They leave the motor still running."

I could hear the soft purr of the engine in the stillness of the night.

"Are they attempting a Turkish bath?" I flung back. "Muffled like that on this sultry evening!"

Gresham's reply was nipped by the ringing of his bell.

"Wait here, Brandon," he said. "I'll go down to let them in."

Nothing loath I complied. Digby Gre-

sham, criminal investigator, was continually being embroiled in strange affairs. Mystery was the breath of his life.

Without ado Gresham flung open the door, saying, "enter, gentlemen."

Then as the two stepped in, "This is Mr. Brandon, my assistant."

"Ah," said the short man in a deep bass voice, "we are not unfamiliar with 'Dr. Watson' Brandon, the famous detective's shadow."

He bowed pompously to Gresham.

I flushed, though not with displeasure

Gresham placed chairs beyond his glass-topped laboratory table. He arranged the light so that the faces of the two would be brought out in high relief.

"Better throw off your togs," he suggested. "It's beastly hot in here."

Silently they obeyed.

I instantly recognized the two who sat before us with their wraps off. The tall man was Collins Travers, the short one Halsey Ralston. They were members of the firm of Travers & Ralston, criminal lawyers.

Ralston cleared his throat. "There is something you ought to know. The thing happened to-day. We received an extraordinary, a really remarkable telephone message. Or I did. I instantly recognized the voice; our biggest enemy, a man who hates us immeasurably—Jerome Clackett, the financier."

Instantly I recalled the reason for the open warfare existing between these men and the millionaire Clackett. More than once had there been ugly whispers about certain operations of Clackett's. By those underground channels to which Gresham has access, we had heard, not three months ago, of the manner in which Travers and Ralston had held a "big stick" over the financier; that Clackett's hand had been forced in a way which must have been exceedingly unpleasant to one of his ruthless temperament.

Furthermore, there were faint whispers of a hundred thousand dollar reward which had silenced Messrs. Travers and Ralston from disclosing their damning evidence. Therefore, I was well aware of the deep-seated hate which must exist between Clackett and the pair before us.

"Indeed," Gresham was saying, "and what was the nature of Mr. Jerome Clackett's message? Something unpleasant, I take it, or you would not be here. A threat?"

"If it was only an open threat our cue would be clear. But what do you think, Mr. Gresham? That blackguard had the audacity to invite us down to Clackett House for the week-end, giving as an excuse 'important business' which must be discussed there. He particularly stressed the *must*."

Gresham's face fell. He drummed on the glass-topped table.

"But that's not all! The insolent cur had the cheek to suggest that we must accept his invitation *if we were not afraid to come*. Damn it, sir! He hinted that we hadn't the nerve to meet him in his own lair, so to speak!"

Gresham smiled whimsically at the angry, glowering faces. Enraged dignity was written large over the two.

"Mr. Jerome Clackett," he mused, "is a profound student of the *genus homo*. He knew his hint that you were afraid to go would bring you just as surely as though he had planned to have you abducted and carried there secretly. You accepted his surprising invitation?"

Sickly smiles crinkled the two countenances.

"Y-y-yes," stammered Ralston, "we're to leave the first thing in the morning."

"Indeed," commented Gresham. "Then why do you consult me?"

Travers cut in excitedly. "We want some one to know where we are and under what circumstances. We know Jerome Clackett for a scoundrel. He would stop at nothing short of murder. We have long been thorns in his flesh. We have much knowledge concerning certain of his operations. Naturally he scarcely holds any affection for us. And he fears us. That's the situation in a nut shell. But beyond it, I know something sinister is afoot.

"Clackett would never invite us to the house on the lagoon, where many secret conferences take place, unless there were some deep-laid plan under way."

"Surely," parried Gresham, "Clackett

is altogether too wise and cautious to court the consequences of doing you physical harm under such circumstances. We aren't living in the twelfth century. The Borgias have been defunct for a long, long time."

"That's why it is all the blacker," insisted Travers. "Whatever it is, he is beastly sure of his hand."

"My advice to you," deliberated Gresham slowly, "is to reconsider, to change your mind and to send belated regrets. Why permit a taunt to place you in what must be awkward circumstances? Such an act would by no means be craven—merely wise."

"Oh, no, no," protested the two in chorus, "we'd never hear the end of it! Clackett would send broadcast his story that we were a couple of cowards. Oh, no, no!"

"Nonsense," flung out Gresham impatiently. Then, shrugging his shoulders, "if your decision is made, I fail to see how I can help you."

"But you can," insisted Travers. "For if you do not hear from us by Sunday night at eight o'clock, when we plan to return, we authorize you to take steps as our representative. We will call you up the moment we return. But silence on the wires after eight Sunday night is your cue to act. You may be sure that we have met with foul play."

"Very well," agreed Gresham.

From a drawer he brought out a fountain pen and a sheet of paper. The pen-point traveled busily over the sheet for a few moments.

"Better sign this," he suggested briefly. "It merely states the conditions existing between Clackett and you, that you have dangerous knowledge against him, which you are decent enough not to reveal, and that you have gone to Clackett's house by the coercion of a veiled threat as to your physical bravery—your fearlessness."

Without hesitation the two affixed their signatures.

"You will see that that paper is put away most carefully, won't you?" asked Travers. "It might cause a deuce of a row should our fears be unfounded and we return safely Sunday night."

"Certainly," retorted Gresham with a hint of asperity. "It will be consigned to my safe and returned to you whenever you call for it."

The two arose, reassumed their discarded garb and departed.

CHAPTER II

THE HIDDEN HAND

"COUPLE of boneheads," grunted Gresham as they were whirred away. "Funny how folks shy away from the hint that they are afraid. Just such foolhardy threats have sent more than one into oblivion. I confess that I don't like it a little bit, Brandon. I think we are in for a great deal more than we know. Messrs. Travers and Ralston are admirable legal men, but they are no match for the wily cunning of Jerome Clackett. Of that I am certain—"

The quiet was broken by the sound of a swiftly approaching motor. With long strides Gresham returned to the window.

I followed him, saying, "are they coming back?"

"No," answered Gresham curtly, "it's a gray roadster. Some one else in a hurry."

The car, to my disappointment, tore by. I had half hoped that it would come to a stop under our arc-light.

Gresham drew the shade. He picked up the note which the two men had signed and went to the wall. He pressed a knob. A panel slid back disclosing the door of a very competent strong box. With a few twists of his supple wrist he soon had the door open and the signed paper securely deposited within. Then he returned to his long-neglected mortar.

I was in the act of lighting a cigarette when my hand paused in midair. The break in this operation was caused by the sudden, peremptory ringing of the bell.

"Humph!" remarked Gresham, "we seem to be holding an 'At Home.'"

So for a second time he went down the stairs, loath to be interrupted in that experiment on which he had been working.

Almost immediately he ushered in a tall, powerfully built man, who also wore a long

motor wrap. But its material was of linen and less out of place on so stifling a night. He pulled off his cap and mopped his brow. As the big square of linen came away, I all but gasped.

For before us stood Jerome Clackett!

"Suppose you're Brandon," he said abruptly to me. "Well, my name is Clackett, Jerome Clackett. Don't have to introduce myself to Gresham here. He knows everybody, either by sight or reputation."

Without waiting for the invitation the big man flung himself into the chair Travers had vacated not half an hour before.

"Why don't you have the numbers on your front door bigger?" he demanded truculently. "I ran way by them."

"You would," answered Gresham quietly, "at the pace you were setting in the gray roadster."

"Humph!" flung out Clackett brusquely. "Shouldn't have parked out under your light anyway. Not that fond of publicity. I need your help, Gresham, at your own figure. For I'm a hounded man."

Not a muscle moved in Digby Gresham's face. He merely regarded Clackett with that unblinking stare which many find so disconcerting.

"Yes," continued the financier irately, "for the last month it's been hanging over me. I've been the recipient of anonymous notes, threatening me with death."

"Any alleviating conditions?" asked Gresham.

"No. That's just the hell of it. From the letters it would seem that there is nothing I can do—that my fate is inescapable. I've been hoping all along that the motive for the written threats would sooner or later come out. Actually expected that I would be commanded to leave a certain sum. But nothing of the kind—not the hint of a chance to buy off with money. Damn it all, Gresham, the tone of every one is so deuced final, as though the mind of the writer were made up and my fate sealed."

"Why have you waited so long?"

"I'm no coward. As I told you, I suspected at first that the notes were merely a clumsy beginning which would eventually end in demands for money."

"And why do you think now that blackmail is not behind the anonymous threats?"

Clackett mopped his brow.

"I don't like the tone of the last note. It's stronger than all the others taken together. It seems so damned sure of itself. But beyond that, for the first time, it mentions *when* I may expect to make my exit."

