

**MURDER  
IN THE  
MILLS**

**HARRY  
STEPHEN  
KEELER**

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STEPHEN  
KEELER**







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THE SEARCH FOR X Y Z  
THE IRON RING  
TWO STRANGE LADIES  
THE 16 BEANS



## MURDER IN THE MILLS





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BY  
HARRY STEPHEN KEELER

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TO

EDWIN CHARLES MAYER

“pal” and ever-eager companion in  
those olden, golden days of marbles  
and baseball bats, fishlines and  
swimming holes, explorations of  
Darkest Streeterville, strawberry picking  
in the dank cellar of Garben’s Bakery  
—days that were full of impatience  
then, but are golden now!



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# MURDER IN THE MILLS

## CHAPTER I

“ THE NIPPER ” SPEAKS AGAIN !

NOAH TURNBO, electrical construction and transmission superintendent of the Tippingdale Steel Plant, slammed the desk telephone, over which he had just been talking, viciously down on its cradle base.

And reason enough—for the news he had just this moment received was—at least to him—the straw that broke the elephant’s collarbone !

Angrily, morosely, he gazed about his commodious private office, now fitted up with its cool summer-time furnishings consisting of woven grass rug and comfortable wicker furniture ; then flung his gaze frustratedly toward the one broad window which, its sill now filled with green-potted plants all greedily drinking in the bright sunshine provided by this hour of 10-30 of an August morning, looked out over the mills and towering chimneys of the great steel plant. Then he brought his gaze fiercely back to his flat-top desk, seeing, reflecting upward from its plate-glass top, a man of fifty-seven, grey of hair, and wearing a dark tweed coat and a soft-collared dark shirt that was a perfect compromise between the garb of executive and worker.

But now, hearing a gentle apologetic squeak at the door of his office which led to his secretary’s room outside, Noah Turnbo’s troubled face lighted up with relief. For a stocky head, covered with flaming red hair, was peeping experimentally in. And Turnbo eagerly called out :

“ Come in, Red ! Come in. You’re the very man I want to see ! Just got a report, no more than ten seconds ago, from the trackwalker on the Slagville line. And damn it to double hell and gone, Red, ‘ The Nipper ’ slipped over something new on us sometime between last night and this morning ! ”

Over the wide and somewhat flat face that was peering into the office, swept a look of complete surprise. Its lower jaw fell open, displaying two rows of irregular tobacco-stained teeth, and its brown eyes widened into unbelieving circles. A



freckled hand came forth, and pushed back from a low narrow forehead a tangle of bright red hair. "The—the hell you say, Mr. Turnbo?" was the answer. "What—when——"

The owner of the red hair entered, diffidently, and closed the door behind him. "Red" McAfee, foreman of the electrical linegang, was a stockily built individual of no more than thirty. He wore a brown suit and a liverishly brown flannel shirt equipped with bright flat pearl buttons, but unadorned by any necktie, and the hat clutched in his fingers was a much begrimed and much begreased grey slouch hat.

"You—you don't mean t' tell me, Mr. Turnbo," he was saying, "that 'The Nipper'—is startin' in now to monkey—with our 22,000-volt lines?"

"Sit down," ordered Turnbo peremptorily. "There's no thinking about it, I tell you. I know it for a fact." Red McAfee was dropping helplessly into the wicker visitor's chair next the desk, where the bright and generous light from the now-near window brought vividly out the slight jaundice-like tinge to his skin, betokening a man possessed of a liver that was not all it should be; perhaps even explaining—as, indeed, it always had to Turnbo—the linegang foreman's undoubted genius at inundating a crew of lazying workers with curse-words such as had never been heard before on land or sea! "However," Turnbo now went on grimly, "what the devil would a mere 22,000 volts be to a man who was monkeying with twenty-five years in the penitentiary? For that, don't forget, Red, was the penalty decreed in this state, during World War II, for sabotage in any plant making United States military or naval material—we still, today, roll *some* destroyer steel—and even now, two-and-a-half years after the close of the war, the law has never been repealed."

He shrugged his shoulders as a man who has completely made his point. Which he plainly had, in view of Red McAfee's acquiescent nod.

"But," Turnbo put in suddenly, "you want to know, of course, what 'The Nipper' pulled off last night. Well, the trackwalker on that Slagville line reports that all three insulators on Pole No. 147, out there in the country, are neatly shot away, and that the three transmission cables are sagging right onto the crossarm. And 'twas no damnfool kid, either, shooting with a .22 rifle for nightbirds—for one of the slugs, lying at the base of the pole, is a high-powered, steel-jacketed .45.

Why—if that rainstorm that was scheduled—but fortunately has by-passed us far east of here—had come up by this morning, there'd have been such a beautiful imitation of a short-circuit across that wet piece of wood that we'd have had to close down the Cement Plant there at Slagville right in the midst of its present 24-hour-a-day operations, just in order to fix up that one little piece of vandalism. For you know as well as I that those cables are improperly spaced—strung, to boot, over crossarms that are really too short—by whatever Scotch-brained idiot laid out that line in the long, long ago—if 'twasn't so, we wouldn't have been using these special extra-corrugation long-surface-travel insulators we use today, with the amazing travel, from tip to supporting pin, of—however," Turnbo broke off, "the weather's dry—so leakage there is none—the Slagville plant is running now night and day, on a huge rush-order plus its backlog—and so we'll just let her keep running till she's cleaned up. Which will be in a few days more or less. And then only will we shut her down—to fix up that last night's piece of vandalism. Unless, of course, rain, in the meantime, plays hell with——"

"Aw, there'll be no rain," declared Red emphatically. "That threatened rain las' night was the only chanct we had of any."

"I believe you—yes," Turnbo lapsed into dour silence. "Well, it seems now 'The Nipper's' got a new toy to play with—or at. And now I suppose—by heaven, Red, it's a queer industrial situation we're up against here. I get so damned mad sometimes that I actually hate myself—when I think of how one lone devil of a human being can delay and impede and hamper the whole output of a big mills through nothing but his wirecutters and his mere skill in selecting the vital spots of our great nervous system—the electrical network—to tamper with."

The linegang foreman nodded silently.

"One could understand it," Turnbo went on helplessly, "happening back in the combined days of Rearmament and the War—when 'twould have really counted for something—to America's enemies of that time. But today—Peace and all?—however, that very fact, plus the absence of the other facts, sets the real motive for us. Which plainly is——" "But," Turnbo broke off fiercely, "we've got to get 'The Nipper' somehow. Not because of the twenty-five-year



sentence we can dish him out—and which would do us no good whatsoever!—but to eliminate him from out of our picture. For his nippings can be translated into ‘tons production lost’—and ‘tons production lost,’ continuing at the present rate——”

“Yeah, I know,” acknowledged Red lugubriously. “It can mean the sack for you. If——”

“If!” laughed Turnbo mirthlessly. “Will mean—and within sixty days from now. For when I was re-hired last, Red, the contract, fixed up there by the directors in the Eastern office, was cooked up by some technological efficiency expert, and specified that I was automatically out once the electrical transmission efficiency curve dropped to a certain slant. Against that contract, President Seth Hiatt couldn’t do a thing for me. And I—I—well I wouldn’t like to go, Red—at my age. For with an invalid wife—two daughters in college—we-ell——”

“Well, I got a pers’nal stake in your stayin’ here,” declared Red fiercely. “For I never yet see the time when a new transmission super, in a plant, didn’t mean a new linegang foreman. Always did. Always will! So it looks ’s though your problem’s mine—and which for both of us ’d be solved 101-p’cent. sweet if we not only got hold of John Henry Nipper by his behind, but got his sig. on the dotted line, to boot, that he and no in’fficiency has played hell with things around here—and which sig. we ain’t no more chanct of getting, I guess, than a snowball ’n hell. So, barrin’ that, we got at least to elim’nate him.”

“But good heavens, Red, we’ve eliminated every possible man now that——”

“Yeah!” said Red combatively. “Well, I know one Englishman on the gang who ain’t been——”

But here an interruption took place, consisting of the entry into the room of the tall skinny-necked woman, with topknot on back of head, and black velvet dress, who served as Turnbo’s secretary—the only woman in America, according to a certain picture-story in *Life Magazine*, who worked in a steelmill! In her hand was a thin, dark-green bound book with gold stamped letters.

“Pardon me, Mr. Turnbo,” she said, “but there’s a gentleman outside who wants to see you on a matter unconnected with business. That is, steel.”

“And electricity, of course,” said Turnbo. “That being my end—of this business.”

"So he says," she affirmed. "Unconnected with any phase of the steel business—entirely. He's from Paris, though not a Frenchman, and his name is Manifex Saltmarsh."

"Mannyfex—Salt—are you kidding me?"

"Not at all, Mr. Turnbo. And he's written a book. A copy of which he's sent in, autographed to you, in lieu of a calling card."

She came forward now, and lay the book on Turnbo's desk. The gold-stamping on its cover read :

S A B O T A G E  
A Statistical and Analytical Study of  
the Phenomenon, as Occurring in  
British and United States  
War Plants  
by  
MANIFEX SALTMARSH, Ph.D.

"Would you care," Noah Turnbo's secretary was now asking troubledly, "to see him?"

Turnbo, staring dumbfoundedly at the book, was coming slowly back to himself. Looked up.

"Would I care—to see a specialist—in sabotage?" he was repeating. "Would I—send Mr. Manifex Saltmarsh ri-i-ight in."

## CHAPTER II

### MR. SALTMARSH—OF PARIS

THE man who was ushered through the door a moment later was a man of about forty, and possessed an obvious clubfoot, having even to use a heavy blackthorn cane to aid his progress. He was impeccably dressed in pin-striped grey suit, with a broad-brimmed grey velour hat, and as he came forward it could be seen that a gold and ivory Phi Beta Kappa key hung from his watchchain. The man's face, Turnbo noted at once, was keen and sensitive. No fraud or charlatan, plainly.

Turnbo was on his feet, book in hand.

"Have a chair, Mr. Saltmarsh. I'm so glad you came here. And thanks ever so much for this book which I'll treasure. This—this is Mr. Peter McAfee—not that we ever call him anything but Red!—my linegang foreman, a linegang being,



as of course *you'd* know—the entire group of workers that keep the lines flowing!”

“Oh yes, yes, indeed.”

Saltmarsh was settling himself in a chair that Red had hastily drawn out from a wall, and placed in position. The man from Paris seemed puzzled because of his so-generous reception.

Turnbo, dropping back in his own chair, felt that that so-cordial reception should be explained.

“I’m certainly glad,” he said, “that the author of a study in Sabotage has happened in here! For I’ve got a problem right in that line—and I’d like to get his verdict of exactly what he’d do—to solve it!”

“Why—of course,” returned Saltmarsh, cordially. “Of course! For such as it’s worth—being based purely on my analysis of other cases. For I’m here myself to ask some help.”

“And what can we do for you, Mr. Saltmarsh?”

Saltmarsh, placing his grey velour hat on the under-rack of the chair, which he’d plainly noted, and leaning his black-thorn cane conveniently against his knee, cleared his throat.

“Mr. Turnbo,” he said, “I’ll have to make everything I say here—and give—very brief, for the reason that I’m stopping off between trains. I have just about, as I figure it, thirty minutes to stay—unless developments warrant my remaining over a whole twenty-four hours more. Which, however, to clear up who I am—today—I am a confidential agent, in Paris, for a very rich woman who has retired there. American—yes. She has recently decided to adopt a boy—and bring him up. But her—ah—yen—is for a Chinese boy. Now I happened to hear, in State City north of here, in the course of laying over while transferring from the air service to the railway, that you have a small Chinese boy working here in this plant as a plant messenger—and heard also that you were a most amiable man—you see, I heard this at the Technology Club!—so I’ve stopped off to ask you something about said child—whether he would be adoptable—could be—well, anything you cared to offer.”

“We-ell,” retorted Noah Turnbo, “you’ve come to the right person. For he is a plant messenger here—I know him right well—and Red here even knows his father. He—but wait——”

He raised the receiver of his phone.

"Miss Longuy, put me on Plant Messenger Headquarters." Then——"

"Plant Messenger Headquarters? Is Archimedes Kee there? Yes, this is Turnbo. Oh—you can catch him at Open Hearth No. 2. Well catch him there, will you, and tell him to pedal that bike of his over to my office—no—nothing important—I've a visitor here—who's interes—well I want him to meet Archimedes. Yes." He hung up, and turned back to the visitor.

"That will make it possible for you to meet the child in question. For child is all he is. He's the son of old Jim Kee, the town's one laundryman—though heaven help the poor old boy, for about all he gets to wash is bachelors' greasy overalls and bachelors' workshirts. The old man's a widower; hence there's no mother in that particular family. The kid's age, though far under the legal working age, is blinked at by us, since he's got in his small head all our Tippingdale schools could teach him anyway—so's he can work and help the old man, there being no brothers or sisters, you see. We think a good deal of the little boy here—for instance, he was ill at home for seven weeks with a broken ankle—and got his plant messenger wages all the time. And—but there's a fairly comprehensive history on the child."

"Though it means," nodded Saltmarsh thoughtfully, "that I will have to look over the old man, too. Background, you know."

"Well, all you'll see, Mr. Saltmarsh, in Jim's joint, will be a dejected old man who found Negro-employing laundry competition too great for him in Brooklyn last winter, and so came here to Tippingdale, with his motherless kid and his nickel-plated washing machine—only to find that there is no expert laundering to be done in a steel town. Outside of, perhaps, an occasional boiled shirt for our president, who swears Jim is an unsung genius and the town's real acquisition. In fact, he gave Jim a television machine for returning two diamond studs from a boiled shirt—and Jim, not interested, rents the use of it to sports enthusiasts like McAfee here, at twenty-five cents the hour, to catch the prize fights and wrestling matches up at Chicago."

"I see," said the visitor interestedly. "Well the child, coming from a humble background but an honest one, is just the sort that is desired by Mrs. ——. However, I'll put the



situation up to the child himself if, after I see him, I get a further satisfying impression from him. And then—" There was a silence. "But you say, Mr. Turnbo, you have a problem that maybe I can throw some light on!"

Turnbo tapped the book. "Being author of a study like this—I'd say you very much could. At least to stating what kind or category of sabotage problem we have here—and what has proved in the past to be the best solution of it. Which—but shall I proceed?"

"Gladly," said Saltmarsh—though added, troubledly—even apologetically—"providing—ah—that I don't have to lay over here tonight—I mean, that I can complete all I would have to do with the child, with his father, everything, before the early two p.m. afternoon train pulls out—you see, I'm booked to sail tomorrow at ten on the *Ile de France II*, and——"

"I'll state our Tippingdale Mills mystery quickly enough," said Turnbo grimly. "In five hundred words—no more."

## CHAPTER III

### MYSTERY IN THE TIPPINGDALE MILLS

"WELL, Mr. Saltmarsh," Turnbo began, "here, at Tippingdale, is one of the largest independent steel plants in the country. It's successfully survived the post-war war-plant transformation process—because it was an old and tried plant, evolved in line with the needs of its own best efficiency—and also thanks to Congress designating many of the mushroom plants as having completed their service and requiring new uses.

"Our works here are practically a mile square. Fenced in with that ten-foot-high, all-metal, unclimbable fence you must have seen when you came in, made of corrugated sheet steel and deeply imbedded I-beam posts—and with the posts, moreover, on the inside, and wound with barbed wire. And the fence itself studded with sharp spiles, about three inches apart. There are only three entrances into or out of the Plant—Executives' Gate, in the south wall where you came in—Workers' Gate in the west wall—Railroad Gates in the east wall. None in the north wall—but all that has nothing to do with the problem. The plant," Turnbo went on hurriedly, "comprises

eight-five different mill buildings, connected together by a vast electrical system that contains more feet of wire than all three of us in this room here have seconds yet to live. A fact! Yet, Mr. Saltmarsh, for the last four months or so we've been confronted by nothing but trouble, trouble, trouble—at the vital points of that vast network of wires——”

“Vital points?” mused Saltmarsh. “Well that selectivity precludes chance, all right—indicates the work of some mind that *knows what* a vital point is. In short—an electrical mind.”