"Show me the message."

He fumbled inside his coat. He brought out a folded note and passed it to Gresham, watching him intently.

With fastidious fingers Gresham spread it before him on the glass-topped table. There was silence for a few seconds.

"What do you see?" demanded Clackett impatiently.

"A piece of ordinary wrapping paper, such as is commonly used in many markets for the wrapping of meats—a message written, or rather printed, in lead pencil. Both precautions show a shrewd intent on keeping in the dark. It would be impossible to trace the source of the common paper. And instead of using ink, which might be identified, an ordinary soft lead pencil is employed, thereby making identification doubly difficult—I might say impossible."

Clackett's face cleared. "Glad you realize that it is a deep one and not at all simple."

Gresham continued imperturbably: "The terseness of the message is convincing. It seems to point to a mind which has come to a definite conclusion. Moreover, the character of the printed letters points to a person who will stop at nothing, to whom fear is almost unknown."

Clackett nodded with a faint approval in his face. "That's what I feel," he blurted.

Gresham went on: "The message reads:

> "This is the last notice. Death is inevitable. It shall come to you within four days of the receipt of this warning.

"At what time precisely did you receive this note, Mr. Clackett?"

"At six this evening."

"Where did you find it?"

"On the desk in my library on the first floor."

"Had it gone through the mails?"

"No. It was not even in an envelope. It lay open under the paperweight on my blotter."

"Did all the other notes reach you in this same mysterious way?"

"Identically, except for the time. The hours were always different, falling between noon and midnight."

"Um, rather a long range! But there are certain significant facts to be deciphered from this note. In the first place it was written by a person of undeniable education—"

"How do you make that out?"

"Correct spelling, even to *inevitable*, and the nicely correct use of the word *shall* in the last sentence."

"Anything else?"

Gresham didn't answer. He was frowning at the note.

Finally he asked abruptly: "Do you suspect any one, Mr. Clackett?"

Clackett banged a big fist on the table.

"I do," he thundered, "that's why I came here. There are only two persons who hate me like that."

"You are indeed fortunate if you can narrow your enemies down to two."

Ignoring this, Clackett continued: "I've had a feeling all along that it wouldn't take many guesses on my part to narrow the suspects down to two." He leaned forward. "Mr. Gresham, either one of two men is quite capable of such a thing."

"And they are—"

"*Collins Travers and Halsey Ralston.*"

I tremendously admired the wooden aplomb with which Digby Gresham received this disclosure. Not a ripple disturbed his face.

"Why these criminal lawyers?" he asked.

"Because I hold a big stick over their heads. They have some shady knowledge which, as servants of the law, they should disclose. I could run them out of town on it—if I were that type."

"Forewarned should be forearmed," suggested Gresham. "If one knows where the lightning is to strike, why the danger? Why worry?"

"It is a good point," answered Clackett. "Ordinarily. But the thing is getting on my nerves, even though I feel positive that it's one of the two or both. So I brought the thing to a focus this afternoon. Long before that note came I called up the firm of Travers and Ralston and invited the two down for the week-end."

"Just why did you do this?"

"Because I wanted to have them where I could watch them. You see, I've been getting the threatening notes on an average of one every twenty-four hours. I reasoned that were there a cessation during their week-end visit, I would have positive proof that they were behind the thing."

"Were they running the thing," remarked Gresham, "it would be far simpler for them to continue when on the premises."

"No," declared Clackett, "not without making a very suspicious change."

"What do you mean?"

"The notes have always appeared on my desk without failure. I plan to station in relays of two my most faithful servants hidden so that they can see for a certainty the entrance of either Ralston or Travers into my library at any time during their stay."

"Why haven't you had your desk watched before?"

"I have. Got my private secretary, John Rodney, and the servants to do a bit of sleuthing. Rodney's trustworthy and a painstaking plodder. The servants have also been with me for some time. But in every instance the notes have in some weird and mysterious way still appeared, despite the watchers I had posted."

"Why couldn't the same thing continue, new guards notwithstanding?"

Jerome Clackett leaned forward again. "Because," he declared tersely, "I see a way out of it if my household is being bribed. I want you to post one of your operatives—two if need be."

Gresham tapped a long finger on his desk.

"That's not a bad idea," he observed. "Certainly it's very suspicious for the notes to appear uninterruptedly, were your personally posted spies keeping *bona fide* watch. At present I'm inclined to suspect inside collusion in the matter."

"So am I," confessed Clackett ruefully, "though I hate to admit it. As I said, they've been with me for some years. I thought I could depend upon them."

There was no mistaking the real regret in his voice. This attitude made me see the man in a new and more favorable light.

Gresham was thinking profoundly.

"Do you know," he said at length, "the thing interests me mightily. I have half a mind to come down myself, seconded by Brandon here. If I am any judge, I believe that whatever is hanging over Clackett House is too important to minimize."

Clackett folded his arms thoughtfully, lost in deep contemplation.

"I believe it is very important," he said. "I am practically certain no one is playing a poor joke on me to keep me in hot water. How could you manage it, so that my servants wouldn't get wise to your presence and tip off Travers and Ralston, who are due to-morrow?"

"That's easy," answered Gresham. "Brandon and I are not unfamiliar with effective, recognition-proof disguise. Invite us down as a couple of extra guests. What time do you expect Ralston and Travers to-morrow?"

"In time for lunch at two. Clackett House is situated on a small lagoon. It's a good run down the coast."

"Very well," responded Gresham. "Receive the two for lunch. Then very casually let it be known that you expect two others, a Mr. Long and a Mr. Stranger. I will be Long. Add that we are keen for quail shooting in which your estate abounds—it does, doesn't it?"

"Great quail country. None better," answered Clackett proudly.

"Good! We'll plan to arrive for dinner—make it eight thirty or nine at the latest. I'll have hard work getting away, but I'll do it. Then at dinner that night we'll talk quail shooting *ad nauseum*. We'll let it be known that we are going to spend every minute away from the house with a gun and shooting togs. That will explain our absence when one of us is carefully cached where we can watch what goes on in the library while the other spies about the place."

"Suppose," mused Clackett slowly, "that that note isn't bluff, that it is the last letter, and that I—well, that I am in actual danger?"

"That has been admitted before. And if either Travers or Ralston is plotting against you, as you believe, you may be sure that I will make myself responsible for their every move."

"Good," answered Clackett, arising.

Mechanically he put out a hand for the note.

"No," said Digby Gresham. "I want this documentary evidence. It may prove very valuable."

CHAPTER III

FATE INTERPOSES

THE moment the front door banged Digby Gresham dropped to his knees before a cleverly made tiny hole in the opaque curtain. Moreover, the laboratory lighting arrangements were so constructed that no awkward ray could limn revealing silhouettes on the window shades. I imitated him by peering through another small hole on the other side of the curtain. The rôle was familiar to both of us from frequent assumption.

Jerome Clackett, drawing his linen duster high about his neck, started at a smart pace southward. But hardly had be covered fifty paces when the shadow of a big tree trunk opposite grew quickly larger. It was obvious, almost instantly what had enhanced the size of the shade. For a tall, dark-cloaked figure immediately leaped across the sidewalk into the black shadows of an alley there.

"Jerome Clackett's would-be surreptitious visits no longer remains unknown. Some one is thoroughly familiar with the millionaire's movements. The plot thickens," said Gresham.

"The fellow is about the same height as Collins Travers," I suggested.

"The two are not unlike," admitted Gresham.

"Maybe Jerome Clackett will be done for before you can lend a hand," I said ominously.

"I believe that the slinking figure is only a hireling. I do not for an instant believe that the principal has been dogging Clackett's trail this evening. However, the thing

is gathering many suspicious ramifications."

It was a magnificent run out to Clackett's house on the lagoon once we had passed through the metropolitan system. The fine macadam bobbed in and out among imposing estates, now and then glimpsing the silver strand and the tossing ocean beyond. The air was redolent with the tang of the sea and of pine trees.

Twenty miles out a sharp *ping-g-g* rang out. But in short order one of the two mounted spares was substituted for the flat tire. We were soon off again.

But after forty miles by the speedometer a second blowout followed.

"Humph!" remarked Gresham. "Well, a poor beginning makes a good ending. This takes my last spare. We shall have to put in to the next small burg and buy a new tire. Can't spare the time for vulcanizing. Ordinarily two extras are sufficient."

So in due time, while Digby Gresham paced back and forth restlessly, a new tire was mounted and placed in position on the running board.

"We're going to be late," muttered Gresham as we sped on.

"And, although we tore along at a law-breaking pace, darkness had long since set in when we were still thirty miles from our destination. A soggy gray sky had blotted out an angry sun. The night was moonless and starless. The wind moaned and soughed. And the ocean added a deep bass accompaniment as it rushed in.

"We are in for a black night all right," observed Gresham, peering ahead where the headlights sheered off into darkness. "Fate has been dogging us rather relentlessly this afternoon. Obviously she resents our interference at Clackett House."

A tunnel of black loomed suddenly from the right between the tall trees. I fancied I heard something above the noise of the wind and the breaking of the waves on the shore.

"Gresham," I began in an undertone, "what is that noise?"

Then things happened thick and fast.

Out of the tunnel of shadows at our right something came on furiously with the sullen roar of some gargantuan monster. Before Gresham, expert driver as he is, could apply the brakes, there came a terrific crash. Our car rocked drunkenly, then swerved sharply to the left, where it careened in a ditch.

Then I fell into a black sea of oblivion where strange noises roared and cracked all about me.

I was aroused by cool air fanning my face. Gresham stood above me waving his hat.

I lay before the headlights which still burned faithfully, though the big roadster was hopelessly ditched. Dazedly I beheld a big gash running close to Gresham's scalp. His gray wig was awry. Part of his disguising beard was torn off. He had a big welt on the jaw. And his clothing was torn and disheveled.

"W—w—what hit us?" I stammered weakly, striving to sit up.

"Drink this first," said Gresham, holding out a flask from the side pocket of the car.

The draught cleared my befuddled mind. Beyond the lights in the road I saw something else.

Another big roadster lay there. It had turned turtle. Its lights were out, even as they had been when the black car dashed on us from the dark road to the right.

"Yes, that did it."

"Was any one killed? Where is the driver?"

"Do you feel able to stand? If so, come over to the mysterious car. I want to show you something damnable."

I got to my feet, somewhat dizzily. Supported by Gresham I limped over to the wrecked machine. It was a low-hung car of a racy model.

Gresham helped me to kneel. By the help of his electric flash I caught my breath at what I saw.

For the wheel had been securely lashed so that the car would pursue a full-speed-ahead direction. Although one of the stout ropes was broken, another still held, plainly indicating the diabolical intent behind the onslaught of the wrecked car.

"Yes," said Gresham soberly. "That was the noise we heard. Its big motor was bearing down on us from the unlighted car.

Undoubtedly, the car was poised in readiness in that cross road there. It was an admirable place for concealment. When our headlights became visible a long way ahead, the alarm had been given."

" But how," I demanded, " could they be sure that they were hitting the right car when they sent this chauffeurless car at us?"

" Simple enough. Undoubtedly the rascal behind this rotten scheme had the big car parked in readiness near the end of this cross road, while he in another car kept track of our progress. He could easily cut across on a parallel road, outspeed us and get to the planted car in time to get it under momentum to block us."

" Evidently some one very much dislikes the idea of our presence at the house on the lagoon! But we're in a beastly awkward situation. It means that we shall lose many precious hours before arriving at Clackett House. For go there I will, if we do not arrive until daybreak. I'm going to see this thing through to the finish, if it takes a leg."

Both cars were out of the question as a means of locomotion. Ruefully, Gresham surveyed the havoc wrought by the mystery car.

" Come," he said, " we shall have to walk to one of the big houses edging the coast. Meantime, perhaps some other car will pick us up."

Before setting out he turned the swivel spotlight of our maimed roadster so that its rays fell on the wreck in the middle of the road. The mystery car had a crimp in its electrical system so that its lights would not come on.

We were not playing in luck that night. For no car passed us. We walked for what seemed like miles before we came to the outposts of a big estate. There, after much ringing of bells and parleying, Digby Gresham routed out a rather disgruntled caretaker, who in turn grudgingly produced a chauffeur. This had not been necessary, for Gresham had merely requested the use of a car, giving his reasons convincingly and succinctly. Our disheveled and battered appearance, however, was much against us, particularly in the middle of the night.

At last we set off in the borrowed car with the loaned chauffeur. The fellow thawed out a bit when he saw the wrecked car lying in the main road. We salvaged our personal property.

" Rotten smash-up," declared the chauffeur. " Lucky you called up the police and told them to clear the road all right, all right."

Gresham paid the fellow handsomely as he dropped us outside the high walls of Clackett House at two o'clock in the morning. He had insisted on being left there for reasons obvious to us, though obscure to the chauffeur. It was imperative that we slick up a bit. To be sure, Gresham's plan was to mention frankly that we had met with an accident which had delayed us. But the rest he was going to keep dark. So in a shadow of the wall behind the shrubs we patched up our disguises as best we could by the aid of the invaluable electric torch.

Then we opened the gates and entered the long, sweeping drive.

The house was spaciously located in fine grounds edging the great, brackish lagoon on one side. The lagoon itself was screened on two sides by dense growing woods. And except for the immediate grounds about the house, the place had purposely been left in its original wildness. The ocean pounded away outside a narrow neck of sand separating it on that side from the long lagoon.

To our amazement lights showed all over the house, despite the early hour.

" Wonder what all the lights mean," mused Gresham. " They will at least prevent our arousing the house at such an unseemly hour."

Just then a figure came running up from the lagoon. It was close upon us in the darkness before I could recognize the features. Then Travers shied away from us and stopped. His face made a ghostly white patch in the darkness.

" Who are you? What are you doing? Thought you were the private secretary," he shouted hoarsely.

Gresham answered calmly, " We are the missing guests, expected by Mr. Clackett. I am Long and this is Stranger. Got mixed

up in an auto accident which tied us up fearfully."

He motioned to our damaged faces and clothes.

"Well, you have stumbled into something worse than a motor accident, I can tell you," blurted Travers. "The devil is to pay here. *For Jerome Clackett was found murdered not half an hour ago!*"

CHAPTER IV

THE LAGOON GIVES UP ITS PREY

NARROWLY Digby Gresham watched the twitching features. Whatever part Collins Travers had previously played in the night's grim business he was now assuming no rôle. He was badly unnerved, and was shaking palably as with the palsy.

"Have you notified the police?" asked Gresham in that assumed voice which even I would not have recognized had I not known of his disguise.

"Couldn't get 'em—haven't yet. And I've been trying to get Digby Gresham, the big detective, you know, on—on the line. Should think they were all d-dead. C-can't get 'em." His teeth chattered. He was in a blue funk.

"Anything the matter with the wires?"

"Dunno."

"Any one else visiting here as I take it you are?"

"My f-friend and partner, Halsey Ralston."

"Where is he?"

Travers shook. He jerked his head in the direction of the lagoon.

"D-down there with—it—the body, you know. The servants are scared stiff."

I thought fear wasn't limited to servants.

"Well, isn't any one doing anything?" queried Gresham tartly.

"Rodney must still be trying to get the police."

"Who's Rodney?"

"The private secretary."

"I had forgotten him for the moment. Take me to the body," said Gresham directly, "since the secretary is still trying to call in the law."

"Why do you want to see it?" asked Travers suspiciously.

"I knew Mr. Clackett. Perhaps I may be able to help. At least I can relieve your partner. If the thing has hit him as badly as it has you, he will probably be glad of a substitute."

"Very decent of you, I am sure," muttered Travers turning obediently toward the lagoon.

As we started off Gresham asked: "Who discovered the tragedy?"

"I did."

"How did you happen to be walking about so late?"

"Devilish hot and uncomfortable in my room. Couldn't sleep with that infernal ocean pounding away on the shore—it's only separated from the estate by a few rods of sand, you know. So I stole out for a walk. From the moment I got out I felt nervous. Half made up my mind to turn back. But the air was better without. Gradually it allayed my apprehension. Fool that I was! If I had only followed my first inclination to return!

"Twice as I struck off in the woods I fancied that I heard some one following me. Each time I tried to banish the notion by believing the wind was causing the branches to snap. Besides, the infernal pounding of the surf made it impossible to hear anything for a certainty. I had been out perhaps for fifteen minutes. I was in a little pine clump.

"Then for the third time I was positive that I not only heard a twig snapping in the woods but that I saw something moving there, a dark cloaked figure. Then I acted like a consummate idiot. I had carried my revolver with me. Without thinking of the dire consequences, I fired point blank at what I thought was skulking there in the shadows. But no answering cry followed my shot. The act somewhat steadied me. Then only a few moments afterward, I fancied I heard something on the lagoon."

"Yes?" prompted Gresham eagerly.

Our coming had obviously calmed Travers. With admirable lucidity he continued, "I stepped on a little shelf of sand edging the lagoon. I peered in the direction of the sound. Momentarily it grew

more audible. Then above the pounding of a surf and the wind in the trees, I detected the *putt-putt* of a motorboat. She showed no light in her bow. I stood straining my eyes in the darkness. The boat came nearer and nearer. This seemed an odd place for a landing. Ordinarily the boat makes for the pier down near the house.