“Even,” put in Red fiercely, “if you ask me——”

“Let me tell it, Red,” ordered Turnbo. “Or we'll use up my five-hundred precious words—arguing!” Red subsided. Turnbo went on. “Anyway, as an example of our troubles. Last week, one of the feeders to Rail Mill No. 1 snapped in the night. After the whole mill was shut down for an hour, and eighty hunkies—I note, Mr. Saltmarsh, your sabotage studies have been derived mainly from Eastern and British plants; so I may have to explain some of our mid-west and western steel-plant terms!—well a hunky is merely a millworker that's a Hungarian, while a bohunk is one that's a Bohemian—we use the term more or less freely to cover *all* European mill workers, including the Polacks or Poles, since—well, anyway, getting back to the snapping of that Rail Mill feeder in the night, after the whole mill was shut down for an hour, and eighty hunkies got sixty minutes each for rest and gabbing—but with their pay going on just the same—the two night trouble-shooters that, by good luck, happened both to be on duty that night, got things hooked up again. But what did an examination of the broken feeder ends show? Simply that sometime in the past the feeder had been neatly cut halfway through by a hacksaw. Again, the day before that, the giant induction motor in the rolling end of Plate Mill No. 2 broke down. Result—a shutdown there for twelve hours—when we were swamped with orders. But what did we discover? Simply that eleven of the field coils had been neatly nipped through by a man with a clever pair of wirecutting pliers which every electrician in the world carries on his person. And what was it, Red, day before that?”

“Controller connections shifted on the soaking pit crane,” put in Red promptly. “Two armatures burned out—and no extrics in stock.”

“Yes,” repeated Turnbo wearily. “And so it goes, Mr.



Saltmarsh. Invariably output is hampered and delayed—but always in the production end, let me explain. Never in the laboratories—or the offices—or the telephone system. Troubles and breaks that used to come in at the rate of three a week, come in now at the rate of three to five every twenty-four hours. Though we ordinarily keep but one trouble-shooter at night, he's more than once had to call the other man, by phone, out of bed—so busy has he been kept humping, at times, because of the sudden emergencies that have sprung up with the snapping of vital parts of our circuits. Last night The Nipper—that's the name, Mr. Saltmarsh, that McAfee and I have had to give to the—the dirty dog!—who's doing all this—well. The Nipper thought of a new one. For he blew to pieces—with a high-powered rifle plainly—all three insulators on one of the crossarms of a high-tension line that goes across country to our Slagville Cement Plant—a subsidiary plant of ours where we grind up the slag from our melts, and make cement out of it—anyway, he lay those three 22-000-volt lines neatly atop the crossarm—and if we'd had the rain which apparently was threatened, we'd have had to stop operation right there—will have to yet, if rain comes—” Noah Turnbo stopped. “I think, Mr. Saltmarsh, that I've summed up the situation quite briefly. So what's your opinion, as a sabotage specialist—or—analyst—on how *that* problem were best handled?”

Saltmarsh was silent.

“Based on several solved cases of somewhat similar nature,” he said, “the answer is easy to give you. Only—you may not like it. That's the rub. But such as it's worth—you shall have it. But first, I want to ask four simple questions. And then——”

“Bat them, Mr. Saltmarsh,” put in Turnbo eagerly. “And Red and I will bat back the answers. The quicker the better. Far, far over the mills there I see a pink silk jockey shirt pedalling this way on a bicycle. Which means Archimedes Kee is cycling this way. And when Archimedes gets here——”

“Right,” smiled Saltmarsh. “I may have to hop to it fast—to get permission from one old Chinaman to give his son what he himself can never give. So here goes. And how would I get—to Jim Kee's?”

## CHAPTER IV

### FOUR QUESTIONS

BUT without waiting for an answer to a question not really essential yet, Saltmarsh put his fingertips together.

"The real intriguement of your mystery to me," he declared, "is of course the motive. Not the mere identity of who, in your linegang, is the malefactor. For some electrician it must be who does it. And the linegang——"

"Sure," put in Red. "For only an electric'an'd know how to bite through them circuits just far enough so's the trouble'll develop weeks later. Through vibration, an' contraction from temp'rature changes, an' so forth. Though most o' all from the quick oxydation o' the raw, cut copper where its skin—not its ins'lation, you understand—but th' skin it gets in its drawing—is broke. And secon', with th' exception o' the carpenters and so forth, ther' ain't no other class of labour in the mills that works all around the plant and goes into th' little out-of-the-way nooks and up the poles like th' linemen and wiremen. Electrician he is—lineganger, therefore—an'——"

"I don't doubt it. I—but here's my Question No. 1. Just how many are there in your linegang?"

Turnbo answered this first of the four proposed questions.

"It's a reasonably standard-composed one for a mills of this size and area. Under McAfee as foreman, and myself as supe, there are twenty-three men, divided as follows:—six out-and-out linemen; two trouble-shooters—one for night—one for day; four all-round men, frequently called wiremen; two motor-inspectors; eight helpers, all supposed to be twenty-five years or more of age each, and one toolman."

"A case of eeny, meeny, miney, mo to the twenty-third power, eh?" commented Saltmarsh with a smile.

"Lay over," invited Red, "and come to the linegang shanty this evening—anything in a mid-west mills, Mr. Saltmarsh, other than a mills buildin' itself, with four walls an' a roof, even if it's made o' steel, brick and stone, is called a 'shanty'!—anyway, come to the linegang shanty t'night when the men themselves wash up—and lamp 'em."



"I'll do that gladly," nodded Saltmarsh, "if successful developments in my quest force my laying over. Though faces and motives never match, you know? For—but back to my questions. Number II now—for I'm still intrigued by the motive in this case—World War II being over, and all that, and—but here 'tis: Any labour troubles?"

"None—absolutely none," affirmed Turnbo. "The men even get a small gratuitous time-bonus for having to walk to the centrally located gates, and thence to their shops—a condition growing out of the bug in the head of old Milt Hiatt who founded Tippingdale Mills a hundred years ago—'little kingdom in castle walls,' you know?—and who left the land to the corporation with that three-gates proviso tied up in it."

"Good—I don't mean the castle walls and all—I mean that there are no labour troubles. Well, now—but here—Number III! Can a man stay inside the plant, once his day's work is over?"

"Oh, yes," affirmed Turnbo, with a half sigh. "All workers ring in and out at their shops—to avoid congestion at the gates. After that, if one hid in one of the thousands of places possible in a steelmill, nobody would know it. The night watchman at the main gates could never keep track of who goes in or goes out."

"The trouble with your question, Mr. Saltmarsh," put in Red, a bit acerbically, "is that it implies th' stuff is bein' pulled nights. Hell, Mr. Saltmarsh, it don't have to be did nights! The men get all over the place as it is, goin' back and forth for tools an' material, and makin' all sorts o' shortcuts across areas where people don't ord'nary go. They——"

"I see. Well then for Number IV—and if, Mr. Turnbo, you did see Archimedes Kee across the terrain, who knows but that when it's answered, he'll be here, and—but here's Number IV and final!" Saltmarsh paused. "What about—business rivalry? For coming here on the train, I noted another steelplant—a little one—about fifty miles north of here—Specialtown, I think was the name on the station—now is there——"

"If you're implying," said Turnbo, almost scornfully now, "that the Special Steels Company—as it's called—at Specialtown would be mixed up in this sabotage, the hypothesis is unequivocally 'out'—capital O—U—and T! For the Special Steels Company at Specialtown doesn't even handle our line

of stuff. And because of the War being over, and there being a myriad of demands in certain peculiar lines requiring very odd kinds of steel, the S.S.C. has more work in their own line than they have hours in the day to do it. A fact! For they do only special steels. Like silicon-alloy stuff. Which is of much greater strength than ordinary steel. And is used in bridge trusses where unusual engineering problems are inherent. And cobalt steel—used for high-speed cutting tools and permanent magnets. And 12 per cent. manganese steels, that are resistant to abrasion. And are used for frogs, switches, dredge-bucket teeth. And the new ‘hypersil’ steel, whose crystals are lined up in such a manner that it carries one-third more magnetic flux in any given path, making it just about the only thing in the world for transformer coils. And—but here!—I won’t attempt to go into the steel game. The point is, Mr. Saltmarsh, that we give that plant all our special orders—and they give us their standard stuff. We’re like this—” And the elder man held up his fingers, twined one on the other. “And on top of that, we furnish ‘em every watt of power and lighting they use in all their operations—via a 22,000-volt transmission line like the one that goes to our own Slagville cement plant. So——”

Saltmarsh looked so lost, that Red put in a significant query.

“You look kind of—of dimwhizzled, Mr. Saltmarsh—about our bein’ able to act’ally *sell* power—’crost country? Maybe you ain’t familiar with steelmills, heh?”

“I have sabotage data on three,” said Saltmarsh, a bit stiffly. “But they were special World War II plants—electrically supplied from hydro-electric projects—their coke supplied, too, from other plants, and——”

“Holy smoke!” commented Red, apparently not in the least chided by the other’s tone. “They were cripples! Now a real honest-to-God, up-from-scratch steelmill, Mr. Saltmarsh, uses the gas what it drives off’n the cheap coal what it has to turn into coke, by explodin’ that gas in a gas-engine power-house—into watts an’ amperes. On’y—a self-operatin’ steel-mills produces twice the gas it needs for its own electric power. So-o-o—we turn our unnec’ery half or so into watts and amperes, and sell it—to the Special Steels Company.”

“I see,” nodded Saltmarsh, quite interested, and quite unperturbed. “Nature is in balance in every aspect; industrial processes out of balance. So——”



"Well the point is," put in Turnbo, a bit impatient at discussion philosophical, "that the Three Threebrothers haven't any motive to hurt us; in fact, quite the contrary. So——"

"Three—three——" Saltmarsh had a puzzled yet polite look on his face.

"No," explained Turnbo calmly, "I wasn't stammering—no. For the Special Steels Company isn't a corporation at all; it's owned, in joint tenancy, by Ackroyd, Fothergill and Rathbun Threebrothers—wealthy and elderly surviving sons of the two brothers who sprang from Roger Threebrothers whose foundry was erected there, where the steel plant is, nearly one hundred years ago. One brother lives in Florida, one in New York, and one at Specialtown. Rich men, all—impeccable—honest—highest Dun and Bradstreet ratings—churchgoers—and, as I said, very elderly."

"Well then," nodded Saltmarsh, "in the face of everything you've related, Special Steels Company—of Specialtown, U.S.A.—owned by the Threebrothers three!—*is* obviously 'out' as the trouble-causer here. Which simplifies the whole problem completely. Now I'm sure I have a complete picture of the set-up here. And the diagnosis—is easy. For your case, gentlemen, falls amongst those we call 'persistent sabotage.' And in all such cases, where we find the extraneous factor *f*, known as—however, read my book at your leisure. Particularly page 84. Your case here—is 'grudge stuff'."

"Grudge stuff?" echoed both men in unison. And Red added solo: "We both agreed on that long ago."

"Yes?" said Saltmarsh pleasantly. "Well that's the toughest kind of sabotage to trace. Its objectives can't be figured out in advance—and watched. Workers' records, histories, whatnot, cast no light at all on their grudges. The grudges being not in the least alleviated with the continuance of the sabotage—a psychological effect—but I'm sure you get the idea. If you put in a detective-operative, disguised as a worker—well, they know every time—a moron would—they naturally pull nothing within sight, sound or hearing of such a man. Who would? There *is* a case cited in my book where, in a plant using boy-messengers like yours, successful use was made of one of—but skip all that, too—you want to know what you should do? Well, statistics and classified cases show that the *only* thing to do in a case like you have here, is to

—but first—before I state that—who in your gang are in a position *not* to have a grudge—that is, to have the opposite emotion: a sense of obligation—loyalty—gratefulness—in short, who are so placed that they could *not* have, nor feel, grudge?”

“Only two,” declared Turnbo, “if concrete proof of such emotion has to be cited by me. The two are as follows: One, a Hindu lineman from India—whom the men call Bombay. The other——”

“A Hindu lineman—in America? How odd! I’ve never encountered such, even in England. I wouldn’t fancy they even had linemen in India. For——”

“Well they must have,” declared Red, “for this duck has sure learnt his trade right! And his complete handle——”

“—is,” put in Turnbo, “Ghotus Khotoval Chakraverti.”

“Well why—but wait!—who is the other man who logically could have no grudge?”

“A helper,” said Red, “called ‘No Kidding’.”

“No—Kidding?”

“That’s right,” nodded Turnbo. “Because his right name is the unbelievable one of—Oswald Sweetboy! A fact. He’s twenty-three years of age. Highly intelligent. His name is genuine—for he has a birth certificate. Father was a Professor Sweetboy, in the East. Mother a lady-lecturer on—ethics! Both dead. He drifted out here. We needed helpers—took him on. That’s his case-history.”

Saltmarsh was shaking his head helplessly. “Oswald Sweetboy,” he mused. “No—Kidding! No wond——, but what are the reasons that place these two men in a category where grudge they would not have?”

“Easy to state,” said Turnbo. “The Hindu landed here at the mills, broke—stony broke. Mr. Seth Hiatt, our president, personally talked with him. And broke a hundred-year rule here against employment of colour—black colour, I mean, which never has militated against our Chinese Kee boy—by hiring Chakraverti. He’s probably the most grateful man in seven continents, and has shown it.”

“Aye,” said Saltmarsh. “But has created resentment in who knows who—who looks upon him as being a ‘nigger’ instead of the true Aryan he is? That is interesting. It—but the helper?”

“He was granted by us a 300 dollar night-school scholarship in



electricity, to begin next Fall, for being the most intelligent neophyte in electricity—he knew nothing of electricity when he came.”

“And thus—made seven other helpers resentful—for not being so honoured?”

“We-ell,” put in Red, “them lads didn’t show it. For they give him a dinner.”

“No doubt,” said Saltmarsh dryly. “Well, now for the solution of a case like yours.” He halted a second. “And if it sounds too radical, read my book—note particularly the grapho-analysis on Page 171.” He halted again. “Well, in the face of sabotage whose technical nature is such as to definitely restrict the commission of it to as few people as you have involved here, the quickest—most economical in-the-long-run—most efficient thing you can do is to fire your whole linegang, kit and kaboodle—rather, all of it other than those two whom you’ve plainly shown are necessarily free from grudge: only thus will you stop the whole thing, with a minimum of trouble.”

“Good,” said Turnbo sepulchraly. “Meaning, Mr. Saltmarsh, that I have something—at least—to fortify me with regard to my own recommendations to our President, Mr. Hiatt. For your verdict has been my own idea for some considerable time. To fire the whole linegang—yes, even to leaving out from the firing the Hindu and Oswald Sweetboy—and to start over. In short, I’ve wanted to forget all about the year’s work in new construction ahead of us, and drop ’em all. And advertise in the Pittsburgh and Chicago papers for new men—even though I have to take boomers. A boomer being, at least here in our mid-west mills, Mr. Saltmarsh, an electrical workman who roams from plant to plant, working only a short time in each place. But——”

Turnbo stopped. Tossed his shoulders frustratedly.

“——Hiatt,” he went on, “won’t stand for it. Claims that the men are mostly married and settled here in Tippingdale, and that it’s an injustice to punish all of ’em to eliminate the guilty one.” He bit his lips. “Maybe after a few more important breakdowns of feed wires, lighting systems, controlling devices, hoisting motors, whatnot—and with your verdict now added—he’ll change his tune. Maybe—he won’t.”

“That’s bad,” commented Saltmarsh. “I mean—letting

sentiment enter into a purely mechanical process like industrial production. I'm a humanitarian, I'm sure ; but I'm an analyst besides ! And where figures, and graphs are concerned, there's just no factors for sentimental considerations. A fact. Eventually and finally—if you don't nab this saboteur by some piece of sheer luck—and he'll keep several hops ahead of you, probably—well, your president will have to come to what he won't do now : but by that time you'll have suffered all the further damage that wouldn't ensue if you cut the Gordian knot now, and——”

But Saltmarsh's words were interrupted by the sharp ring of the phone on Turnbo's desk. He subsided, while the electrical superintendent answered it. And found it to be his own secretary.

“ Yes, Miss Longuay ? ” Turnbo said. “ Oh—he is ?—okay !—yes, send him right in.”

He hung up and turned in his chair.

“ Well, Mr. Saltmarsh, I don't know what kind of a Chinese boy your wealthy client would like. Naïve ?—shrewd ?—or what ! But I'm certain that if she got Archimedes, she'd have one of the most unusual ones in the entire world. A unique personality, at the least—a genius, so *I* believe, for—yes, come in, Archimedes ! ”

## CHAPTER V

### THE LOGICIAN !

It would have been difficult to have told the exact age of the small bit of Orientalism which came diffidently into the room. But there would have been no difficulty for any one to conclude that Archimedes Kee possessed the flattest, yellowest, most Mongolian face that ever anyone had possessed. In size about that of a ten-year-old boy, Archimedes' flat face reflected a curious innocence combined with the age-old wisdom of Archimedes' progenitors in far-off China.

A pink silk jockey shirt, ballooning out from the short pants, seemed quite in keeping with the fact that Archimedes was, indeed, the rider of a steed whose owner—because such owner was an official plant messenger—could bring that steed—a bicycle—into the very mills. And a green silk jockey cap on



the jet black-haired head made one wonder when the great race would begin!

But though the small bit of Chinese humanity came in smilingly, closing the door carefully to after such entrance, there were traces of tears on Archimedes' face, due to the fact that the dust of the mill roads kicked up by the bicycle had been cut away by rolling salt globules, sometime in the last hour, leaving curious vertical channels, particularly at the corner of the oblique eyes. And it was Turnbo, the electrical superintendent, who was first to notice it.

"For heaven's sake, Archimedes—what the devil have you been crying about?"

Archimedes looked, at this moment, as though the fount of tears was about to reopen. Nothing came forth, however, only a tightening of the small lips.

And Archimedes' answer came in a curious child-like treble so high-pitched that it betrayed a far younger age than Archimedes' appearance signified. "Somebody—misinformed me. And thereby caused me injury!"

"Misinformed you—caused you—well—who—what was it?"

"Well it was Johnny Klane, sir. The newest plant messenger. He—he induced me to take hold of the two contacts on that big copper switch in the Bloomer Mill No. 2 switchboard."

"Got you—to take hold of those contacts—for heaven's sake, Archimedes, how?"

"By proving, sir, that pract'cally no 'lectric voltage could be across those points, and consequently nobody would get hurt. He offered to pay me ten dollars if I felt anything at all."

"No electric potential there—and you took hold of the two contacts? Holy smoke! You must have gotten a devil of a shock?"

"Well I—well my arms, sir, felt as though a giant had each one in his grasp."

"I'll bet they did! And good thing they stiffened out rigid as a board, and pulled one—or both—loose. Well see here, what the devil kind of proof could that Klane boy, new to the mills here, give to a bright mind like yours—that those two stubs could be harmless?"

"Why, sir, it was perfect proof—it was proof so good that even yet I cannot fathom anything wrong with it."

Noah Turnbo turned to Red. "He got hold, of course, of the mid-wire in that 3-wire 220-volt system—and one of the outsiders—and caught 110 volts. Not fatal, to be sure, but it's a good thing his rigidifying arms caused him to pull loose." He turned back to Archimedes, grave-faced. "Go on, boy? What the devil 'proof' did that young simpleton give *you*?"

"We-ell, he first told me—as a pos-tu-late—what I already pers'nally knew—from Bill Jenkins, head of the Power House. That there were 110 volts pressure there at the Power House. But—so Johnny Klane said—if there were that much pressure at the Power House, then at two little points way out on the end of a line nearly a mile away it would have fallen away till there would be less than a volt. And he said that even an ordinary 'lectric bell dry battery was only two volts. He—he said that all the signs on switchboards reading 'Danger' and all that stuff were—were introduced by—by 'lectrical unions—to give work to 'lectricians. And that—that they didn't really mean anything at all. And though I—I really doubted he would ever give me any ten dollars, I did know he must be right. For if pressure is so and thus—at one point—then 'way down, at the end of the hollow tubes that carry it, it—it must be zero. Like, you know, a river? For father and I lived in a town once where a river, 'way up at its source there, was so—so full of pressure, that you couldn't wade it; but at another place where we lived, where the same river emptied into the sea, the river flowed so slowly that a cork hardly moved."

Turnbo threw up his hands.

"Heavens, Archimedes—of all the fallacious pieces of bunkalorum to stuff down your throat—and for you to stuff down yourself, with fool analogies about rivers, I—listen here, so long as you work here, never again listen to any of those smart alecky kids about electricity. Nor use your own reasoning, either. Never take anybody's word, about electricity, or you'll get killed—and we'll be paying your poor father a compensation. It's true that there is 110 volts pressure *at* the Power House—there's also, incidentally, 220 volts for 3-wire systems—there's even high-tension systems—but, assuming just a line with 110 volts at the Power House, it happens to be also true that 'way out at the end of any line coming from that source—viz., that Bloomer Mill No. 2—



there's 110 volts right there at the mill. And 110 volts is no—thing to monkey with. Moreover, there'd still be 110 volts at the switchboard if those lines were extended 10 times as far as this plant extends. For the pressure, infant, doesn't just fall away—like a river—the further you get from the Power House. Those wires extend it—just like—like—well, like feelers——”

Archimedes had been listening with wide black eyes. The while Red had sat with a half-amused tolerant look on his face.

“Like,” Archimedes put in, “the antennæ—of an insect?”

“Right! But what an insect! Those wires, infant, are nothing but the antennæ of a great insect called a dynamo that can spit death. And if ever I hear of you laying hands on switch contacts, or motor connections, or copper line connections ag'in, I'll—I'll give you a month's lay-off—without pay—for your own good.”

“Believe you me, sir, I never shall! For I got a lesson today that will never leave me. I shall *nev-er* believe anything anybody tells me again about electricity.”

“No, don't. Believe me—believe Mr. McAfee here—but don't believe any of those kids.”

“I will not, sir. Though I fear I shall get no opportunity—to believe Red.” Turnbo looked a bit puzzled at the familiar appellation of this small Oriental mite to his electrical construction foreman. Which was not lost on Archimedes. For he explained. “Red—Mr. McAfee—comes sometimes to view and listen to Father's television radio that Father got from——”

“Yes, I know. For returning President Hiatt's three diamond studs from his banquet shirt! Well, Red might put in a little time, I think, informing his host's son what electricity is like. However——” He made a gesture. “You promise not, then, to believe anything again, that anybody tells you—about electricity?”

“No, I shall indeed not. Though——and the childish tremolo rose——“though perhaps you, sir, will answer one question—that perplexes me?”

“Shoot, Archimedes? What is it?”

“Well, it's this, sir. How does the electric pump in the crane draw the glue out of the pores of the crane magnet after the glue has been pumped in?”

“Glue?—crane?—magnet?—pump?” Turnbo repeated

aghast. He turned to the others. "Whew!—this is the worst I ever did hear!" He turned back to Archimedes. "Good gracious, Archimedes, those magnets aren't pumps that—they don't operate by glue—listen—where did you get that idea?"

"Why, from a new boy who came here—and said he'd studied all about it, at school."

Turnbo threw up his hands. "Archimedes, there is no glue in those magnets. They're—they're magnets—there's no motor pumping glue in them—there's a controller—that controls the amounts of electricity that go about the coils in them—and makes them able to pick up steel plates—makes them, in short, magnets."

"Yes, but what, then, is 'magnetism'?"

Turnbo scratched his head.

"Those—those things can't exactly be explained, Archimedes. Magnetism is a force—hrmph—a field of force—that makes two bits of metal try to come together——"

He stopped helplessly.

And Red put in a sardonic comment.

"Now you'll understand, Boss, why, when I stop off to see a Golden Gloves fight or two in Jim Kee's televisior—I never try to explain electricity to the kid here. For it can't be did."

Archimedes was speaking again, to Noah Turnbo, in the strange high childish tremolo.

"Well, is it magnetism, Mr. Turnbo—or is it 'lectricity—that's pumped through the hollow wires? For if it gets there, it must——"

"Did I hear you, Willie," put in Red, pricking up his ears, "say hollow—" He turned to the others. "I allus call him Willie—his right name—" He turned to Archimedes. "Did I hear you, kid, say somep'n 'bout hollow wires?"

"Why—all 'lectric wires are hollow, aren't they, Red? How—how could the 'lectricity flow through them, otherwise?"

"I—give—up!" said Red, shaking his head, though amiably, and as perhaps one who did not wish to forfeit his occasional position as guest, in front of that prize-fight recording television machine. "I—I only know that I didn't know they made 'em as naive as you, kid!"

Mr. Manifex Saltmarsh spoke up now, for the first time.

"Did you say—genius!" he queried banteringly, toward Turnbo.



Meaning, of course, that he had met up with but a stupid boy. "Well, Mr. Saltmarsh," declared Turnbo. "Electricity, don't forget, is the Great Mystery of Life—and nobody ever has explained it adequately. Nobody—" He turned to the flat-faced young visitor. "Archimedes, I want you to meet Mr. Manifex Saltmarsh—of Paris. Mr. Saltmarsh has a proposition that may be of great interest to you—and, depending on your answer, may affect your entire life for as long as you live!"

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DEPUTIZATION OF ARCHIMEDES KEE

THE oblique eyes in Archimedes' flat Mongolian face opened as wide as saucers. The flat face turned to Saltmarsh unbelievably.

"A—a prop'sition—to *me*, sir? I—don't understand. But I am most int'rested, Mr.—Saltmarsh."

"Yes, to you." Saltmarsh thrust out his hand. "And it's a pleasure to meet you, Archimedes."

"To meet—*me*? Me—just Archimedes Kee? Well, sir, the—the pleasure is all mine."

"Sit down, boy." Saltmarsh gazed at the subject of his words. "Yes—do sit down." Noah Turnbo, with one foot, slid out from under his desk a hassock. Archimedes Kee dropped down on it, gazing up helplessly at Manifex Saltmarsh.

"Well now, my boy," began Saltmarsh, "the situation is this. I—but here—tell me something about yourself, won't you? Such as—well, where did you get the name Archimedes? For Mr. McAfee here says he calls you Willie. So Willie must be your right name."

"Yes, sir," said Archimedes, "Willie is the name I was christened. But I took the name of Archimedes, when Father and I came to Tippingdale, because he was the great man whose name occurred in the last spelling book I had—back in Brooklyn—where it said, at the very end, 'Archimedes was a great man, and when you can Spell this Great Man's name, you are ready to enter the next spelling book'."

The three men laughed in unison.

Manifex Saltmarsh asked a pointed question.

"Well, do you know, boy, who Archimedes was?"

The flat round face oscillated from side to side. "No, but I have so often wondered."

"Well, he was a Greek mathematician, who invented the screw."

"Invented—screws?" repeated Archimedes, in full disgust. "Just those little dewdads—that you put into wood—to hold it against something else?"

"My dear boy," said Noah Turnbo, "the principle of the screw is the greatest mechanical principle the world has ever known. It's at the basis of all machine construction. Indeed if the screw had never been invented, you may lay to it there'd have been no Tippingdale—and perhaps no Archimedes Kee."

"That latter I doubt," said Archimedes cryptically. "For my race went on producing individuals for thousands of years with—with no more machines than—than a crude wheel for a cart drawn by an Ox. However"—the yellow face brightened up—"if you say the world hinges on his invention, then my se-lection of names was not so stu-pid."

Noah Turnbo glanced at Saltmarsh with a highly amused glance.

The latter, a bit bewildered, drove on.

"Well, Archimedes, do you think a white man like myself—has anything of interest to one of your old honourable race? In short—will I get anywhere—with a proposition—to you?"

The owner of that round flat Mongoloid face tried to give pointed, yet polite answer.

"Well—we Chinese, sir, have a saying, 'Don't climb a tree—to look for fish.'"

"I—see," laughed Saltmarsh. "Meaning—it depends on how impossible the proposition is, eh?" He became grave. "Well, I'd better tell you the situation. Here it is. Archimedes, I represent a very wealthy—and very kind—and very lonely—lady living in Paris, who wants to have a child to rear, and bring up, and educate. Preferably—a Chinese child. One that is bright. Which you are. It would mean, for such a child, every advantage of education—whatnot. And being brought up in a land where race and colour do not figure against one as in this country. So the question is, Archimedes—will it pay me to pursue this matter further—with your father—and, of course, yourself?"

The flat face was sad. But firm.



"I regret to say, sir," was Archimedes' reply, "that it is of no use what-so-ever. You see, my father received me late in life. He is an old man today—with no one but me—and I would no more leave him than I would cut off my right hand. I well realise what it would mean to be brought up by a rich lady—but you see, we Chinese have a sense of loyalty to those who——"

"I know that," said Saltmarsh sepulchrally. "So much so that when I heard that your father was alone with you—I practically felt I had no chance."

"You have none whatever, Mr. Saltmarsh," declared Archimedes, "to take me away. My father's fate is to be a laundryman in a steel town. Mine is to—stay with him. He would never consent, I know, being a Chinese of the old school. And I would never consent. Please try to underst——"

"Say no more, my boy," put in Saltmarsh. "This happens—to be the third time I have encountered this! Well, before you go——"

He turned to Turnbo.

"Since you're up against that proposition we discussed, and can't solve—that is, I spoke, once or twice, of the spectacular results achieved in the East in a case of sabo—— well, what I'm trying to get at is—would you object if I interjected an angle here with respect to this child——"

"Why—ah——" replied Turnbo, puzzled, "not at all. That is, I don't know what you mean. But it's all right, whatever——"

"Good," Saltmarsh had turned to the small Chinese. "Archimedes, do you know any of the men in Mr. McAfee's linegang?"

"Oh, I know them all. From having often waited there, to take away a report after a linegang meeting."

"Oh yes. Well in riding around this vast plant have you ever seen any man that you know to be working with some electrical group at some place in the plant, at some other place—fooling around, *all by his lonesome*, with any electric circuits or whatnot with his wirecutters? Or any man, so far as that goes?"

Archimedes thought.

"Well—no I haven't. Sometimes I wave at a group who are working together somewhere. Though I can't say that I've later seen one—detached from the rest. Though to tell

you the truth, I keep my mind on my work—and on the road ahead of my bicycle.”

“Well, suppose you did see a man who was of the gang—or wasn’t, so far as that goes—doing some funny-wunny sort of electrical tinkering at some point where there wasn’t supposedly anything wrong—or, say, at a considerable distance from the group he was with where there was something wrong—exactly what would you do?”

“Well, may I ask if there is anything wrong—in the ’lectrical end of the plant?”

“Well,” hedged Saltmarsh, “I don’t guess Mr. Turnbo will object to my saying that some rascal is monkeying a bit with the wires in order to—oh, to anger Mr. McAfee, I guess. Anyway, what would you do in that hypothetical case?”

“In that case, then, I would make sure that the man—lineman or not—was doing something ’lectrical but illegitimate—and then——”

“And then—what would you do?”

“I—I would inform Red here.”

“That’s the boy! You keep that firmly in mind in the future. As you ride around. Watch. Watch everybody. For there’s a little trouble—of sorts—being had. And you’re appointed, I believe Mr. Turnbo will confirm, a sort of deputy-sheriff of observation.”

“Oh, I shall watch from now on,” said Archimedes fiercely. “For it is ev’dent my watching is necessary.”

Noah Turnbo had been frowning deeply during this unauthorized colloquy; Red, too, looked irritated. Turnbo now spoke.

“But see here, Archimedes——”

But Archimedes was bringing the whole affair to a close by rising. “But now I’ll depart,” he declared. “For I have an urgent pick-up at the Streetcar Rail Mill. Then I go off duty—to return tonight on night duty. And—I am happy to have met you, Mr. Saltmarsh.”

The small hand came out.

And was grasped by Saltmarsh.

“And glad to have met you, Archimedes—even though my cause is a lost one! Though—ah—by the way—just keep it a secret, won’t you—about your appointment as—as observatorial deputy sheriff?”



"I am Chinese," said Archimedes proudly. "Goodday, sir. Goodbye, gentlemen."

And Archimedes turned firmly on heel, and walked out of the room with more dignity than an Archbishop.

The three men now sat alone. Noah Turnbo stroked his chin dubiously.

"I know you meant well, Mr. Saltmarsh," he said. "But I'm kind of sorry that you've set Archimedes to snooping around. Because now it'll be utterly impossible to derail him from that sort of thing. In short, I fear you've gotten him hot and bothered on—on keeping his oblique eyes where they don't belong. And because there's a penitentiary sentence of 25 years in this state for sabotage, there could be—you know?—murder in this plant—if somebody—anybody—ever caught The Nipper in his work—or even inadvertently revealed he had done so. And——"

But Saltmarsh had arisen, watch in hand. Quite unperturbed, however.

"Well, Mr. Turnbo, you appeared to have been quite stymied—at what has to be done in your problem. So-o-o—I merely tossed in an expedient that has proved successful elsewhere: i.e., watching and observation—from a source never suspected by a saboteur. And—however, if that small lad ever comes to any grief—through keeping his eyes open for sabotage, or anything suspicious—there will be no one in the entire world more than I, Manifex Saltmarsh, who will grieve his life out. Only—my instinct is that he's not only hyper-observant—but Chinese enough to never reveal he has seen anything. And—but as you can see, I've a train to make out of here. And will be on my way. And in going, I hope both you gentlemen figure out the best way of putting your saboteur out of the running."