"Then I could descry the dull gray outlines of the prow. It made straight for the shore on my right. It was coming on at half speed. This, too, seemed curious. Why didn't the person at the wheel shut off the motor and coast to a landing? I wasn't to be left long in doubt. For with no lessening of speed the boat shot directly into the sand. It stuck with considerable force, enough to kill the engine. Thoroughly perplexed I went over to investigate."

Travers stood still mopping his brow. His face twitched with a recollection which obviously was still fearfully vivid.

"When I looked into the boat—there was no one at the wheel. But slumped in the bottom, lying on his back l-l-lay Jerome Clackett, dead. I lighted a match. It sputtered out with a gust of wind in my shaking fingers."

"How did you know he was dead?" Gresham interrupted.

"B-because his face was covered with b-blood. And there was a hole in his left temple."

"What did you do?" asked Gresham.

"Ran as though I were mad to the house —routed out the servants."

"Did you also rout out your friend Ralston?"

Travers hesitated. Twice he tried to speak. Then: "I—I ran into him just going up the steps."

"You mean that he was also out of doors?"

"Y-yes."

"What was he doing?"

"I haven't asked him. He's a poor sleeper. Maybe he was out as I was, seeking a cool breath." He stopped a moment then went on doggedly. "I told Ralston to go back to the body. I aroused the household, and tried to get the police—"

"Where had you been when you encountered us?"

Travers hesitated.

"I—I—I—" he stammered, "I dropped something near the boat when I discovered the crime. I went back to get it."

"What was it you dropped?"

"See here," flung out Travers truculently, "why are you asking me all this?"

"I am trying to be of assistance," answered Gresham quietly. "If I am not mistaken you are badly in need of help."

Travers put a shaking hand to his head. "I—I don't know who you are, or what you are, but you talk like a white man. I had hoped to get Gresham here to advise me."

"Let me set your doubts at rest," hastened Gresham. "While I am independent now and my own master, I don't mind telling you that some years ago I was on the police force. I know much of crime."

I smiled in the darkness.

Relief whipped across Travers's face. "Well, it certainly is lucky you are here then. I've got to tell somebody or I shall go to pieces."

"You can trust us," promised Gresham.

Travers seized upon this offer as a drowning man catches at a straw.

"Then, Mr.—Long," he said, "you won't tell the police—you won't betray my confidence to them?"

"We will not," answered Digby Gresham fervently.

Travers heaved a big sigh. He whispered hoarsely, "I'm afraid—afraid for my life. For you know one chamber in my revolver is empty. Who will believe that I fired at random in the darkness, thinking that I had been followed? It came over me after I had roused the house. Then I found that I had dropped my revolver down by the motor boat. It was that I went back to recover—had recovered when I bumped into you."

"Perhaps," pacified Digby Gresham, "the bullet which killed Jerome Clackett was of another caliber."

Travers turned a white, twitching face toward Gresham.

"No," he said. "I have had a long experience with firearms. I would be willing to wager fifty dollars that the hole in Clackett's temple was made by a .32 bullet."

"Dangerous circumstantial evidence if it could be proved," admitted Gresham. "But one could hardly tell by a cursory inspection of the wound. Wait till the slug is found. Meanwhile, I advise you to make a clean breast of the story to the police when they arrive. Omit no detail. To be sure, your story does present many extraordinary features. Even so, however, don't try to hide them. Your best chance is absolute frankness."

A dim light showed. Behind shone the gray outlines of the boat. Evidently Ralston had lighted a lantern in the boat.

He was pacing up and down on the shore. His hands were folded behind his back. His short figure looked squat and pudgy.

"Ha-Halsey," began Travers haltingly, "here are the two guests who failed to put in an appearance at dinner."

Briefly Digby Gresham explained our unprepossessing appearance. But Halsey Ralston was paying scant attention. He kept locking and unlocking his hands. He strenously refrained from looking into the boat.

"Neither one of you has touched the body?" inquired Gresham.

"No," the two answered simultaneously. "We know," explained Travers painstakingly, "that it is contrary to the law."

Gresham and I immediately approached the long craft. Its nose was still dug firmly into the sand.

Jerome Clackett lay, a huddled mass, even as Travers had described. Gresham bent close over the body. He made microscopic examinations.

"Mr. Clackett might have been killed by a thirty-two-caliber bullet," he stated. "But no one can be definite without the measurements of the bullet. They will be checked soon enough."

The words caused a startling change in Halsey Ralston. He tore up to the side of the boat. He leaned far over. Gresham put out a restraining hand, as though fearing that Halsey might forget himself and touch the silent figure. The man's attitude was in marked contrast to the previous way in which he strenuously avoided any glance in the direction of the boat and its hapless object.

Finally he raised a white face. His eyes seemed bloodshot.

"Are you sure," he demanded hoarsely "that it was a thirty-two bullet?"

"No one can be positive," answered Gresham. "It might have been."

With an odd, jerky gesture Ralston's hand went to his right pocket. In the dim light I could see something bulging there. Quietly Gresham surveyed him.

Then he remarked: "Your manner suggests, Mr. Ralston, that you are tremendously interested in the size of the bullet which killed Jerome Clackett."

At this point Travers stepped forth.

"Mr. Long, I can explain Ralston's manner—in a measure. For he too came to Clackett House protected by a thirty-two caliber revolver."

"Was it not rather fortuitous that both of you should have had the same size weapon?"

"No," answered Travers, "under the circumstances it was not. I can't explain now why we both came armed. But Ralston carried the twin of my own weapon. I lent it to him from a brace in my den."

"That," answered Gresham, "explains satisfactorily the coincidence of the similar caliber of the two weapons. But it does not explain your excited manner, Mr. Ralston."

"Do you belong to the police?" asked Ralston shakily.

"No," answered Gresham bluntly, "but even so, I should be defeating the purposes of justice were I to conceal the fact that you came here armed with a thirty-two-caliber revolver, that it now rests in your right pocket, and—that you are greatly terrified because, if I am not mistaken, *one chamber of your revolver is empty.*"

CHAPTER V

SNARLED THREADS

AUTOMATICALLY Ralston's hand jerked away from his weapon as though the very touch of it were abhorrent to him. He kept wetting his lips and staring, first at Gresham, next at the hole in Jerome Clackett's temple, and then

down at the ground. And his manner seemed a curious admixture of fear and incredulity.

"Well, suppose there is an empty chamber in my revolver?" he asked harshly. "I wasn't out in the boat with Clackett. Travers here can prove it. He saw the boat run aground here. And he found me near the front steps. I had just returned to the house from a stroll and a cigar. I am a wretched sleeper. And the place was getting on my nerves."

"Perhaps," suggested Gresham, "you can explain the reason for the empty chamber in your revolver?"

"I can," answered Ralston sarcastically. "I potted away at a rabbit that scurried away across the sand in front of me. It made a good target, because its brown fur was sharply silhouetted against the white sand."

"Were you facing the lagoon when you fired?"

A startled look swept over Ralston's face.

"Good God," he said, "I never thought of that!"

"What?"

"The rabbit *was* between me and the lagoon."

"Precisely where you when you fired—on which side of the lagoon?"

"On the lee side."

"And the boat," murmured Gresham, "was headed this way, which means that you were on the left of it."

"That's just what struck me, fo-for Clackett was hit in the left temple."

"Did you see or hear the boat when you fired?"

"Too dark to see anything on the lagoon, especially as the motor boat is the same color as the water in the darkness. As for the noise, I could hardly hear my own revolver shot the surf was running so high."

"And the boat was without lights when it grounded here," reviewed Gresham thoughtfully.

With wide eyes Ralston regarded Gresham.

Then he said raspingly: "Do you think that they will try to prove it on me—call it intentional, and scout the idea of a rabbit?"

"Of course you didn't hit the rabbit?"

In any less serious situation I would have smiled.

"N-no."

"Then you can't prove that you *tried* to hit one. But no one can prove that you knew of the presence of the unlighted craft on the lagoon. Even now no one could hit an object twenty feet away. The darkness is too heavy. Furthermore, no one can swear that Jerome Clackett was standing very conveniently with his left temple toward the left side of the lagoon where you stood. He might have turned about, presenting his *right* temple, for example. A motor boat requires little guiding in this placid, protected lagoon. That is proved conclusively by the way it came directly to the shore here even when a dead man lay in the cockpit."

Ralston's face lighted even as Travers's darkened. "You must be a lawyer," he said.

"Still," went on Gresham, "the police always jump at the obvious things. They will consider the empty chamber in your revolver a very suspicious factor. And they will cling religiously to that idea, if nothing else suspicious turns up. They may even declare that there was a lull in the wind, that you heard the motor, and fired at it—that luck was with you, and that you hit Clackett."

"What you say is nonsense!" blustered Ralston.

"Again," resumed Gresham, "they may say that there was a light in the cockpit and that by its rays Clackett presented an admirable target for you. Then a sudden gust of wind, caused by Clackett's falling body, extinguished the lantern. It was filled with kerosene, you know."

Ralston shifted uneasily.

"That's only circumstantial evidence," he affirmed.

"So is the incident of the rabbit," retorted Gresham.

"See here," thundered Ralston, "are you insinuating—"

Gresham put out a restraining hand.

"Don't excite yourself. I am merely

presenting all sides of the case as it develops."

His calm tone instantly sobered Ralston.

"Halsey," began Travers, "you don't need to be so scared. I am in the same boat. My revolver too is minus a bullet. There is safety in numbers, you know. And fortunately Jerome Clackett wasn't killed with two bullets," he ended ironically. "So if either of us is lying, it is up to the police to discover which."

In a few words he sketched his own predicament.

"So my situation is either as convincing or as impossible as your own."

Footsteps approached in the darkness. Two men in uniforms loomed up, carrying lanterns. They were accompanied by a slight man with a thin face, a high brow and sensitive features. His open countenance appeared white and shocked.

I instantly knew that this must be the secretary Rodney who had last succeeded in appraising the police of the tragedy on the lagoon.

They went through the usual forms, examing the body and the vicinity and questioning Travers and Ralston. But the moment they learned that both these men had fired a shot in the evening, had come armed as the guests of the dead man, and that they now bore revolvers with empty chambers, they looked very wise.

Smith, the bigger of the two, addressed his companion, who was evidently his inferior. "Well, Tom," he said, "the sooner the coroner gets here, the better. About the first thing we need to know is what size bullet killed Jerome Clackett. If it proves to be a thirty-two—"

His glance traveled threatening from Travers to Ralston.

"If that's the size of the bullet, to my mind it will matter precious little which one fired it. For of course the two are in cahoots. The second bullet was merely a ruse to cover up which one did the business."

"You forget," reminded Gresham quietly, "that both of these men had ample opportunity to throw their revolvers in the bottom of the lagoon if they wished to conceal the fact that a chamber in each weapon was empty."

Travers and Ralston both flashed grateful glances at Gresham.

"Bah!" answered Smith scornfully. "They are probably new at the business of killing—became rattled at the end and forgot to rid themselves of their guns."

Smith pulled out his watch.

"Coroner Rugby ought to be here any time. In fact, he should be here now. The sooner he performs the autopsy, the better. Then I can go ahead, but I am practically sure now," he finished meaningly, again glancing at Travers and Ralston. "The only question to be threshed out is which of you will go to the chair, and which ornament the pen for life. And in case of doubt as to who's who, you can both be sentenced for imprisonment—"

"Hold on," began Ralston. "You will sing a different tune when Digby Gresham gets here!"

"Is Gresham on his way?" asked Smith with a swift change of manner. There was deference in his voice.

A twinkle appeared for the fraction of a second in Digby Gresham's eyes.

"We'll engage him the moment we can locate him," answered Ralston.

"Oh, that's different," retorted Smith acrimoniously. "Gresham may be halfway across the continent by now. Possession is nine points with him. You've got to get him first."

At last the belated coroner put in an appearance.

"Who can drive a motor boat?" he asked.

"I can," responded Gresham promptly.

"Very well, jump in and take the wheel. Step about gingerly though. There is room enough. You don't need to disturb the body. Now all the rest of you push the boat free. Then," he turned back to Gresham, "drive the boat to the pier. It is on a bee-line with the front piazza—not thirty feet away from it, in fact. You can see the lights through the dark. The house is ablaze with illumination. I'll go along, too."

He stepped in beside Gresham. The rest of us lunged mightily at the grounded boat.

After several attempts we shoved her off. Finally the boat was headed toward the pier.

We tramped along silently but stiffly. It was obvious that we were all under guard. The two policemen made their espionage very apparent. Not that I minded. And Rodney, too, seemed undisturbed, lost in deep thought. But I could see that Ralston and Travers were much disturbed by the attitude of the police—by everything, in fact, which had occurred since the crime. I hardly knew where I did stand. Were the two working in collusion or independently? If the latter supposition were true, which had killed Clackett? But they had not sought out Clackett.

They had visited the house because the dead man had importuned them, had coerced them by hinting cowardice. Yet there was still Clackett's own surprising visit to remember, the stealthy figure who knew of it and the dastardly attempt to delay temporarily—or forever—our arrival at Clackett House.

To be sure, either Travers or Ralston had been given ample time to circumvent our coming. If the man who spied on Clackett were in the employ of the criminal lawyers, might he not have been the man who arranged the car which had all but proved disastrous for us?

Much perplexed I tagged the group to the pier where Gresham and the coroner already awaited us. Soon the *tramp, tramp, tramp* of feet announced that the cold clay which had once been Jerome Clackett was entering his house for the last time. It seemed to me that the sable darkness of this night presented a singularly fitting and impressive shroud for the return of the master of Clackett House.

Coroner Rugby soon turned to the task at hand.

Meantime Digby Gresham had contrived to get the ear of Smith. I do not know what he said. But I was positive from the ludicrous bewilderment on the bumptious officer's face that Gresham had considered it advisable to disclose his real identity.

Then the coroner appeared.

"I have to report," he announced, "that Jerome Clackett came to his death from the result of a bullet in the left temple. And the caliber of the bullet was thirty-two."

Covertly Smith glanced at Digby Gresham. But Gresham's face was as immovable as that of a wooden image.

"It is my duty," declared Smith, "to arrest these two men."

He stepped with alacrity toward Travers and Ralston.

CHAPTER VI

LIMELIGHT

BUT the two officers and the coroner were indefatigable in leaving no duty unturned. While Travers and Ralston were under arrest, the three representatives of the law next went doggedly about questioning the servants. There was not a full quota of servitors at Clackett House. Some were on vacation. But there was a confusing number.

For example, in addition to Ralston and Travers, that night Clackett House sheltered Jerome Clackett's personal valet, his secretary, the cook, the butler and the chauffeur. So there were five people whose actions had to be accounted for. Smith went about the thing in a businesslike way. Gresham had obviously told him to assume charge, keeping it under cover that he and I were there in disguise.

Shortly Smith learned by shrewd questioning that Jerome Clackett was is the habit of making late tours by motor boat around the lagoon. He, too, appeared to be a wretched sleeper. I wondered how many more people affected with insomnia would be disclosed. So Clackett's late run on the lagoon was readily explained.

Most of the servants had been in the employ of the dead man from five to ten years. This to my mind seemed favorable. And unfortunately for the dark cloud hanging over Travers and Ralston, the five other people sheltered by Clackett House gave clear and uncrossed testimony as to their whereabouts at the fateful time.

In addition, their evidence dovetailed admirably to form an excellent alibi for each. This was unusual, to say the least. But obviously five people had not previously

planned the evidential links which eliminated them from suspicion.

For clever as Smith proved to be at cross-questioning, no one tripped up anywhere. The cook's story substantiated the butler's. He had declared that he retired at ten and was aroused from a sound sleep by the report of the crime.

As the butler's room was beyond the cook's, the latter's testimony that the butler was sleeping soundly as she sat at her window for a breath of air, seemed convincing, particularly as she declared that she heard him snoring stentoriously. The valet in his turn corroborated the cook's story that she had not left her room. For he had left his own door open to get a draft of air. His room was at the head of the stairs—the rear stairs. He swore that neither the cook nor any one else had descended there.

The valet's story was substantiated by the chauffeur's. He occupied the same room, thereby seeming to eliminate from suspicion the valet, even as the valet threw him out from consideration. And next to the room occupied by the valet and the chauffeur was the chamber of the secretary. Clackett had given his secretary instructions that he wished some vitally important work finished that night. Rodney was known for an untiring worker, who never failed to finish any task assigned to him.

So the wide awake valet and chauffeur testified that they had heard Rodney drumming away at his typewriter throughout the evening. Several times they had been on the point of asking him to hurry up and finish. But they knew that he had promised to complete the work—that Clackett had demanded it.

Smith chewed at his underlip as he set down all of this testimony.

"Who reached Travers first when he entered and gave the alarm?"

The valet, the chauffeur and Rodney answered in chorus.

"How did all three of you happen down at the same time?"

The valet answered. "Bill and I heard Travers shouting at the foot of the stairs. We dashed down in our pyjamas. At the same time Mr. Rodney here stopped his infernal pounding away at his typewriter and flung open his door. The three of us went down together. The others trailed along in short order."