He stooped over, and took up his white velour hat from under his chair, and his heavy blackthorn cane, thrust out his free hand. And shook brief hands with each man.

"Good luck," he said. "In your problem."

And, on his clubfoot, hobbled to the door. Was gone.

And now Red, alone with his superior, spoke. Disgustedly.

"Bah!" was all he said.

"Bah?" queried Turnbo. "Why, Red?"

"Oh, because," Red grunted, "we hand this mat'matical specylist in sabytage a neat problem on a gold platter—showin'

him how you're co'pletely stymied around here from canning the gang. Which I'm ag'in, Mr. Turnbo, of course, just as Pres'dent Hiatt is. And—abs'lutely all he does for us is to spill our beans to the kid—not that the kid won't keep his trap shut. I'm sure he will. For—listen, Chief, this guy Saltmarsh is the Mullarky. All theory an' tables, see? You're a prat'cal man like myself. But stymied. Now I've a method better than Saltmarsh's to get us out—O—U—T!—o' this sabytage. With no disturbance an' all. On'y"—Red grimaced sourly—"nobody asks my opinion around here. Nobody——"

"Now wait, Red," expostulated Turnbo. "If you've a suggestion, far be it from me to lean on a Doctor of Philosophy—who has to have a cane himself to lean on!—or to try and raise Hiatt's blood pressure by arguing with him. So—shoot! What's your suggestion then, Red—to end sabotage in the Tippingdale Mills?"

## CHAPTER VII

### CHIEF MONEYPENNY ENFORCES THE LAW

CHARLEY SQUAT-IN-THUNDERSTORM, Tippingdale's only cleaner and dyer, troubledly surveyed himself in the bottom of the bright 25-cent tin dishpan he was just about to place beneath the short counter in his cramped shop. To add itself to the other odd-shaped pans there which served as repositories for coins of different denominations. Thus constituting, all in all, Charley Squat-in-Thunderstorm's cash-register! Charley saw in the dishpan, however, only the bronzed head and shoulders of what would have been called a tall, dignified, middle-aged North American Indian, with a single black fetlock hanging over his creased forehead, above his high cheekbones—a brilliant gold tooth—and an open, half buttonless vest of snakeskin partly covering a pink and white striped barbershop shirt.

But now a shadow falling athwart the street door of the shop apprised Charley that a customer was entering. Either to bring a suit for cleaning—or to get same.

Charley took a hurried, troubled glance at the cluttered cement-floored workroom behind him and the counter, with its naphtha pans atop benches, its revolving hat cleaner, and



its two soaked suits now evaporating in the open window, one of which had been promised its owner for all of a week ; then he cast a more hopeless glance at the glassed-in cabinet to one side, where a half dozen cleaned suits hung, each with squares of paper pinned thereto bearing cryptic Indian signs, and with empty cardboard boxes galore atop the cabinet. And now Charley turned to greet his prospective customer.

And who, now actually entering, proved to be someone Charley knew well. And personally liked. None other than Tippingdale's Chief of Police Wilkins Moneypenny. A little short man the Chief was, no higher than  $5\frac{1}{2}$  feet, with ever-darting blue eyes and a straw-yellow beard that stuck out almost at right angles from his chin ; on his head was the blue and heavy-gold-embossed cap that betokened his rank—but which all in town knew had belonged originally to his uncle Cyrus Moneypenny, the famous police chief of Memphis, Tennessee—whence Wilkins Moneypenny himself had come.

Had Charley, instead of having spent most of his working life with a circus and wild-west show—until, that is, he got too rheumatic to ride in the big stagecoach hold-up scene—been familiar with American short-story literature, he would have known that Chief Wilkins Moneypenny resembled nobody else than the famous "Captain Kettle," and had Charley, who himself spoke most perfect English by dint of his utterly useless education in an Indian reservation college, known the nuances of American dialect, he would have known that the Chief's everyday speech was a perfect 50-50 combination of "river-bottom" and "hill-billy."

But Charley himself was already speaking.

"Good morning, Chief Moneypenny. And what can I do for you?"

Chief Moneypenny, standing now inside the door, had a reproachful look on his face.

"Wal' dang it, Charley," he complained, "I thunk 'at I made it clar' to you yest'day 'bout the new State Law pervidin' 'at evv'y kind o' goods tu'k in by an'boday, fo' cleanin' o' what, has got to have a receipt giv' fo' it? An' that all this hyar fool pinnin' of a man's dee-scription on his suit, like—like a danged Chineeman—is out. Sence——"

"I—I have given tickets—to everybody since," protested Charley. "Just as you instructed me. Though I did still append my cryptic markings. Look——"

And he brought up from under the counter a coverless cigar box in which lay a couple of dozen scissors-cut pieces of thin silver-hued bark, about four inches square, and with, written across each piece in black ink, "Charley" and a number.

"But ya didn't," protested Moneypenny, "give th' lineman what jest went out o' hyar, aftah leavin' a suit and gittin' one, no ticket. 'Caze I jest ast him, up the street thar. On gin'ral princ'ples. He——"

"You mean—the brown man? With turban on head?"

And Charley made a circular stirring motion about his own head.

"I mean the Injun—yeah—not Injun like you, but Injun from East Injia—'ith the yaller towel 'round his conk." And Moneypenny sniffed audibly at such outlandish habiliments.

"I gave him a ticket, I swear," protested Charley. "I——"

"Wa'all, we'll argy it out," pronounced the Chief, judicially. "Injun to Injun, as 'twere!" He stepped out the door. Put his fingers to his mouth. Whistled. "Hi, Injun, come hyar."

He waited till a figure drew up on the narrow sidewalk outside, and then, opening the door further, said: "Come in hyar, Injun. Or—or Hindu as I reckon yer rightly called. We got a argyment on our hands—about the ca'yin' out of a suttin State Law, the bustin' o' which raghtfully ca'ys a \$10 fine."

The man who dignifiedly stepped inside the shop was a tall powerfully built Hindu, perhaps 45 years of age, deep chocolate in colour, with almost classical features and a short black beard. He wore a soiled yellow turban instead of the usual hat, and a peculiar maroon-coloured short-sleeved flannel shirt. He carried a thin coat loosely over the same arm that hugged a tied-up suitcase. Seeing the Chief proceed straight over to the counter, and at the same time motion him to follow, the Hindu did so. Now both stood at the counter, facing each other, Charley constituting, as it were, the audience!

"Hindu," said the chief dourly, "thar 'pears t' be a leetle diff'ence in 'pinion 'round hyar. Which we hatter git to th' bottom of. So f'ust—to cred'bilities! Now yo're a wukker, hain't ye, on the 'lectrical linegang, in th' plant, yander?" He tossed his head toward that great hive of industry whose combined roars and booms could be heard, though considerably subdued, even in here.



"That eez correct, sair," said the Hindu.

"Whyfer hain't ye wukkin' this mornin'?"

"Varee easy for to answer, sair. Las' night did I put in three full hour on emairgancy lineman job. Now I do not go on job today—till noon."

"Wa-all, I'll hatter take yo're wu'd—on th' matter of the 'mergency. Lineman, heh? Then yo're the feller called Bombay, o' course?"

"That also is correct, sair. I am call' that becoze my employment re-cords in mills show I am born in that so-wanderful city. On 17 Delhi Road—eef you wan' same. Bot my right name, 'owevair, eez Ghotus Khotaval Chakraverti."

The Chief but gave a sour grimace at this unwieldy appellation. But was plainly intrigued, if not appalled, at the vast distance between Bombay and Tippingdale. Even asked:

"Durned long way from home, hain't ye?"

"In mattair of Space—yes; so far as pro-jec-tion of astral self go, no deestance—at all."

The Chief made a moué. "Larn' yer linework in Injia?"

"Correct, sair. In Serampur. Great region of jute mills, along Hughli River."

"Millworkers all Inj—ah—Hindus like yo'rese'f? Or do they i'clude, perhaps, Chinkies—an', now that the war is over, Jap——"

"All are, sair, of India onlee. They are, for mos' part, Uriyas, Punjabis, and Peshwaris, latter moch like, you know—een fac', sam' race as—Afghans?"

"Yo're 'way over my head," grunted the Chief. "Wall, Bombay, Charley Squat-in-Thunderstorm hyar sw'ars he gi' ye a ticket. 'Codin' to the new State Laws. Now Charley's a intellygent man, sure—even graduated oncet from a Injun college—such as 'twas." And the Chief gave a hyper-critical sniff at, and concerning, Indian higher education. "'Sides w'ich," he added, with no sniffing, "he's a act-or—or was. And ef'n he says——"

"Act-or?" said the lineman. He surveyed Charley with profound interest. "It mos' be mos' eenteresteeng, my fran', to be soch. It——"

"I was but a Wild-West Show performer, that is all," said Charley sadly. "And——"

"Hyar," put in Moneypenny, irritably, "this hain't no discussion o' acting. This is—well the p'int is, Hindu, that

ef'n Charley—with all his 'sperience an' background, says he give you a ticket—and 'you say he didn't—then who in billy-hell am I 'sposed to belie——”

Bombay had turned squarely to Charley Squat-in-Thunderstorm.

“I varee sorree, my fran', to mak' troble—Chief ask me op street if I get teecket—I 'ave to say 'no'—I——”

“Wait,” begged Charley. “You remember,” he now protested, “you laid your coat on this counter—stepped over to survey yonder Indian calendar?” He wagged his own bronzed head toward the side wall of the shop, where a beautiful lithographed Indian girl filled several square feet.

“Yes.”

“Well—I stuck the ticket in an open pocket of your coat. So you would not lose same. I thought you saw me do it. But now——”

The Hindu was already inserting his long powerful-looking brown fingers in the outer pocket of the coat on his arm. Was drawing out, a second later, in the presence of Moneypenny, no less than a square of silver-hued birchbark, hand lettered and hand numbered.

“In the name of Good Queen Vict——.” He turned helplessly to the little man in the police chief's hat. “I was varee wrong, Chief. I was varee moch wrong!”

Chief Wilkins Moneypenny had already thrown up his own pudgy hands. “Okay—okay,” he said disgruntledly, to everybody present. “My fault, too, I reckon. Evva'body's error—an' nobody's fault, I reckon. Evva'body's a victim of a mistake. Jest a fool error—all 'round.”

“But which will never occur again,” promised Charley sternly, and hurtfully, “for from now on I will do even as Jim Kee, the laundryman, is now doing, under these new provisions—tear my piece of bark in two—and keep half—so that I have a receipt—for my receipt. Yes, sir!”

“Wa'll, that's all right, too, I'd say,” said the Chief. “Well, come on, Bombay. I'll stroll on up 'ith you fer a block. Like to hear more about this city whar you 'uz born. I got me a cousin lives thar.”

The two men drew out the door. Moved off.

And Charley, once more alone, shook his head helplessly. Wondering why the Commonwealth of India passport that had lain inside the breast pocket of this Hindu's suit—the one



brought in a week ago, and taken out today—had carried—as even Charley had not been able to help but note—a most peculiar entry filled in on it after the significant printed line reading “Profession, Trade, or Occupation.” An entry which had even been followed by no less than the parenthesized, but highly salient, words “Confirmed by Examiner.” An entry, in short, which had been not at all that of “Lineman,” nor even of “Electrician,” but of—“Actor!”

But at this point Charley shrugged his shoulders and proceeded to forget the entire matter for good and for all.

## CHAPTER VIII

### RED MCAFEE'S METHOD

“WHAT'S your suggestion then, Red—to end sabotage in the Tippingdale Mills?”

Noah Turnbo, leaning back in his swivel chair facing his linegang foreman, surveyed the red-haired man troubledly.

“Simply this,” replied Red McAfee promptly. “Let's weed out every suspicious man in th' linegang, one at a time, and watch results over the course of the next three weeks. Tabulatin' th' frequency o' them circuit-breaks so's to see w'ether we got rid o' The Nipper, an' w'ether——”

“But heavens and earth, Red,” interrupted the older man, “we've eliminated the really suspicious men two months ago. From the first, Whiskey Davis, up to Deadpan Fentress, who was the last. At the present moment, not one of the gang is any more to be suspected than anyone else. In that respect, they're all on a par. They——”

“No, they ain't,” stated McAfee pointedly. “How about that damned Englishm—ah—uh—I call all Englishmen ‘damned Englishmen,’ Chief, because—uh—in view o' the fact that—but I'm off the beam, an'—anyway,” Red flounderingly broke off, “how about—Kel Lauriston?”

“Kel Lauriston?” repeated the superintendent thoughtfully, ignoring all of Red's somewhat stumbling semi-excoriations. And practically unconsciously repeated the linegang nickname of the man referred to. “‘High-Tension,’ eh?” He was silent. “Then you still feel, Red, that Lauriston's

the man that's doing the wire-nipping? You hinted at that last week."

"I always suspicioned that he had a finger in it," declared Red obdurately. "In the first place, Mr. Turnbo, he's a boomer. An'——"

"But there are no unexplained 'holes' in his employment history," expostulated Turnbo. "Other than, of course, that six months he put in with that private construction outfit on Tonga Island in the Pacific—while the Seebees were in process of being created—and those two later years he put in in that anti-invasion camp on the California-Southern California boundary—wrongly classified as——"

"An' I say," Red put in angrily, "that his whole hist'ry in that there camp may be the Mullarky. For th' camp-paper clippin' he turned in here for gen'ral ident'fication when you hired him, may ha' be'n set up by himself, and printed himself." Turnbo listened patiently to this obviously biased argument. "What t' hell," went on Red, waxing more wrathful, "is the story? He's the on'y bird in the U.S. Forces who never even seen a Jap in the Pacific—but got his Jap on Amer'can terr'tory! Goes out, orig'nally—with a private construction outfit—to Tonga Island to git it fixed ag'in invasion—an' the whole outfit leaves 24 hours before the Japs come and wipe out ever'thing on it. All right. He gets back—an' fin'ly winds up in the army. Gets burrit in an outfit in Southern Calyforny. Where, long later, a Jap plane, comin' out of a hideout in Mex'co, goes over that there camp very low, strafin' hell out of it with a machine gun—and this guy, p'ticly; he has sense of mind enough—in the int'view in the clippin', he claims he was jest scared!—to kneel and take a single pot-shot at the plane's engyne; and low!—kills it dead, so's the Jap has to come down and be took pris'ner. And has a lot o' incendiary bombs on him, designed for Los Angeles or what-have-you. Bah!"

"That clipping is bonafide," pronounced Turnbo. "Its contents would undoubtedly have been a national news story had the whole affair not had to be soft-pedalled at the time it happened, and written up months afterwards. And new events by then had made its facts—well—penny-ante stuff. No, Red, I checked the clipping with an actual issue of that army paper available here in town. The clipping's bonafide; hence the facts in it would have to be."



"Bonyfidy, eh? Well, I allus half-thought—well, all right. The point is, Mr. Turnbo, that Lauriston's a boomer—and boomers don't have none too much loyalty to no plant they work in. In the second place, he knows—or thinks he knows—too durn much about th' 'lectrical construction game. And in the third place, he's one of the cockiest damned individ'als I ever see. He's got one o' them tongues in his head which pract'cally always is sayin' 'take it or leave it.' And a hifalutin' way of speaking, too—sometimes—that don't fit in with no ordinary pole-hiker's job. I tell you, Mr. Turnbo, he's *the* man to weed out." Red paused. Then he went on "Mind you, though, I don't actually know that Kel Lauriston is The Nipper. It could be that after he was fired, the trouble'll go on the same as ever. There's no tellin' 'bout that, o' course."

Noah Turnbo remained silent for several minutes, staring out at the potted plants on the broad windowsill. At length he spun round and faced Red McAfee once more.

"Red," he said suddenly, "I'm going to tell you what I know about Kel Lauriston—but it's understood that you're to keep it to yourself, for I gave him my sacred word on that when I hired him. Thus far, all I've been able to tell you was that he was virtually, and to all intents and purposes an Englishman—and never had lived—in England. Perhaps I had no right to tell you even that much, confidentially and all as I did, without giving you the explanatory facts. And—however," Turnbo broke off, "Kel Lauriston, Red—believe it or not—once came within a millimetre's breadth—within the veritable flicker of a gnat's eyelash!—of being the richest man in all England."

"Th' richest man—in all England?" gasped Red.

"Right! And the tiny insignificant thing that snatched a fortune of a hundred million dollars out of his hands—that caused him to be what he is today—a lineman—moreover, a boomer lineman—even yet more, as I understand, a penniless boomer lineman—was——"

"Was what?" asked Red, incredulously.

"A mere thimbleful of old port wine," said Noah Turnbo.

## CHAPTER IX

### A THIMBLEFUL OF WINE

"You don't mean to tell me," said Red jocularly, "that a guy could get plastered on a thimbleful o' dago red, an' lose his chances to—but I give up."

Noah Turnbo shook his head, almost amusedly.

"No, Red," he replied, "nothing like that. Kel Lauriston, Red, is—or was—no less than the grandson—and the only grandson—of Sir Anthony Fenstock of London, who, when alive, was the richest man in England. Kel Lauriston was a grandson of Sir Anthony's by the latter's daughter Beryl who broke with the old man, and married the man she loved, in America, and died in giving birth to Kel. The only mother Kel Lauriston ever knew was a stepmother, who, however, was very good to him. Anyway, when Sir Anthony's agents, through long meticulous tracing down of his own daughter, finally found that Kel Lauriston, indisputably and beyond any doubt whatsoever, was his grandson, Kel was brought to England, and the old man was overjoyed. Kel was then in high school in America, somewhere in Worcester, Massachusetts, living with his father, his stepmother being dead. Well, Sir Anthony was overjoyed—for Kel was the spitting image of his own two sons, both dead—and without children. The old man had already disposed—by will, that is—of his estate into a number of huge trusts in England. Most of them terminable, into the form of permanent bequests, a few years after his death should take place, though they varied considerably that way. But he made excited plans that day to have Kel sent to the finest technical schools in England—to become, in short, an electrical engineer. He ordered his solicitors to come next day, and terminate that old will by the drawing-up of a new will, all in favour of Kel. And, to celebrate the finding of this wonderful grandson, he had a bottle of old port opened. And drank a thimbleful. His blood pressure, it seems, was high—the wine caused it to rise a bit higher—and he had a stroke. And died—then and there. And Kel was left high and dry. For mere 'intent' to make a will is, it appears in England, of no legal significance whatsoever.



Any more than it is in many of our own states, here. And so, as I say, Kel was left high and dry. The trusts, as originally scheduled in the old man's will, got everything. The matter was kept out of British papers, as such things can be done in England. And thus remained out of American ones. And Kel got back to America—on a cattle boat. He had a father to help support—for his father was an ill man—and so Kel had to go to work. And because he had an extreme penchant for electricity, he went to work in a steelmill near Worcester. Till his father died. And then became what he is today—a boomer lineman—an excellent man, too, I fancy, who can get a job anywhere, any time in the world—but just a boomer, booming back and forth, bitter and alone, penniless too, I guess, between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. And that, Red, is the real inside story of Kel Lauriston, lineman."

"Well by gosh," said Red, "the whole story sounds like cheesecake to me. If I had the givin' out of the pink slips, Mr. Turnbo, on the stren'th o' that yarn alone, he'd be the first to get his——"

Turnbo smiled tolerantly. "Well, it sounded plenty fantastic to me. So—out of curiosity—I went to the trouble of writing to certain people in England. And sure enough, there was a Kel Lauriston who came within an inch of inheriting the vastest fortune in England. And lost—by 12 hours—or a glass of port wine, whichever way you care to look at it. And not long after, Kel Lauriston brought me in a mass of papers, establishing conclusively he was *that* Kel. So you see the facts are genuine."

"In short," Turnbo went on, "Kel Lauriston is a classical example of how our lives are altered completely by the tiniest of elements. His destiny as the richest man in England was shifted to perhaps one of the poorest men in America—since boomers always have nothing, and no one can have less than nothing—by the flick of Fate's eyelash—a thimbleful of port wine downed by a multimillionaire."

"All—right," said Red grumpily. "Then, in spite of that, is all that any proof that he ain't nippin' wires with those wire-cutters of his—all over this plant? Why—a guy who got his pockets turned inside out like that'd be bitter as hell at capital, money—employers—any instytution that represented dough. He—well is all what you say any proof that Kel Lauriston ain't The Nipper?"

"No," said Turnbo regretfully, "it isn't."

He said no more, however. Drumming, instead, thoughtfully on the desk with his fingers. During which Red fidgeted, but said nothing either. The older man's face seemed to show that he was weighing the pros and cons of an unpleasant situation. Finally Turnbo, with a reluctant sigh reached into the top drawer of his desk and withdrew a pad of pink-coloured slips. He signed the top one, tore it off—but held it up only. McAfee's face, however, instantly lighted up.

"It could be, Red, that you're right," Turnbo acceded.

"For he's a boomer—and a rather bitter individual to boot. So — to close the debate — here's your pink slip, all signed. Pin it to his paycheck at the end of this week, and which'll be now—let's see?—four days from now, won't it? Yes. And mark the slip merely 'Laid off on account of reduction in force.' And——"

With an uneasy sigh, he extended it to Red, who took it quickly. Thrusting it in the upper pocket of his brown coat, and nodding only. And now Turnbo proceeded to explain his sigh.

"I—I shouldn't, I know, feel so squeamish in letting him go. Even though with his booming record—I might almost say 'zooming' record!—he's not got a flea's chance to get into, say, the Specialtown Plant, who are laying off just now—not hiring—and so will have to depart this part of the country." He shook his head. "No, I shouldn't feel squeamish about it, I know. For he's reckless and restless—Lord only knows why he's even stayed as long as he has in this plant—in fact," went on Turnbo, as a man trying to convince himself, "being a boomer, he's only—if he isn't The Nipper!—going to blow us sooner or later anyway. So that's that—and I'll quit being thin-skinned about the whole matter."

"Bein' thin-skinned in this game is the nuts," said Red sapiently.

"Perhaps it is—yes. In the meantime," Turnbo now cautioned, "better get out of him any and all 'free' nightwork due you under those 'loaf regulations'—yes—out of fairness to the other men—yes. And speaking of night work brings me back to that 22,000-volt line. The minute the Slagville Plant is near the end of their rush operations—and which will definitely be this week, and quite possibly tomorrow night—I'll let you know; then we'll close it down, at midnight that



night, when the load curve is at the minimum. Tell whoever you assign the job to, to work fast—but not to slouch the job. Also, tell whoever you assign to stay in the high-tension shanty to guard that cut-off, and keep those deadly lines 101-per cent. dead—tell that person that the single existing set of keys to that shanty and oil-switch are kept at this office now, and not at the power house as before. Otherwise, so much time may be wasted chasing up keys that—but you understand. 147 is the Pole Number, but you have that, I guess. And——”

A prolonged hollow whistle interrupted Turnbo's words. It was taken up instantly by separate mill buildings all over the plant. Amidst the din—as could be seen through the window of Turnbo's office—hundreds of men, dirty-faced, some wearing overalls, others clad only in trousers and coarse undershirts, but all swinging dinnerpails, made a mad rush towards the gates which were not far back of the Electrical Office—so-called Executives' Gate.

“Dinner time already, eh?” Turnbo was commenting, unbelievably checking his watch. He rose, and turned to Red McAfee. “Where you eating today, Red? The air-cooled place uptown?—or the one with the big red-checked tablecloths just outside the gate?”

“Neither,” said Red, also rising. “Though I like the latter joint the best. No, I got me a pail today—and liverwurst sandwiches in it to boot”—and Red licked his lips—“and it's at the linegang shanty. So I'm pulling on.”

Red took up his hat, and with no further words beat a retreat from the room. Even while Noah Turnbo was already retrieving a straw hat from a coat rack near the desk. Once outside, Red struck off in an opposite direction from Executives' Gate and the flow of jostling foreigners, and shortly found himself near the centre of the plant. A few minutes later he left the road, where it meandered hopelessly, and cut across a great open space which was filled with rusty broken castings and junk of all sizes and descriptions—stuff, from World War II plants mostly, waiting its turn to be melted up—even parts of gargantuan General Sherman III tanks which had never got to see action on any front—but all destined to become post-war steel. Near the centre of the area—and quite all alone—Red stopped, and withdrew the pink slip. He scanned it carefully, to see that it was all in order. And made a few half-spoken-aloud observations as he did so.

"All in order, all right, all right," he said satisfiedly. "One pink slip—for one goddamned son-of-a-bitch—who may be Mr. Nipper, for all I'd know—and who maybe ain't Mr. Nipper, for all I'd likewise know—since they's 23 men on the gang, and anyone c'n be him. Yowsah!" He half nodded his head, but perplexedly. "Maybe you're Mr. Nipper, Brother Laur'ston—and maybe you ain't. But you're canned—whatever you are. You're out—O—U—T—out! And——"

But here supreme elation got the best of Red McAfee. And he actually waved the pink slip gleefully at the remains of a huge iron flywheel.

"There, b'heavens," he muttered, still half aloud but to himself, "was the best stroke that Red McAfee Esquary ever put over! For with Kel Laur'ston out o' the plant—and out o' Tippin'dale to boot—I ought to git back as solid as ever—with Myrene."

With which cryptic words, though not perhaps cryptic to himself, he bit himself off a generous "chaw" from the sticky plug in his back pocket, and headed off rapidly in the direction of the linegang shanty. In which, at this very moment—though Red did not know it—Kel Lauriston, the man who just missed becoming the richest man in all England due to a tiny glass of port wine!—Kel Lauriston, penniless boomer, was re-reading for the tenth time today a letter which, strange to say, threw some light on the *real* motive back of the vicious sabotage going on in Tippingdale Mills.

## CHAPTER X

### THE BOOMER

THE 6.00 p.m. whistle had just finished blowing.

To Kel Lauriston, coming up the steps of the linegang shanty—and late!—his climbers clanking over his shoulder, the whistle had a melancholy tone today. As though it were repeating the question running through his head that very minute. And which stark, bare question ran:

"When a certain broke boomer, who never had more than a nickel at one time in his life—except on payday!—and hasn't more than a half dozen nickels right now—proposes to the



swellest kid in the world tonight, what the hell will he do—if she says ‘yes’?”

The whistle gave its usual final flippant:

“Whoo—who-oo—who—who-oo!”

Which exactly repeated Kel Lauriston’s further question. Running:

“And on the other hand, what the hell will he do if she says ‘no’?”

He stepped over the threshold of the linegang shanty. Noting that all the men had been in—and gone—for the long galvanized iron trough that filled the entire opposite wall of the low-ceilinged wooden building—the so-called “hog-trough”—was dripping, and the floor underneath it, clear out to the centre of the room where stood the old rusty potbellied stove which roared lustily in wintertime, was slipperily wet—showing how a line of sunburned torsoes had stood at that hog trough today washing off the signs of the mills.

A cranky voice came from a doorway which led into a small office, partitioned off by glass from the big room, and in which was a table, carrying a telephone, and a filing cabinet. The owner of the voice was red-haired, and evidently cranky.

“Wal damn it to hell, Laur’ston, can’t you come in a bit later? How the hell much time do you expect to give the mills—for what you git? Come in here, will you—before you wash up. I got to go myself, and want to give you some low-down on a forthcomin’ night job.”

“Okay.”

Lauriston turned to the time-clock near the doorway, and taking his card from the rack, rang in his time. Staring at himself in the one piece of glass provided by the clock. And seeing, of course, an exceedingly sunburned tall broadshouldered fellow, with steel grey eyes—the greyest in the world!—a faded red bandanna knotted about his neck, a bit of a sad and bitter expression at the corner of his eyes and mouth. A broadrimmed grey felt hat, of Western shape, matched the grey flannel shirt that he wore, laced at the neck with a thong. Curiously he was reflecting, at the moment, not that he looked the 30 years of age he possessed—but that the 30 years he looked had brought him not a red cent.

“Wal damn it, Laur’ston,” came the voice again, “will ya quit figgerin’ how good lookin’ you are—or ain’t—and come in here? I got to go, I tell you.”

"Coming, Red. Keep the old tuxedo on." Lauriston deposited his time-stamped card in the rack, and strode into the office. Dropping his climbers on the floor. And sinking into a chair.

"If you don't mind," he said, "my sitting? For I've been standing on those hooks of mine all day."

"Softie, eh?" retorted Red. "Can't take a day's work—but let's get down to bus'ness. I wanta get away."

"Okay. So do I. So what's on your mind, then?"

"A forth-comin' night job—for you," affirmed Red. "For it seems, Laur'ston, that on this arrangement where you fellows compensate for the loafin' you do on the day jobs by a little free night work, you owe me some six hours——"

"I don't loaf on any job," said the other, "but am glad to pay in with the rest—on the free night work. So save the moral arguments. What do you want done?"

Red grimaced.

"Let's see. Now that Sunday that the Slagville Cement Plant was closed down bag and baggage—the day they'd et up all their backlog, and hadda stop runnin'—you was with the gang, wasn't you?—at least all o' the gang that could be got holt of, anyway—when it turned out to clean the insulators on the transmission line?"

"Right! I dispossessed so many poor insects of a home that day, between the petticoats of those insulators, that I felt like a mortgage forecloser. Except that mortgage foreclosures don't exist any more."

"Oh, don't they?" said Red cryptically. "Well my brother, Dan McAfee, uptown has to—but skip it. Well, you cleaned out a few insects, that day, you say? Every one o' which—his nest, anyway—coulda b'en the passer of a nice stream o' high-tension juice from one of them insulator petticoats on to the next. So you wasn't very hard hearted, I guess. But now let's see. You're next to high-tension line construction, ain't you? Or is this 'High-Tension' nickname that swings from you the baloney?"

"Baloney, I'm afraid. For I've never done real high-tension work. Only about six months on the Western Associated Dams Power Company lines; and eight months on the Trans-Continental Power Company lines; and seven months on the—and, oh yes—I did six months on the King George Transmission Line that runs from Niagara up to Hudson's Bay.



One of the big jobs of the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario. And—let's see? I—did——"

"That's enough," grunted Red, with all the acerbity of a man who has received a blast of heated irony. "You don't have to hit me with a brick, you know, to kid me a little. Since you were on that King George line, our two dinky little 22,000-volt lines here must look like telephone circuits to you. Well, they's a small job that's got to be did on our Slagville branch soon—good for about two hours' work 'round midnight—an' in a couple nights more or less—so don't figure to squire any dames about town or anything—because you're next in line for free night work, and this job's plainly your meat, by right o' talents an' proclivities. Now the quickest an' easiest way to do this p'ticlar job, which is to——"

"Don't tell me about *how* to do the job," said Lauriston scornfully. "When it's ready, tell me *what* it is. And I'll do it. And in the meantime, since you've got words to waste—and time—tell me your arrangements for putting that line dead *while* I do the job—rather, *keeping* it that way. For as I remember that Sunday, it was a general high-tension shut down, for the Specialtown Plant, at the end of the other branch, had closed down completely waiting for orders to roll up—and so your powerhouse took occasion to bring its a.c.'s to a stop, and to make a general overhaul and cleanup. Including the two oil-switch cut-offs. But, obviously, if something's come up to be done on the Slagville line now, you're not going to call a general shutdown like *that*—for a little tinkering work by yours truly!—certainly not with Specialtown running day and night for a week or two, as I hear she is—and screaming for more power."