"Well, that's all for the present," declared Smith. "You are none of you to leave the place, you understand? You can go back to bed if you want to—all except you, Mr. Rodney. As Mr. Clackett's private secretary you'd better take charge of his affairs, send out the telegrams and everything."

Rodney nodded. "Very well," he answered. "I'll assume charge."

Then Digby Gresham and I left the house. Daylight was already faintly streaking the east. Gresham went around the house first, squinting at it appraisingly, though I couldn't tell why. Then he set off toward the faint line of bath houses standing between the sea and the lagoon.

We ducked under the clothesline on which bathing suits flapped disconsolately as Gresham hastened along. We kept up at a dog trot until we had encircled the lagoon at a rapid pace—or nearly so. We were blocked on the last lap by a huge branch which the heavy gale during the night had evidently flung across the path. Gresham and I set our shoulders to it and after some exertion succeeded in flinging it aside.

Then he uttered a low whistle. He stooped to the sand. Before him in the hole dug out by the big branch lay a few inches of pipe—galvanized iron pipe.

Gresham took hold of it and tugged mightily. It refused to be budged. Then he ran along for a few paces, knelt down and began to paw in the sand. He reminded me of some dog on the scent of a bone. Shortly he disclosed more pipe. Then he stood up.

"Very interesting," he remarked. "A length of pipe here on the edge of the lagoon."

"I don't see anything particular interesting about it," I acknowledged.

"I do," insisted Gresham. "For I think I am at one end of the snarled skein in the puzzle."

Without another word he kept on his tour of the lagoon until we came back to

the house. Then to my disgust he left me abruptly.

He flung back over his shoulder. "Go in and get a cup of coffee, Stranger. You look fagged. No one will care if you help yourself in the kitchen."

I knew that this suggestion was merely a ruse to follow out something which had given him a clew. He always liked to conceal whatever he discovered for a somewhat theatric dénouement. However, his way was his own. And this was the only bit of stage play which he affected.

So I saw him start out once more at a rapid pace to encircle the lagoon without me. I entered the house, running into the private secretary.

"Hello, Stranger," he greated me. "Where is your partner?"

Association with Digby Gresham had taught me discretion. I answered cautiously. "He's gone for a walk and a smoke. We didn't expect this sort of a week-end."

"I imagine not," answered Rodney heartily "You look rather done up. Come on in the dining room and I'll start the percolator going. Clackett was a teetotaller, you know, so there is nothing stronger I can offer you."

Shortly I was sipping a cup of excellent coffee and listening to the occasional remarks of Rodney. But he left me with my second cup, remarking that he still had much to do. He looked dog-tired himself.

Finally Gresham came back. There was a trace of color in his lean cheeks. He sipped a cup of coffee abstractedly. In the midst of it, after cautiously shutting the door, he brought out one of those omnipresent test-tubes which he carries stowed away in his pockets. In it was a colorless fluid.

"If I am not mistaken," he offered in a whisper, "my analysis of this will solve the riddle."

"What is it?" I asked, staring at the innocent looking fluid.

"*Aqua pura* plus," he answered. "It's the *plus* I'm after. Clackett was a bit of a scientist. The back of the garage is fitted up as no mean experimental laboratory. My skeleton key gives me ingress. There is ample paraphernalia to test my theory."

With a smile at my puzzled face he left again.

I hadn't the ghost of an idea at what he was driving. What on earth could an ounce of fluid substance have to do with the murder of Clackett by a thirty-two bullet? Had the contents of the vial anything to do with Travers and Ralston? Lighting a cigarette and hypnotized by the thought of the disclosure which Gresham might soon make, I strolled toward the garage.

Gresham came out in short order. His knowledge of chemistry was profound, and he knew all the shorts cuts.

He took me by the arm, whispering excitedly: "It is as I thought. The tube's contents showed strong traces of lime."

"Lime!" I echoed disgustedly. "Why, that isn't even a poison! What of it? Jerome Clacket was *shot*."

"Ah," responded Gresham cryptically, "but the murderer was not. *He* is reserved for the chair."

We now returned to the house.

"There is only one more thing I need," he stated. "I want to examine uninterruptedly the second floor. I am going to post a policeman at the foot of the stairs at the front of the house. I want you to make yourself responsible for the rear staircase. Luckily no one accepted Smith's invitation to return to bed. One could hardly expect it under the circumstances. But it is mighty convenient for me."

So Digby Gresham went up the stairs on what I felt sure was the last act in his search before he rang up the curtain on the true solution of the mystery—whatever it was to be.

CHAPTER VII

THE STARTLING TRUTH

HALF an hour later we were all assembled in the commodious library. Surreptitiously Gresham had drawn Smith aside and asked him to gather the people together, saying that further investigation was necessary. Much surprised at this request, Smith soon marshaled them in. He took his position with his burly

back against the door. His colleague was stationed at the bay window. Every one looked more or less apprehensively at the two policemen. But they looked curiously at the tall bearded figure of Gresham, whom Smith now addressed with deference as Mr. Long.

The inmates of Clackett House were even more dumbfounded when Gresham began to speak. His words were no longer dissembled, but carried their usual crisp intonation. Travers and Ralston exchanged glances. Full-fledged relief flooded their faces. They now recognized Gresham's natural voice, even when confronted by the excellent disguise.

"You've all been entangled in a very strange affair," he began, "which is all but solved."

Perplexedly many eyes traveled from Travers and Ralston back to Gresham.

The detective continued tersely. "In the first place Jerome Clackett's death was both timely and ultimately."

Low murmurs followed this seemingly contradictory remark.

"Had Jerome Clackett not died as he did, it is entirely possible that one or more might have paid for his retarded death with their own. Clackett was a ruthless man. I regret to speak thus of the dead. I do so only because it is imperative in clearing up the complete mystery.

"When Jerome Clackett came to me saying that he feared for his life, that he was receiving anonymous threats, he did so with a very definite scheme in mind. I am positive of this because I have proved conclusively that the purported death warning he showed to me was printed in his own cleverly disguised hand.

"Ironically enough Jerome Clackett, all unknowingly, wrote his own death warrant. His story of other warnings was a sham. There were so such other warnings. He pretended that he feared for his life because he wanted to incriminate two men whom he had cause to hate and fear. The men sit before you. They are Messrs. Ralston and Travers.

"When Clackett craftily brought the supposed death message to my attention he did so to be on the safe side of further developments. He had invited these men he feared and hated down here for the week-end. He had already told me that he had invited them because he suspected that they were behind the faked warnings. He wanted to watch them, so he said. That was all acting with an eye to future benefit. The reason Clackett invited these two men here was not to watch them, but *to destroy them!*"

Every one was listening breathlessly.

"Can you prove it?" asked Smith respectfully. "Do you know that Mr. Clackett had planned to get rid of them—provided he hadn't been killed himself?"

"Yes," answered Gresham, "I can. The elements lent a helping hand to disclose the diabolical thing that was afoot. Murder will out, you know."

A little apprehensive shiver raced about the group.

"The high winds last night ripped off a big branch. They flung it into the sand. My associate and I found our path blocked when we were encircling the lagoon. We dug out the branch in order to continue. We discovered, embedded in the sand, a length of pipe. I have since traced this *from its source to its end.*"

"What did you find?" asked Smith impatiently.

"The pipe stopped in the sand bank outside Jerome Clackett's experimental laboratory. Inside the pipe was concealed a long length of slow fuse running to a spot along the path. It was connected with a bomb loaded with nitro-glycerine and heavy shot.

"It would have been an easy thing to have started the time fuse just at the right moment when Travers and Ralston had been considerably sent along the trail to the spot. Clackett knows his own grounds thoroughly. Whichever way his enemies set out on the trail he could have told with deadly precision how long it would take them to arrive at the fatal spot.

"But his nefarious scheme was nipped in the bud. A number thirty-two bullet beat him. With the fuse burned out and only a length of disconnected pipe, no one could have proved anything. This was especially true were the bodies discovered

riddled with shot as Clackett had planned. All other traces of the bomb would have been destroyed by the explosion.

"The trail shows many big hollows just as the bomb might have made. An extra hole would have meant nothing."

Gresham now took a position nearer the center of the room. Some might have misconstructed this as an effort to claim greater attention. I knew better. He had the man whom he was about to condemn within reaching distance.

Quietly he went on in the ominous stillness. "The criminal generally overreaches himself. The crime here is no exception to the rule. A trivial thing set me on the right track. That was nothing more than a trace of lime."

"Lime!" echoed Smith in wide-jawed amazement.

"Exactly. For the lagoon contains a strong trace of lime deposit in its waters. It is unusual certainly. But I have encountered it before."

"What has lime got to do with a bullet hole in Clackett's temple?" queried the officer.