"And all of which, Red," Lauriston finished meaningfully, "brings me right back—after a hell of a lot more words than I usually use—to my first request: *if* you've words to waste, just tell me just and only your arrangements for putting that Slagville branch dead while I do your job—and *keeping* it that way. For——"

"Okay. I know what you mean. Though if you're crackin' any, from your world-wide experience, about th' way them lines happens t' be laid out here—one stemmin' right off'n the other, but at a point well off from the powerhouse, all I c'n say is that I didn't lay out the damn——"

"Don't be so apologetic, Red! About your line lay-outs

here. For I've seen hook-ups of feeds in mills so downright screwy, and so cut-off-less to boot, that you had to work 'em hot. No fooling! Of course, *they* were low-tension—not high-tension. And, on top of that, you *could*—if you had to—get 'em cut off at the switchboard, and——”

“Well, if you're crackin' now,” Red put in acerbically, “because, thanks to the p'tic'lar hook-up here they's no way to cut either of them two high-tension lines off individ'ally at the powerhouse switchboard, all I c'n say is that *I* didn't lay out the fool power systems of this plant. They was laid out back before—before the Pyramids was built, I guess! Back, an'way, before the plant even decided to grind up its waste slag, but picked a site 11 miles off so's us Tippingdalers wouldn't choke to death on white dust 24 hours a day. An' so jest tapped th' new line in on a line a'ready going to Specialtown——

“Aw hell,” broke off Red, with the infinite disgust of a man who has vouchsafed too much explanation to an underling, “it's—it's all too straw-jay for a world trave'ler like you to have to cock ear to. It's——”

“Hold ever'thing,” said Lauriston, serenely. “I wasn't beefing about your line hook-ups here. All I was asking about, when you catapulted off the deep-end, was what your arrangements will be for keeping that Slagville line branch dead while I do your two-cent job on it. That's all. *Keeping* it dead, and——”

“Ah—Panty-Waist, eh?” retorted Red scornfully. “Now I do get it. Panty-Waist. Like that Canuck I met onct when I took a quarter year out from these mills, a couple o' years ago, and worked them three months or so up in a Montreal paper-pulpmill, strawbossin' over some hunkies—now this twisting Canuck,”—and Red chuckled derisively—“not on'y was he afraid to work on a hot line—a lousy 110-volt line—but when he worked on *any* line that had to be deaded by a switch cut-off, it wasn't enough that a good man had to guard the danged switch—no!—there hadda be a double-keyed padlock on it, with a key for him, and one for the guy tendin' same—why, that Canuck's britches was trimmed with Irish point, and——”

“Yeah?” retorted Lauriston, nettled. “Well, he sort of had the right idea at that.”

“Not for no 24-hour-a-day joint like this,” proclaimed Red



darkly. "Where we gotta work fast—keepin' the linework to a minimum. But cheer up! Old Host Joly is quittin' Saturday—he owes me two free night hours—so his pay off on same shall be devoted to perfectin' you—that is, with your honorable permish! Remember—he ain't never lost a case yet!"

"Host Joly is okay for my money," said Kel. "In fact, Red, your toolman is the most careful man in the whole place. A fact. He—but what the hell is Host quitting for? He's been here, so far as I understand it, for—well, since he started here as a helper—and learned his linework here—married, and brought up a kid to start in as helper—and the kid himself now qualifies as a hookman—and Old Host is de-graduated from the lines down to toolman——"

"Nearly 50 years," Red summed up grumpily.

"Yes, would be. But he won't be happy on a pension. This place is that old boy's whole life. Why is he quitt——"

"What t'hell is it to us why he's quitting?" snapped Red exasperatedly. "I don't know. He didn't tell no reason. If the damned old fool wants to quit and sit in the sunshine, let him. We can get plenty toolmen—from brokendown boomers like——"

"Like me, yes, that's right. Only, I've not broken down yet. I've got three months of active service in me ye——"

"Oh keerist," wailed Red. "What t' hell are we arguin' about, anyway? Host Joly will play nursie-maid for you to the cut-off—and if he won't do, then cable the Duke o' Bedford, or some of your high-up British frie—skip it."

Lauriston frowned. Made reply.

"Host Joly is okay. But for pity's sake, Red, give me an intelligent helper for a change, will you? That little Swodock you assigned me last time is twice as dense as his lineman brother, Big Swodock, and——"

"No Kidding will go out with you," ordered Red.

"No Kidding?"

"No, I ain't ki——, say, what the hell!—is this a Abbott and Costello movie short?—Oswald Sweetboy, Esquire, alias 'No Kidding,' will go out with you as helper. And if he's more'n 25 per cent. dimwitted, just knock him on the head and plant him, and don't fetch him back. For—but enough o' horsing around this way. I'll give No Kidding and Host *their* dope when the job's ready. And in the meantime, don't

you figure to squire no dames to no all-night dances nor nothing—keep a free week, that's all. Beat it now. I got to figure on gettin' myself the hell out o' here."

"I also. And for dam'site better reasons than you, maybe. Okay."

And without even waiting for Red's assent, Kel took up his climbers and went back into the main room, gently closing Red in the latter's glass-encased office. And as he headed for the combined locker and toolroom, at the end of the office, he could not see Red shaking his head, angrily biting his lips, and saying:

"Oh hell—but that bastard sure gets my nanny! 'S too damned bad 'at No Kidding can't have a stinkin' row with him, out there in th' country, conk him in the bean with a stillson wrench, and plant him out there somewhere—and take it on the lam. Boy, oh boy, but I'd like to read a-a-a-all about such little epyisode—next mornin'. And be first t' tell Myrene that her smooth-tongued gen'man friend was found shovin' up daisies, and—but—" Here Red shook himself irritatedly from such delightful daydreams. "—what t' hell's—th' diff? He's out o' here an'way, end o' week. And as f'r that lousy little Johnny-Boston-Beans of a sissy—Os-wald!—ever sockin' anybody in the bean!—and plantin' 'em!" Red chuckled derisively. "Hell, when No Kidding pulls an'thing like that, Sonja Henie'll be puttin' on an ice-skatin' act—in hell!"

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCERNING A "BOHUNK" WITH A BLACK BEARD

KEL did not even bother to wash up tonight, for tonight would—in all probability, anyway!—involve more than a mere washup—and that done all in one place: the bathtub of his rooming-house. He tossed his tool belt and climbers into his metal locker, turned the combination dial it was provided with, locking it against anybody with a penchant for "borrowing" tools, and went out, noting that Red was scowlingly arranging work tickets for the day to follow.

Kel did pause a second, however, on the low wooden steps of the linegang shanty, to make sure that in his breastpocket



safely reposed that letter which, because he was late, this morning, he had to carry away from his roominghouse unopened, to read at noontime—that letter which, as sure as shooting, he felt, held the explanation of certain and various queer production breakdowns he had personally observed going on in this plant—and which letter furthermore, once he was out of the plant, he intended to re-read for the last time and then tear up. *And*, finding that it *was* safe in his breastpocket, he took off for the gate.

Of the narrow cinder road which ran past the linegang shanty steps, he took, at once, the branch that led to Workers' Road, great meandering thoroughfare that passed more mills buildings than any other in the plant. But before he had gotten 50 feet down it, he heard, from the linegang shanty steps in back of him, a peremptory "Hi."

Red again!

Kel, frowning, turned.

"Yeah? What?" He did not try to come back.

This apparently didn't bother Red. Who spoke, loud enough to bridge the distance.

"I f'rgot to tellya, when you was in my office—say, listen, d'ya think you could pick out a guy who talks Bohunk—wears a red flannel undershirt for a shirt—and sports a black fox-in-the-brush under his chin?"

"Hm?" Kel called back, caustically. "I might. With that vague description. Why?"

"Because," said Red, "they's a guy o' that de-scription in Plate Mill Number II w'at wants to hold converse with you. Private converse, see? He's on this shift now beginnin'; so if you want to mosey off Workers' Road into P.M. II, and take a gander about for him——"

"What the hell does a bohunk hot plate handler want—with *me*?"

Red, in the doorway, shrugged his shoulders non-interestedly.

"He told the guy what told me, that he wants to discuss with you somethin' what on'y you and him—in the whole mills—knows about. The address o' some fat nigger wench, o' course! What else would it be? Well goo'bye. You got the message now."

And Red turned on his heel, and went back in.

Kel stood looking back, then turning slowly around.

"Wants to discuss—with me—something that only he and I

—in the whole mills knows about? Oh-oh! Then he must know—must know the *real* cause of the sabotage going on—and now wants to—but who the hell *is* the bohunk of the red flannel undershirt and the black beard? I'll sashay off, right now, up the main road—and see!”

## CHAPTER XII

### SPURZYA

VERY quickly Kel was on Workers' Gate Road itself, cinder paved too, like all steel mill roads, the low afternoon sun beating into his face as he trudged westward past coke ovens and countless narrow-gauge railroad tracks. And within three minutes he was turning off onto a short branch road which led down a couple of hundred feet or so and terminated in a great, rambling, mill building; was, a half minute or so later, entering the building itself from its road side. No door did he have to open to do so. For the simple reason, of course, that steel-making mills have no doors or windows, being one and all comprised of but steel columns holding rooftrusses which themselves support corrugated iron roofs.

Threading his way through seemingly acres of goosenecks—those rigid vertical pipes rising two feet from the floor, and carrying in their open ends pivoted revolving wheels over which, in any direction whatsoever, the heaviest of steel plates can be propelled by a light push, he made his way toward the rear edge of the mill. Glancing at the controller man in the plate-checking shanty to make sure the latter had no black beard, and who, at this second, by dint of speeding up motors geared to certain rollers which lay cunningly amongst the goosenecks, was shunting a huge—and still very hot, plate into the cooling yard.

“Hi, Plate-Gooser,” Kel demanded of the controller man, “have you got a bohunk in this mill—who sports a black fox-in-the-brush?”

“Over behind the rolls,” said the man curtly. “Ask for Spurzya.”

Spurzya!

That was a Bulgarian name, Kel knew from having been around mills galore. Neither hunky nor bohunk. Nor—



But Kel was off and away. Was rounding, a few seconds later, the back of the plate-making rolls themselves. A great crew of foreigners, with unshaven faces and shirts open at the necks, were waiting, "clinchers" in hand, for a plate they had sent through to return—to return exactly one millimetre thinner! Now it came—red-hot—a great luminescent ribbon six feet wide—how long?—still coming—still coming—18 feet long—and as it came roaring through, it could be noticed that here—and there—at many places on its surface—were black patches that looked sullenly resentful of the cheerful glow all about them.

Oxide! Which must be blown off—by potassium nitrate. And which——

The rolling foreman, a lank man with a wide grey-shot moustache, curving majestically outward from his face, keenly watched the plate—and the black oxide spots. Called out to someone behind him:

"Needs extry this run, Spurzya."

And now Kel saw the man he sought. Coming away, with a tin pan full of white powder, from an open barrel containing the same material. Plainly the head of the plate-handling crew; not a labourer on it—if he handled the nitrate. A great ox of a Bulgarian he was, with a huge black beard, and clad from waist up in a red flannel undershirt; he reached into his pan of white powder—reaching into that pan, and cursing out the plate-handlers in Bulgarian and several other tongues was plainly Spurzya's chief business if he handled the nitrate—and even before the plate had reached the end of its forward swing—and become grasped in the notches of the waiting clincher-spanners, to be hurled back again into the swiftly reversing rolls, Spurzya threw, lightning like all over its surface—but uncannily where the black patches were—the white powder.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Violent explosions all over the plate. Ear-splitting. But at each explosion the magical disappearance of a patch of oxide. Now the plate started back through the rolls.

Bang!—crack—crack—bang!——

A literal machine gun, that plate—the pressure of those cylinders exploding all the as-yet-unexploded patches of the nitrate.

And now the big Bulgarian caught sight of Kel. His bearded

face lighted up with plain unconcealed recognition. He gave a significant toss of his head toward where the rear side of the mill apparently gave off onto a so-called nights-run slab-reservoir yard, though a corrugated iron, fencelike wind-break, erected, no doubt, to prevent below-zero winter-time winds from cooling the plates, shrouded it. He turned to the foreman. Made some sort of sign, plainly, indicating that Nature was stronger than Bulgarians. For even as Kel kept right on going—like a man merely taking a convenient short cut across a mill, no more—the foreman called out “Again? A-a-all right!—turn it over to Zagorus.”

And now Kel was waiting on the other side of the corrugated iron wind-break, amongst the slabs which had been selected for the night’s rolling—but which had not yet gone to the “soaking pits” for pre-heating.

And now the big Bulgarian came through and faced Kel. Who spoke curtly.

“All right, I’m here, Cap’n Kidd—no, wrong number, oxcoos’ it please—he was another pirate, wasn’t he?—shoot, Blackbeard! I heard you wanted to discuss something with me privately—something that only you and I know about. What is it—Blackbeard?”

The pirate lore was evidently all Greek to the big Bulgarian, but free mention of his black beard seemed to put him on firmer conversational ground. He spoke, though troubledly.

“T’anks for com’, linaman. Yu plant’ gude fallow. Me, Om wanna aska yu som’tang.”

“Yes—something that only you and I know about! And that must be—but dish it!”

“Will do! An’ Om aska yu this, linaman, becoz linaman gats, in his vurk, hall hover plant. An’——”

“And gets all sorts of chances to monkey-diddle with lines—electric machinery—whatnot. Sa-ay—what is this? A proposition? Or blackmail? For whichever it—but see here, I’ll ask *you* one now, old Fox-in-the-Brush. What is this confydential thing you want to spiel with me about?”

“Wa-all, isa this,” and Spurzya appeared sheepish. “Yu know vare catnap she grow in plant here—hey, no?”

“Catnap—oh, catnip? Inside this pl—yes, I do. But what’s this got to do with sabo——, skip it. Why?”

“Wall, me Om olvays knows she som’vare to be foun’. Never know vare. But me, Om la’rn *yu* know vare. Vy not



—yu linaman—gets hall hover place—me, Om—but isa thisa-way : Me, Om gotta cat——”

“Cat ?” said Kel. “But what’ve cats got to do with sabo—wait—fer goodness sake—now ’twasn’t in front of your house maybe—where you live—that I was chinning the other night with a little female cat no bigger’n a louse—giving her a sprig of fresh catnip I plucked that day—and telling her I’m probably the only gink who knows where it can be gotten in the mills——”

“Did !” declared Spurzya triumphantly. “Vass in frond of my brodder’s house. Me, Om vass in vindow. I look piece catnap—fin’ she frash—give she back to black cat but try catch yu. I know yu linaman—from see yu wance on pole. Aska night trouble-shooter—he sais yu mosta be man Kel.”

“That’s me. Well I’ll be damned ! Eavesdropping—on me elymosynary activities. And now—well I’m kind o’ lost, Fox-in-the-Brush—for I came here thinking to talk sabo—skip *that*—but now we’re talking cats, and—but you say you have one ? A-a-a-all right. What kind of a cat ? Name ? History ? Personali——”

“Oh hesa biga lazy louse of cat,” said Spurzya, but so affectionately that pride and love actually radiated from him. “I—I keeck ’im hout,” he apologised, “ef he no vas soch fool. but he vud starf, dat blinkin’ cat. So me, Om——” He chuckled in his beard, “So sinze me Om got wan cat fool on my han’—but yu mean w’at you talla dat black cat ?—yu know vare in plant is catnap ?”

“Sure do, Blackbeard. And I believe I’m the only gink what does !”

“Vare catnap she grow ?” demanded Spurzya, cautiously looking, for some reason, over his shoulder at the mill he had just stepped out of.

“Listen, you ain’t delivered them goods ! Your cat’s name and all. For I——”

“Say, linaman—yu su’ lak cats, don’s yu ? Wall, my cat hesa nam’ Ferdinandova. Biga striped Tom so fat in belly yu’ su’ he gonna have kits—on’y he no thaz kin’ o’ cat, the bigga——”

“Sa-a-ay—you live on Sulphur Street ? In Goosetown ?”

“Uh—huh.”

“In a yellow house propped up at one corner—on a big rusty iron preserving kettle ?”

"Yazz."

"I know your Ferdinandova. I've twigged his fool ear more than once; and the first time I met him I even congratulated him on the big litter of kittens he was going to have—except that he turned around—and—bing!—went one hypothesis! Well, Blackbeard, since it's catnip and not sabotage you're spieling about with me, you'll find the former—aye, the catnip—in the slabyard—yeah, the big main one in the northwest corner of the plant, along that Ghosts' Walk fence that parallels those woods—the very one from which the soaking pit outfit plucks these very slabs here, every few days. The catnip appears, here and there, in small patches, along the base of the north fence only—there's none along the fence that runs along Bessemer Road at all. Though I think I did see a little at the base of one or two of those oldest slabs that have been there since the Year one because they contain radium, or gold, or some fool element and can't be rolled. But the fence is your meat."

"Gude! Not the joak, bot the information. What I act on, mabbe, whan theez shift she finish' an' hover. Bot I ketch all wot you sais. Thanks, linaman. An' now I get the hall quick back to thems rolls."

"Okay. But what am I? Some kind of poison? That you got to give a signal of gotta-go-when-you-hafta-go? Couldn't you tell the guy with the handlebar moustache you'd like to have a chat with me?"

"No," Spurzya returned, gravely and firmly. "Om gotta ask yu 'bout catnap private, see? Foreman he hate cats lak hell. Me, I pretents I gatta-go-when-I-hafta-go so to follows yu."

"I get it," grinned Kel. "Well, now you've the dope on fresh catnip in Tippingdale. And give Ferdinandova a back-rub for me."

And still grinning, he plunged on through the small nights-run reservoir slabyard, to round the rear of the mill and get back to the main road.

Not knowing in the least that within about one minute he would be giving this same information to still another person! And as a result of which——



## CHAPTER XIII

### HOMEWARD BOUND VIA CHINATOWN

Kel, now back on Workers' Gate Road, had resumed his gateward trudge. The low afternoon sun still beat in his face, except for the brief stretch where the road bent in a steep curve around the modernistic building of orange brick comprising the chemical and physical laboratories, and then veered practically westward again.

And now, a hundred feet beyond the laboratories building, Kel caught sight of a bicycle flashing towards him—atop it, pedalling furiously, a small figure in silk jockey blouse and silk striped jockey cap.

"Whoa—whoa!" he shouted, waving his arms like a brakeman trying to flag the Transcontinental Mail.

The bicycle, with no other than one, Archimedes Kee, atop it, drew to a magical stop alongside Kel. A small leg let itself down, and held bicycle and owner up.

"Hi there, Mister Kel," came forth greetings in a shrill high voice.

"I hates," Kel explained, "to break a world's bicycle racing record—but I craves information."

"From me?" The flat Mongolian face of Archimedes Kee looked hopelessly puzzled. "Please to interr'gate me!"

"Will do," said Kel. "Having just been interrogated myself to a fare-you-well—by a big Bulgarian—as to where in this plant catnip grows! The same being known to me alone. And now——"

"Catnip?" Archimedes Kee was 101½-per cent. attention. "Do you mean to say—why—could you tell *me* where some is to be found?—I have a cat. And——"

"You—have? Good. Yes, Archimedes, I discovered some catnip growing in this plant last week, while sizing up the slabyard—rather, the two metal fences that hem it in—for a possible stringing together of a few night lights there, later on. Yeah. Anyway, along the metal fence that cuts off Ghosts' Walk—but not the Bessemer Road fence, are many patches of catnip growing. Goodness knows who planted it. Maybe the wind. But there it is."

"Oh, I do thank you, Mr. Kel. I have been so wishing to obtain some catnip."

"Well, you can just sneak over there tomorrow like you're reading off a slab number for the Chief Chemist or somebody—and snake yourself a pocketful."

"Yes—but not tomorrow, Mr. Kel. For you see I'm going back on duty right now. For I start tonight on early night shift. And——"

"I see. I thought you'd forgotten something and were pedalling back for it. I even forgot you're a reg'lar steel-worker—instead of an artisan—like m'self who doesn't have to work nights. Well, it shouldn't be hard to take a sneak in the slabyard sometime at night, should it? Unless, maybe—you're afraid?"

"Oh, I'm not afraid. What would there be to be afraid of? But how can I tell, in the dark, what's a weed, and what's——"

"By your nose, boy. Catnip smells like peppermint."

"Oh, thank you. And what can I do for you, Mr. Kel?"

"Well, let's see? Nothing I guess. But here—you can give me some information perhaps. Now wait. You and your dad came to Tippingdale on January first last they tell me?"

"That is right, Mr. Kel. Except that it was January second, for they were taking down the big public Xmas tree that had been erected in front of Workers' Gate, the day we came."

"Oh yes. Well now let's see! Hung died March fifth"—Kel was talking more or less to himself now, and in a mumble, as well, and registering certain dates on his fingers—"they learned the bad news within a day or two thereafter—got on the job quickly, however—perhaps shot somebody to Tippingdale, from 'Frisco or thereabouts, as early as March eighth—ninth—tenth—eleventh—Well, here's my question, boy. Strangers, when they come to a town to pluck information about matters and people in it, frequently query tradesmen—specially tradesmen who meet up with a lot of people like your father—well, now, was your father ever visited, around—say—early last March—which was nearly a full month before I hit this town myself—by any peculiar sort of stranger—who asked a lot of questions? About production, maybe. Or about President Hiatt? Or maybe Hiatt's son? Or goodness knows what?"



"Not that I know of, Mr. Kel, but when you reflect that I work many hours in the mills, I wouldn't hardly——"

"I get it. In politer langwidge, 'see hon'able father.'"

"But my father is an unus'lly observant man. Who can quickly tell if people are not what they perhaps claim to be. And he will be able, I am sure——"

"Fine and dandy then. And I shouldn't have taken up your important time, so be off with you, on that snorting steed of yours, and since Honourable Lauriston will be stopping off at laundry of Honourable Father he can cathee all information what he desires—just whenever the devil he, Honorable Lauriston, can ever get there by shanksmare—the while Archimedes he fly like swallow in air."

"You jest, of course," said Archimedes unruffled. "But I understand. And my honourable father, as you term him, will be glad to render any desired information."

"Good. And avaunt. And if I see your cat——"

But Archimedes was already off again.

Interminably Kel seemed, tonight, to tramp. Late incoming workers he met, some with a nod, and all carrying dinner pails. More coke ovens there were now. And now, over to his right, though considerably obscured by the many flatcars parked on parallel tracks at this side of the plant, was the great slabyard, looking, even in late daylight, like a graveyard with so many of the slabs or ingots standing upright with their black paint markings on them, showing the number of the pour, or the chemical composition. Far back of them all he could see where the two fences, the north fence and the west fence, came together in a corner—back of the former being so-called Ghosts' Walk, and back of the other, Bessemer Road. And now, far up ahead of him—since the road was travelling ever at a distinct forty-five-degree angle—he could see even Workers' Gate.

Twice, however, he had to wait, while snorting locomotives dragging flatcars, loaded with red-hot ingots, being set out to cool for a while atop the very cars that transported them—passed him, and he had, each time, to shield his face. Now Workers' Gate itself hove up ahead, marked by a red-painted roofed open-work wooden structure projecting inward like a hood. A burly gateguard sat tilted back in a chair, hat on back of head. Not giving any heed to any man going in, nor to any going out. Indeed, as Kel came up atop the wooden platform

under the hood, the guard rocked suddenly forward onto his feet, clambered off the platform, and drove across the dusty space in the direction of a small red-painted shack with a pointed roof and a moon cut in the doorway.

"Boy—howdy!" exclaimed Kel, shaking his head. "But that's guarding—a huge plant." He gazed after the retreating figure. "Whoever in the gang is pulling that stuff can be doing it after dark—who knows?—and walking out whenever he sees yon Neanderthaler go over to visit Mother Murphy's." He shook his head. "What price plant guards—with their watercloset a half block off from the gate?"

He shrugged his shoulders, however, traversed the space under the hood, stepped down onto terra firma, and was now out of the plant entirely—on Bessemer Road, no less, one side of which was, of course, the west mill fence, but the other side of which were dingy shops carrying canvas gloves—hickory workshirts—more canvas gloves—overalls—canvas gloves again—but ever snuff. Snuff in all kinds and colours of boxes! Up straight to Bessemer Road, however—not very far off from Workers' Gate—came Mill Avenue, a dusty looking dirt-paved road, and now Kel was pursuing it. On each side of Mill Avenue were dingy looking saloons with unpronounceable foreign names over each doorway, and, back inside over the green baize doors, giant schooners could be seen being tilted. Some men were going in. But far more were coming out. All wiping their mouths.

Kel went not in himself, however, but kept on. He turned off Mill Avenue a block up, and was now, of course, on Sulphur Street, one of the streets which housed the Polish and Hungarian steel labourers of Tippingdale.

The houses on each side of the street were all of frame, grotesquely shrunken, and badly scorched by the sun. Outside, crowds of dirty, ragged children swarmed, those who had perhaps had their suppers—and those who had not—but all screaming at each other in a foreign tongue. Some played tag, and still others sailed shingle boats in a few of the pools of stagnant water whose existence, so long back had been the last rains, showed they must once have been many feet deep. Mothers of some were shrieking to them to come to dinner. On almost every rickety set of front steps sat a weary man—or men—dressed only in trousers and undershirts. Here and there, through an open door, a woman could be seen bustling



about a glowing coal range. And many times it could be seen that she was not only dressed in cheap calico, but that her feet were bare. Thus "Goosetown"—that district, always named the same, found close to the drabdest, ugliest edge of any steel-producing centre in the United States.

But, for each block south that Kel Lauriston walked, he also took a block westward, and before almost any length of time was on a much neater, trimmer street than those so close to the mills—a street with houses that were newer, straighter, better painted. A few even had lawns, in which grass, of a sort, had manfully overcome the chemicals in the dirt and air. Here—on Silicon Street—some of the lesser white-collar workers lived—not executives, no—but those who added a few figures—or took care of a few inspections.

Now, though, at the first next intersection, he was blocked. A traffic block—in residential Tippingdale!

For a long line of brand new metal garbage dump wagons, all coupled together like elephants with tails in trunks—lay across the intersection. Which did not bother Lauriston. For, while he waited, he stood on the curb and re-read that several-paged handwritten letter which many times before he had read that day.

The letter, in short, which explained—if anything on earth ever did explain—all the curious breakdowns which Kel Lauriston knew were going on in the Tippingdale Mills.

## CHAPTER XIV

### LETTER FROM FRISCO

DEAR KEL:

Your letter, addressed just "Three-Phases" Thripp, and sent to me at that San Francisco water-front saloon address I gave you in Pittsburg, did not get forwarded to me as you marked it, for I picked it up—though but yesterday—on my return from Australia.

For I made Australia after all, Kel!

And, answering right off the bat your unspoken question, Australia's not a good territory at all for a boomer. Not even for such a one as you or I, who've seen the inside of a high school. For one thing, those Aussies are clannish as hell,

and regard any pole-hiker from up above as yanking the bread out of their damn mouths. So you better scratch Australia off your route, Comet!

And so—as you travel from hither to yon—and from yon back to hither again!—you’re stopping off at Tippingdale, heh? But what the hell’s holding you there so long? Since April first, you say? That’s four-and-a-half months! Goodness, Kel, you aren’t slipping, are you, as the Ace of Boomers? You ought to have been well out of there by this time; what’s the attraction? Another poker game you figure you can break, in spite of a house kitty that gets it all? Another cripple to set up in business, who, like the one in Pittsburg, blows all your set-up money behind your back on high jinks with a Negress? Another crooked roulette wheel? Or—a blonde?

But, speaking of Tippingdale Mills, it might surprise you to know that I’ve a hot little piece of international scandal concerning your mills. This particular piece of inside stuff came to me, as so much does come to us pole-hikers, via a telephone junction box atop a pole!

To you, even, I’m going to dish it. With res’vations though, old hoss; res’vations! For—

But it was this way. Coming back to the States, I had to travel by two vessels—one that made Japan only. So I lay over there in Japan. Peacetime Japan—not particularly humbled at all, so far as I could see. Scraping and bowing around as blandly as ever. And, while laying over, I caught a couple of weeks work in the big Mitshugi Interests Plant. Steel and all that, you know? You’ve doubtlessly heard of it. If only because the present Mikado, owning, as he does, a 26 per cent. chunk of the Mitshugi Interests, who themselves own 51 per cent. in each property they control, thus virtually owns a hunk of this very plant. For this present Mikado they’ve got to-day, Kel—in case you don’t know it—is a “businessman” Mikado, selected to bring Japan back to “normalcy” in an economic sense, and who manages his palatial scale of empirorial living from his own financial interests—bettered, of course, by what he can *do* and *pull* as Ye Emp, since—but you presumably do know all about that, I guess, even perhaps to how the government itself owns a one-third interest in this plant, and how the pee-pul—but only ex-vets of the Pearl Harbour rape and the Bataan Peninsula strangulation permitted!—hold the remaining 15 $\frac{2}{3}$  per cent. A nice cozy



little corporation, this particular plant, Kel, as much government owned—since the Mitshugi boys are all descendants of the old warlords, the Emperor is the Emperor, the Gov. the Gov., and the Pearl Harbour vets are what they are—as a swivel chair in our own Department of Agriculture, since—

Anyway, Kel, I got into Mitshugi Steel—white man that I was—and the War being ancient history around there—I got in because they'd just had an accident—had a half dozen men fried to death on 'em—some high-tension fluke!—and were hard up against it for the moment. The foreman could speak English—broken English—but enough so's he could tell a good man like yours truly what he needed done—and a good man like yours truly could do it!

My first few days weren't eventful at all; a good part of my time, in fact, was spent showing those admiring brown babies how to make a Western Union joint as *is*!—and a tap joint as likewise is!—and a “same-diameter” splice—you see, Kel, those babies overdo on everything they do do; on their W.U. joints, they use at least ten winds back of the lap-over, each side, instead of our five, and they haven't got on yet, in a stranded wire splice, to removing enough of the centre strands so as not to get a splice that looks exactly like the neck of an ostrich that's swallowed a muskmelon and can't get it all the way down! But those brown babies *do* learn fast, believe you me; I believe I've revolutionized the joining and splicing technique there in Mitshugi—and because my ways are quicker, I've probably increased the output a few tons a year! But anyway, as I started to tell you back there, after putting in time for a few days, I get a job to fix a loose phone connection at a junction box atop a pole. And while up there, Kel, sounding in with my head-phones, damned if I don't tap into a couple of Jap executives, situated far across the plant from each other, jubilating with each other like nobody's business—but in a tongue that nobody *there* would understand. Same being English!

And I caught a bellyfull! Which, from staying on that wire a full hour and hearing many things many times repeated!—and being a “natural,” as you know, as a chess player—and being “au fay” in matters Oriental, thanks to living a while in Australia there, and here in 'Frisco—I was able to co-ordinate into the full, or nearly full, story. And which same I'm going to unload to you. But mum's the word, of course—for this

story is one that couldn't be passed! Not only because it consists of a lot of uncorroboratable lineman's fakealoo—but because it's Sacred Cow with a big S—the kind of story, y' know, that would disturb “now-equilibrizd Americano-Japano post-war relationships,” and reflect pussen'ly on Hizzoner, the present Prince of Heaven, and all of which sort of things the American papers have agreed, with our Honourable State Department, now that peace is back, not even ever to hint at.

Anyway it seems, Kel, that about a month before Hung Lu Fong, the Chinese “royal” puppet “dictator” died, last March 5th—but here!—I'd better tell you what Hung Lu Fong's exact status was. He was the puppet “royal dictator” of China, as you know—slickly gotten into office by these still cunning brown beggars of Nippon through that hastily organized Nippon-sympathetic scare-party of China made right after the War—the “Now-the-White-Man-Will-Get-ALL-Of-Us-Yellow-People-Party,” but Hung was also Supreme Chairman of both branches of the Chino-Japanese Mixed Commission for the Rebuilding of All China (destroyed so beautifully by Japan in the last war!) The commission was composed of two branches—or “houses”—the more important “tze” (meaning “I-grant-you”) or contract-assigning “house”—and the less important “chi” (meaning “I-carry-through”) or executing “house.” Though I shall use the word “contract” herewith and hereafter, in this letter, I may add here, Kel, that the so-called “contract,” as you and I know it, is something else again in the Orient; there, it's an allotment—a one-paper affair—in which Mr. A. “allots” to Mr. B. the “fulfillment” of something in accordance with a certain “bill of specifications.” At any rate, the commission has some umpty millions of gold in escrow in the Bank of London to back up all the “contracts”—or “allotments”—that its *tze* branch awarded—to make them more than mere paper.

And so—to get back to Hung Lu Fong.

About a month before he died—which makes what I'm now relating take place around early February—he was entrusted with, by the brother directors on the *tze* branch of that commission, a partly blank contract (or “allotment,” if you prefer to call it that), completely signed up by them, for no one knows how many hundreds of thousands of tons of straight-run steel—plates, rails and structural forms—and steel's by-



product, cement—to be used in the rebuilding of China's bridges, railroads, and whatnots, over the next ten years, deliveries to commence next spring. The full requirements, specifications, delivery dates, and etceteras and so forth, are known as "Bill of Specifications No. 1." And to fill Bill of Specifications No. 1 is enough of an order, my dear boomer, to make any mills that might get that order in peacetime, when war-taxes, as now, are abrogated, say "whoopee."

It was quite understood, however—as I am able to gather it—that royal puppet Hung Lu Fong was to—after putting his own highly essential John Henry on that contract—the sig. that, in a way, represented "the Voice of Chiny!"—was to fill same out, in his own handwriting, to the Mitshugi Interests of Japan, and deliver same—to the Mitshugi Interests. Get it? Japan she destroy all bridges and railroads; Japan she get work to replace. Gentlemen directors, in explanation later, say, "We were very assorted gentlemen—Jap'nese and Chinese both—bound by ties of new Now-White-Man-Get-All-Of-Us-Party—who all nev'th'less deem steelwork best go to whom she go to. Even yet we leave decision final to China's own dictator, with blood of China's kings in his veins. And even he say 'Yes'—for is not so written—in his own handwriting? Thus China herself have speak, in addition to gentlemen we." And Hung—takes the real rap!