I didn't wonder at the question. Hadn't I asked it myself?

Gresham put a slender hand in his pocket. He brought forth a scrap of black.

"This is the answer," he declared.

Still we gazed at him obtrusely. From a corner of my eye I watched the faces about me. I marveled at the control of the guilty one. For I could not yet determine which was to be so labeled.

"This scrap of cloth also contained traces of lime," continued Gresham.

"But what is it?" persisted Smith.

With biting significance Gresham rapped. "It's a bit of bathing suit. I ran against it as it flapped among its fellows on the line behind the bath houses. It was a chance encounter, I confess. But it started me on the right trail. For when it slapped me smartly in the face, I was struck by its wetness. The other suits on the line were not so moist. They were merely clammy from the humidity. Instantly a hint of the truth swept over me. *The suit had been worn by Jerome Clackett's murderer.* Only the lagoon shows traces of lime, and I readily ascertained that it is not used as a swimming pool, with the ocean so close at hand.

"The man who wore the bathing suit had the gun stowed in the rowboat which Clackett keeps anchored in the middle of the lagoon. The assassin swam to this moored boat, clambered in and squatted inside, concealed by the boat and the darkness of the night.

"When Clackett, according to his habit, started out on his tour of the lagoon in the motor boat, he passed close to the boat with its hidden waiting figure. I believe that the motor boat carried a light. How else could Clackett present so good a target? It is theory at present, but I believe that, as the lurking figure opened fire and Clackett fell back on the floor of the boat, he extinguished the light.

"The motor boat continued its course with no one at the wheel and a dead man as passenger. Clackett had evidently been driving very slowly, and the boat was going at half speed when she grounded. The murderer had meanwhile leaped overboard, dropping his revolver into the water, and struck out powerfully for the shore.

"Here he donned his trousers and shirt and ran at breakneck speed, flinging his suit over the line behind the bath houses. Then, hand over hand, he climbed the rope which he had dropped from his window under the screen of the heavy shadows there. He had easily outdistanced the motor boat, because of the peculiar elongated shape of the lagoon.

"And Mr. Travers had yet to come to the house and give the alarm. Clackett House stands opposite the narrowest part of the lagoon where the fatal rowboat was anchored. So the speeding boat with its hapless burden had over three times the distance to cover that the murderer had. He was thus able to burst out with the others when the alarm came, with a bath robe thrown over his scanty attire."

"Who did it?" demanded Smith.

Gresham faced about quickly.

"John Rodney killed Clackett."

A commotion ensued. Every one asked questions at once. Rodney sat rigidly with his white face and staring eyes turned to-

ward Gresham, who dominated the whole scene.

" Oh, come off," clamored the chauffeur and the valet. " We can both swear that Mr. Rodney was at his typewriter throughout the evening."

Gresham flashed back. " You heard the typewriter, because for the greater part of the evening it was equipped with a clever automatic device run by electricity. It fastened on to the machine so that it struck the space bar and a key at convincing intervals."

" How do you know?" asked some one.

" I found the remnants of hastily burned paper in Rodney's grate. Enough of one remained to set me on the right track. It showed nothing but a single letter repeated over and over at irregular intervals, as the sheet, joined like a roller towel, was automatically fed through by the unique invention. Then I searched the room carefully. Under a couple of cunningly loosened bricks on the hearth I found the clever electrical attachment."

" Well, I'm hanged!" blurted Smith.

Ignoring this heartfelt remark, Gresham turned to Rodney.

" Since I am possessed of irrefutable evidence implicating you, perhaps you will make clear your motive?"

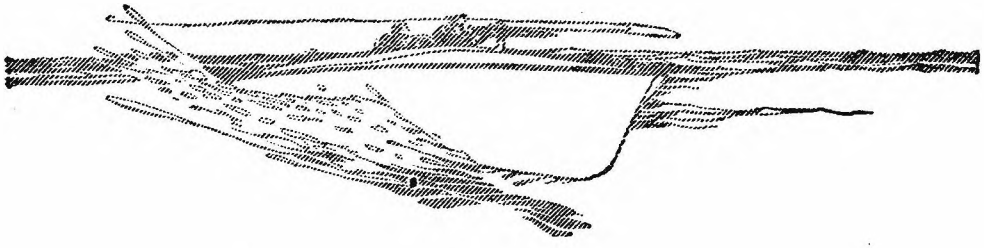
" I will—and gladly," answered Rodney calmly. " Clackett served me a scurvy trick some years ago. You know the man's reputation—*slightly*. I swore to get even with him. He had never seen me. It was a raw business deal he handed out, a crooked one that swallowed up everything I had. So I managed to come here as his private secretary and awaited my time. I knew that he hated Mr. Travers and Mr. Ralston. I thought that there was probably something rotten in back of his invitation for them to come here. But I believed that this visit offered an excellent opportunity to play my hand. Of course I knew Clackett's habits perfectly."

" Did you send the car across our trail?" asked Gresham.

Curtly Rodney nodded. " Hated to do it," he confessed, " but when I followed Clackett to your rooms and surmised what was afoot, I couldn't risk having you here before I had a chance to carry out my plan."

" So the motive for the crime," summed up Gresham, " was a long-held desire for revenge."

THE END



SURE CURE FOR SORCERERS

AN unusual case was uncovered recently among the Indians of British Columbia. In this instance, one tribesman known as Atol was found hanging by his heels from a tree, dead. The Northwest Mounted trooper who came upon the man arrested an Indian woman and four men, who are now in jail.

From the prisoners it was learned that the man was a sorcerer. Because sickness and poor hunting had overtaken the tribe, it was decided that the sorcerer who was bringing on such bad luck must go. To hang him from the heels was to dispose of the prevalent evil spirits, if it is done at the time of the full moon, the sacrifice is most likely to be effective, according to the savage code.

HEADQUARTERS GOSSIP

By William J. Flynn

RANDOM MEMORIES FROM A LIFE-TIME OF CONTACT WITH THE KINGS AND PRINCES AND LORDS OF CROOKDOM

WELL, folks, here we are again.

In many ways it's a satisfying thing to have spent a lifetime in work that supplies one always with food for thought and reflection. Every page in the newspaper will start a train of reminiscences.

But it isn't much fun unless one can share one's thoughts. That's what "Headquarters Gossip" is designed for. It's a wholesale sharing of the sort of experiences that carry a high percentage of thrills.

DESPERATE and, for the most part, undetected holdups of women wearing fortunes in jewelry, have put the police of New York and other large cities on their mettle during the past year or two.

In nearly every instance these robberies have occurred as the women, with their escorts, alighted from their own car, or a hired machine, at the door of their home, after spending the evening at cabarets and all night clubs.

Some of these holdups have been marked by barbarous brutality and unexampled ferocity. In some instances, the bandits have not stopped at murder.

Except for the novel settings of the all night clubs and the cabarets—both institutions being of very recent growth—there is nothing extraordinary in these holdups, for women fond of displaying diamonds and other precious stones in public places, and not overcareful in forming acquaintances, have always been the chief prey of jewel thieves.

Next to money, jewelry is the most desirable form of loot to the thief. The metal, if it cannot be readily disposed of to a fence, can always be converted into bullion and sold with little fear of detection. Of course, organized bands of thieves have all sorts of connections, so they don't have to worry about disposing of their proceeds. They leave nothing to chance. The diamonds, pearls and other precious stones, once removed from their mountings can be converted into cash by the most amateur thief without incurring any considerable risk.

History has been made and unmade by woman's passion for precious stones. Possession of at least one throne has depended upon the possession of one of the world's famous diamonds. Men and armies have battled over the rights to mines of silver and gold and precious stones.

So there isn't anything striking in a gang of bandits plotting to despoil a richly bejeweled frequenter of cabarets and all night clubs of her diamond tiara, her necklace of pearls or the flashing stones in her rings.

The sad truth of the whole matter is that the women are chiefly to blame.

With this thought in mind, the police of New York recently passed the word to the proprietors of cabarets and the managers of the all night clubs to suggest to their women patrons that their jewels and their good looks would be both safer if the jewels were left at home.

In connection with this phase of the efforts of the police to check these jewel robberies, I quote the following from the New York *Sun:*

> Willie Leonard, brother of Benny Leonard, the lightweight champion, and the owner of

the Wigwam, a cabaret catering to the Broadway spenders and theatrical and sporting element, admitted he had been approached by the police.

"They asked me to discourage the display of jewelry by patrons," exclaimed Leonard. "Women wear thousands and thousands of dollars' worth of diamonds and other jewelry when they make the rounds of the cabarets, and the police want us to try and discourage the display."

"How?"

"Why, that's simple enough. In my business, we get to know them all quite well. We can suggest in a nice, friendly way that they're taking a chance wearing so many 'rocks.'

"Don't misunderstand me," continued Leonard. "We're just trying to make the night life safe for every one. We can protect our patrons while they're in the cafés and cabarets, but we have no control over the taxicab driver or his friends who see Mrs. So-and-so carelessly displaying many thousands of dollars' worth of jewels as she comes or goes around the cabarets. But we will help the police to prevent further robberies of this sort by suggesting to the women that they're taking a chance."

My own experience leads me to believe that the crusade against jewelry display will prove of little avail. It may have a temporary effect. But the feminine love for personal adornment will outweigh the sober advice of those who know.

Women will take the chance. They've done it. They'll continue doing it. They will risk not only themselves—those whose love of jewels amounts to an obsession—but they will risk the happiness of others.

This is not a conclusion of mine. It is fact.

A JEWEL SMUGGLING TRAGEDY

THIS brings me to the jewel smuggling. Although this is in a different category, the driving power is the same: woman's inordinate—not all women, fortunately—love of expensive baubles.

Most jewelry smuggling is done by women. And in nearly every instance the smuggler is one to whom money means little or nothing. Sometimes they are the wives of men who occupy high positions in industry, finance or public life. Yet nothing seems to deter them from going through with their smuggling scheme, although it invariably means public disgrace, confiscation of the jewels, a heavy fine and possible imprisonment and loss of prestige.

The consequences are known to the women. Why they persist is something that no one has yet satisfactorily answered. Perhaps it is the gamble involved. Sometimes the player pays a tremendous price for her stack of chips.

There is a tragic story told of one such woman. She had just finished a trip around the world with her husband. She had millions in her own right. Her husband, too, was a millionaire. She had bought thousands of dollars' worth of diamonds abroad. She tried to smuggle them in.

She was caught. She escaped the humiliation of arrest and conviction. But at what a price!

Her husband knew nothing of her smuggling—at least the government officials who handled the case so aver—and when the authorities were about to seize his wife, his momentary surprise gave way to his wonted presence of mind, and suddenly waving the customs officials to one side, exclaimed:

"She is innocent. I alone am guilty!"

The officials had no choice. They arrested the husband.

The tragedy of it all is that this man had hoped to round out his career in public life. But this incident, which was given country-wide publicity because of the prominence of the persons involved, nipped his political career in the bud.

HOW THE AUTO STEALING INDUSTRY STARTED

A QUARTER of a century ago an automobile theft was unknown. At least I do not recall one that far back. Perhaps some of my readers will correct my memory if it is at fault.

Yet in the short time, comparatively at least, that the automobile has been on the market, it has given birth to one of the most highly organized criminal industries in the world.

Let me tell a personal experience by way of exemplification.

Some months ago the makers of one of the popular types of automobiles were confronted with a mystery. They came to me to solve it.

"Chief Flynn," said the representative of this firm, "our cars, new cars at that, are being sold cheaper in the State of Connecticut than our own agents there can afford to sell them. We believe that the cars are stolen, but none of the numbers, that is the factory numbers on the engines, correspond with any reported thefts."

My investigation, covering a considerable period of time, disclosed a new variety of auto stealing.

I discovered that the gang operated from New York. Most of its members were New York men. The metropolis was their stamping ground. They had established connections with crooks in the Nutmeg State and, through them, disposed of the stolen cars.

Their methods were singular. The thieves themselves never stole any of the cars. They hired youths, some of them mere boys in their early teens, to steal the cars.

For their part in the conspiracy the boys were given sums ranging from five to fifteen dollars, and in a few rare instances twenty dollars.

The instructions to the boys—all competent operators of cars, of course—were to steal only new cars, preferably coupés.

Before starting out on their hunt for new machines left by their owners outside of restaurants, hotels, public buildings and the like, the boys were given addresses of certain garages, any one of which would receive the machine and keep it until one of the crooks called for it.

Once the stolen cars were safe in the garages, the thieves set about to remove the tell-tale numbers from the engines. Some of the numbers were eaten away with hydrochloric acid. In other cases a cold chisel was employed. In some instances a new piece of steel was welded to the effaced part.

When the original engine numbers had been removed the thieves punched a new set of numbers, successfully baffling any attempt to trace the car to its original owner.

The next step was for one of the mob to acquire Connecticut license plates, put them on the cars and drive across the border.

One of the mob, when I began rounding them up, committed suicide.

It was not until recent years that auto thieving assumed its present wholesale proportions. So extensive are the thefts of cars that State legislatures have wrestled with the problem, and scarcely a convention of automobile men is held where the subject is not one of the chief topics of discussion.

All gangs of auto thieves have connections in towns distant from the scene of their operations.

In this they have patterned their methods on their forerunners—the bicycle thieves.

The bicycle thieves waxed rich, as riches went in those days. They, too, hired boys, who took up their positions outside of public libraries, drugstores and other places where a bicycle rack was a sidewalk fixture. And when the unsuspecting owner dismounted for a glass of ice cream soda or to borrow a book, or whatever might be his purpose in entering the building, the two-wheeler, unless it were padlocked—they used padlocks in pre-Volstead days—would be made off with if a Fagin happened to be around and there was no policeman in sight.

Most of these stolen bicycles were immediately re-enameled, renickled, crated and dispatched to distant points.

During the war a gang of the bicycle thieves, who had been operating undetected for years, were caught as the result of the work of the secret service.

For a decade or more they had been sending the stolen bicycles to Scandinavian countries. They continued doing so during the war up to the early part of 1917 when we entered it.

One of the commodities most needed by the Central Powers was rubber. When these bicycle shipments were being checked up, it being feared that they were being shipped solely for the rubber tires which could be smuggled through neutral countries to the enemy, it was discovered that the practice had been going on for years, and that this was the manner in which one gang disposed of the stolen bicycles.

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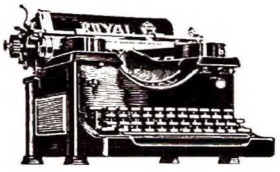

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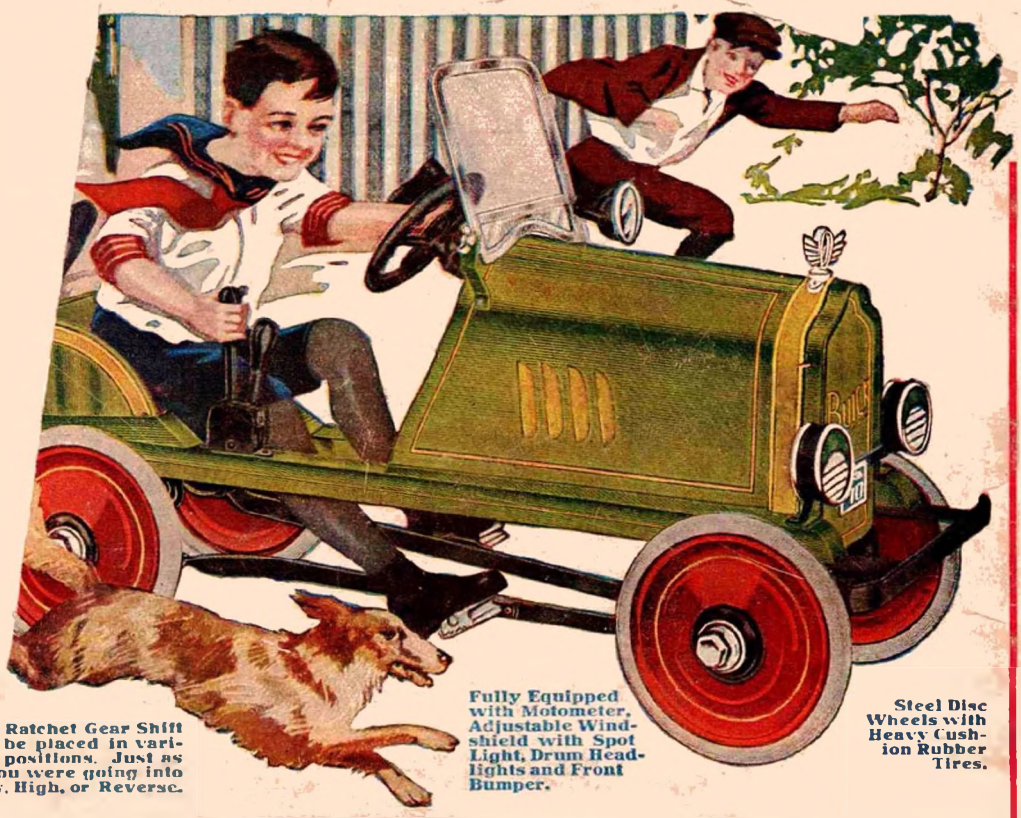

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