But—as I got from listening to those jubilating Jap gentlemen as they stopped, for a few minutes, to call Hung all kinds of a dirty son-of-a-bitch—Hung, learning that he had a fast-growing brain tumour that marked finis for him—and evidently wanting to do *one* good boy-scout deed before he died—filled out that contract-allotment *not* in favour of the Mitshugi Interests—but for a big plant in America—yea, Tippingdale Steel, Incorporated!—presided by a man with whose son, though now dead, he, Hung, was in school, at Oxford—yea, President Seth Hiatt. And he put his royal John Henry on that paper, under the names of all the other Chinese and Jap directors—and his royal Chinese dragon seal, as well—and (as was only subsequently found out by Japan!) secretly entrusted it as, apparently, just a "memento of Seth Hiatt's son" (memento it was, all right, all right! and wadda memento!), to Vice-Admiral Gilbert Nym, U.S.N., who was then visiting China aboard the new battleship *Texas*, and was due to start back shortly.

After which Hung, the fox, announced to the directors of the Mitshugi that he'd learned he was an ill man, due soon to join his hon'able ancestors, that the most trusted man in the Mitshugi Interests now had the contract, but that he, Hung, did not wish it to come to light until he was gone, and even desired that, prior to the birthday of the historic "Yellow Emperor," the first Emperor of China—which birthday happens, Kel, to be September 1st—only the brief announcement be given to the press that the steel requirements of the now-to-be-rebuilt China had been allotted to a "large company well equipped to produce it." (I saw this particular announcement myself, Kel.) However, to continue with royal puppet Hung. Hung, after explaining to the directors—his personal delivery of the contract to the "right" man in the Mitshugi Interests—and expressing his wishes thereto—dissolved the "tze" branch of the mixed commission—under his "dictatorial" rights, and their "acknowledgment" to have been dissolved—for their work was done. And this dissolvment, Kel, I know to have been on February 4th.

Well, the Mitshugi Interests people, it seems, did not get wise to all the foregoing till Hung Lu Fong died, March 5th. (Which, incidentally, was the day that the *Texas*, en route to Los Angeles, was ordered by the Navy Department to turn back, near Honolulu, and make an exhibition trip around the world, and get back to New York around approximately the middle of August. Which is, of course, now.) Prior to Hung's kick-off, it was the old Comedy-of-Errors stuff all over again. A case, y' know, of each Mitshugi director thinking "George" had been honoured with the contract. Or, possibly, all believing that some particular director of the Mixed Commission had it. The old stuff, Kel: the case of "two other men." Why, the comedy of errors going on was even more ironic yet. And more widespread as to angles. For Vice-Admiral Nym—as I know from something in that conversation—quite unknowing of the real nature of the sealed "memento" he was carrying, has written Hiatt only that he has a memento of Hiatt's son which he is bringing back to America with him in the Admiral's safe of the *Texas*. Hiatt, in the meantime, has believed—as do most steel people—that the Mitshugi Interests have gotten the contract. The Bank of London is waiting for the contract—whoever may have it—to be made available to their fiscal agents, at least for inspection and certi-



fication, so that they may be free to pay out on such vouchers as are presented when deliveries start under the contract. If that is not a classical case, Kel, of "six other men," I'll eat both my blow torch and my breast-drill.

But to go back again to Hung's death—and the Mitshugi Interest's discovery that "George" didn't have the contract! My understanding is that they called a meeting almost before Hung's body was cold—and lo—nobody had the contract! It was obvious, from the conversation I overheard, that the Powers that Be twisted the thumbs of several of Hung's private secretaries a bit, and from the right one found out the facts, that Hung had filled that precious allotment out to, and for, Tippingdale Steel Company, U.S.A., and had despatched it by big ship man Nym. And were they furious? Well, if you'd heard those Jap executives calling Hung dirty names, even as many months after as it now was, you could judge for yourself how furious. For it had been "in the bag," you see, and "understood" that his royal dictatorial highness was to deliver the contract to Mitshugi—despite anything and everything. But they could do quite nothing, as the "tze" directors' names were under the paper—and his royal dictatorial highness' name and seal of China as well—the "tze" itself was dissolved—even more, the mealy-mouthed bastards who had constituted the "tze" had, all of 'em, overstepped themselves by announcing to the Press that they had re-gone over the steel allotment paper *after receiving it back from Hung* and had seen that "the Voice of China had spoken truly"—in short, Kel, if a man is elevated to the position of "royal dictatorial" highness, somebody's got to take it on the chin if he "back-fires!" Especially with one-hundred millions of kerplunkos in escrow in the Bank of London to back things up with.

However, it appears that the Mitshugi Interests have not lost out after all, entirely. Thanks to Seth Hiatt having known nothing, all these months, about this contract that has been in his very hands.

For it seems, Kel, that the printed-up part of the contract-allotment is so worded as to specify that it is between the official Chino-Japanese Mixed Commission and a plant which has—at least in the twelvemonth period containing its granting, and ending with the birthday of the Yellow Emperor—a "production rating of A + .37." Now don't ask me how the hell that production rating is figured, according to Inter-

national Steel Industrial Methods of accounting, for I don't know ; but it involves many factors such as plant area and kilowatts of electric consumption, and, what's most important, actual total tonnage production of billets, plates, rails, structural forms and cement—with some limited interchangeability, in the figuring, between items—but not completely so—when multiplied by factors  $X_1$ ,  $Y_2$ , or  $Z_3$  !

But old operating records and ratings don't count, as it appears. In fact, it's a guarantee, that rating, obviously, that the plant in question hasn't rattled itself to death during the rearmament period, and isn't today, as a result, holding together by string and wire !

And the Tippingdale Mills—including, of course, its cement mill, owned by it, and hooked to it, over hill and dale !—now has, due to some seven-and-a-half months' operation at considerable, and exceedingly so, undercapacity—the seven-and-a-half-months prior to the last four months, in fact—a total production, dating from the last birthday of the Yellow Emperor, which falls under, by a hair or so, what it should be right now if the plant is to be able to pile up an  $A + .37$  rating by the next birthday of the Yellow Emperor, two weeks from now ; its probably and possibly sufficiently under, as I understand it, that it couldn't possibly go over by September 1st, the deadline—even by forced operation—spewing out standard stuff for warehousing—rolling “minus backlog”—and all that sort of expedient stuff used sometimes to make a record.

Just how this unusually happy concatenation of things for Mitshugi has taken place, I cannot throw any light, other than, perhaps, some dates involved which I picked up. The Mitshugi Steel Plant is, as I've pointed out to you, just about as government-allied as anything in all Japan could be, with its ownership distributed amongst the descendants of the original sabre-rattling Mitshugi boys, the Pearl Harbour and Bataan Peninsula vets, the Gov., and the Prince of Heaven himself being the heavy stockholder he is in the Mitshugi Interests' fifty-one per cent. chunk. And deriving most of his potentatal expenses and income therefrom. Oh, I call the little gold-bespectacled, big-toothed, Bond-Street-clad louse, Kel, the “Prince of Heaven” because he has to wear the robes—at least on state occasions—live in the palace—and likes to eat the selfsame dishes that doubtlessly interfered with the digestion of Senor



Hirohito himself before the latter gutted himself to death with his jewelled hari-kari knife. But he is, *this 'un*, you know, a Jap businessman, with all the skintflintish skullduggery of soul of such. And so now back to Mitshugi Steel, of which, by owning twenty-six per cent. of the Mitshugi Interests' fifty-one per cent. in that plant, *he* owns such a substantial chunk. And back, also, to the local Jap politicians who represent the government-owned chunk in Mitshugi Steel, *plus* their Emp. Well, they pulled wires right quickly after Hung died—that much I was able to gather!—and moved some skilled government spy—a renegade white man, as I was able to deduce—into Tippingdale—or into some city near there—to find out what local press announcements and steel circles' gossip would indicate as to how much Hiatt knew. Assuming that they pulled those wires fast, after Hung's kick-off—and that the spy was already available in U.S.A.—that would have put Mr. Spy on the territory around or about the 9th of March, wouldn't it? Anyway, the first really definite thing the spy was able to report appears to have been around April 10th, when your *Tippingdale Bugle* proudly ran a little squib to the effect that Vice-Admiral Nym had invited Seth Hiatt to come aboard the *Texas* when it reached New York around mid-August, and receive a "memento of his son."

It was about then—as I gather it—that the Jap engineers were called in on an interesting little problem. For, as things then were in the Tippingdale Mills—as shown by the weekly Steel Institute reports, which of course the Japs had—things were definitely opening up, and there was a nice balance between backlog and orders to the extent that "ordinary capacity operation" had been ordered for Tippingdale Mills for the next four-and-a-half months. And speaking of "ordinary capacity operation," it has always been amazing to me, Kel, how unvarying, on the whole, the production from "ordinary capacity operation" is—the bigger a plant. Week in—week out—it deviates by so very, very little. At any rate, these Jap engineers, it appears, by integrating the production curve whose points were already available to them from the Steel Institute reports—and assuming "ordinary capacity operation" of Tippingdale Mills till at least mid-August—when Hiatt would receive that contract, and would discover, by gosh, that it *was* a contract!—would give a total production of such magnitude that he'd have to carry through "highly forced operation"

from mid-August till September 1st—real high pressure stuff, you know?—what you and I used to call “twenty-four-hour-per-day operation and get-to-hell out of my way!”—to pull Tippingdale Mills to—or just inside—that  $A + .37$  rating for the twelve months ending September 1st. While, if by a miracle or so, his production *till* August 15th fell a bit under the hypothetical “ordinary capacity operation” figures, no amount of forced operation could pull Tippingdale through to  $A + .37$ ! In which case, the contract would be automatically void. And the new “tze”—called together next year—but not callable, apparently, till then—could do the thing right next time. See, in short, that the contract was delivered to Mitsugi.

Indeed, Kel, I have been able to gather that Jap engineers have been watching Tippingdale production like hawks, since mid-April there. Plotting out her production, from the Steel Institute reports which, of course, they get every week, on a compound 3-scale abscissa chart which shows production down to one lousy ton! And integrating that compound 3-scale curve as they go. I even learned, Kel, that they have a hypothetical green curve plotted, showing forced production from August 15th to September 1st, during which Hiatt will—or may—operate like hell after he finds he’s got that contract—but, said green curve, showing a production just a hair beyond his ability to reach; and another hypothetical red curve plotted, covering the last four months which, if average production falls to it, spells finis for Tippingdale for the entire period September 1st to September 1st—at least so far as an  $A + .37$  rating goes. They’re thorough little beggars, those Japs, and they invented, don’t forget, the put-and-take top. I even caught the decided understanding, somehow, Kel, that whenever Tippingdale Mills’ weekly production, in the last four months, ran under their hypothetical red “curve, of doom,” they “allowed” the mills—mathematically, of course, I mean—that much increased production on subsequent weeks; but that whenever the mills ran over their quota on that curve, even for one week, those Jap curve-plotters, to avoid piling up an unconquerable “production plussage” on themselves, swung some sort of wires, in America, to pull small cancellable contracts away from Hiatt by “loss under-bidding” just before the stuff went to the soaking pits, or even to the rolls. I’ve never heard, myself, of cancellable



contracts for steel, or pulling orders away just as the slabs started to be heated up, or the rolls were about to engulf 'em, but I don't know everything about steel, of course. So have you heard of any evidences, Kel, of production nibbling, at Tippingdale Mills, like the foregoing—a few thousand tons cut off here?—a few hundred there? If you have, then it's just the little brown boys' weekly effort to guide that very slightly wavering black line, showing Tippingdale Mills production, in and out over the weeks, so that it integrates identically with their red line—their “curve of doom”—so that, in short—and as I said once before—by the middle of August the total production of Tippingdale Mills to that date spells finis—for any  $A + .37$  rating for the vital period September 1st—September 1st.

However, to cut this story short, Kel, these two Jap gents were jubilating like hell. At least two weeks back, when I left Japan. For it appeared that if their red curve—and Tippingdale's production curve—continued to integrate to the same total area for a few more weeks, Tippingdale was washed up. For after that she could operate twenty-four hours per day—without even a breakdown—a thing, that latter, as *you* and I know, never realized—and still couldn't make the grade. I never heard so much banzaiing in my life. They had even figured *non*-production down to dollars and cents, Kel—no fooling! For they had figured that every ton subtracted right now was worth who knows how many dollars to Mitsuhugi. The only comforting thing I got out of it for the white race was that it was still, then, and for a few weeks more, a moot question whether Tippingdale would make it or not make it. What the situation is right now, Kel, I have no way of knowing.

For that's where the Japanese gents were jubilating. It seems they had all the dope on Tippingdale's monthly—even weekly—production.

So there you are, old boomer! Scandal—right on your own doorstep.

I'm loyal enough, however, to my own white race, that I sent Hiatt a full report on all this—anonymous, of course—and signed “just A. Nonymous, a listener-in on a conversation”—but registered and all that—and he's probably digesting the facts as you're reading this. Though I also understand the *Texas* is due in New York in a few days. So Hiatt will have

the contract itself, not so very long after my belated news about it to him. By the time he does, however, his goose will probably have been cooked, thanks to his more or less non-forced running during the many vital months now past. By the fact, in short, that those curves over there in Japan integrate identically!

So all I can say, old top, is : don't trip over some loose feed wire while you're there! and dislodge a connection! For it just may be, y' know, that when *all* the election returns are in! —that one dislodged connection may have spelled those few tons production loss that will have determined whether Tippingdale Mills were destined to embark on the fattest production run of their history—spread over ten long years—or were destined to continue along their leisurely way—as now. And I'm really not kidding. For I did get the profound impression, I tell you, that while Tippingdale Mills Incorporated *was* almost out of the running, I also got, from something one of those Jap gents said, that she was still within range of making it—too much so for complete Mitshugian comfort. So—watch the old step. And I hope to see you, Kel, one of these days soon, when we both toss our hooks into the locker room of some linegang shanty of some plant which we've both boomed into at the same time. Good luck.

Yours,  
Frank Thripp.

## CHAPTER XV

### A RESOLUTION

SLOWLY now, Kel Lauriston, coming to the end of the letter, tore it into the finest of bits.

The stalled line of new garbage wagons, travelling from hither to yon, started up with a jerk. The last one rattled past him.

And he trudged on, and, within another half minute, reached where he had been heading for all the time, a small dingy shop midway of this better residential block, but painted, high up on its one street window, higher than anyone could see in, with heavy opaque red paint, and with a wooden sign hanging over the narrow sidewalk reading :



## JIM KEE, LAUNDRYMAN

Everything.

Even rag rugs.

There was, Kel found, as he turned into the doorway, a card pinned to the door, lettered crudely in pen, and reading :

IF NO IN AM  
IN BAK YAD  
FICKSING AWTMOBIL  
RING BELL ON COWNTER.

Kel grinned. Remembering how last time he had come here, he had to eventually wind his way clear about the block, along a dark alley, and into Jim's high-fenced back yard, to finally find the old man there, and cursing that ancient wreck of a high-seated Ford called, in this card, an "awtmobil." But Kel's smile faded now as something returned to his mind.

"I wonder," he mused, as he hesitated, hand on knob, thinking he heard Jim in the shop, "how much I'll have to tell Jim—just to find out if he remembers any snake-eyed question-asker around and about early last March? For Jim's a Chinaman of the old, old China—and therefore probably hates Japan as naturally as a dog hates a cat—or a cat a dog. If he knew what I know now for a certainty—and Hiatt'll know in a day or so—that Jap money, working through some damn fool sucker in the plant, is at work to see that those millions in the Bank of London go to Tokyo—and not Tippingdale!—he'd probably be all in a pother to rush off and tell Hiatt. Which'll bring me up on the carpet to—however, I'll go easy on my questions, and—" He turned the knob and walked in. The little shop was empty, only a piece of loose wallpaper on one wall flapping gently in some vagrant breeze.

"Even if I did find out that Nippon's agent was in here last March," Kel said, closing the door back of him, "that still wouldn't tell me who the hell in the plant was doing the actual dirty work!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### JIM KEE EXPRESSES HIS MIND !

THE door to the matchboard partition, back of the short wooden counter in Jim's shop, against which partition were the few shelves containing bundles of laundry, unticketed but nevertheless marked with cryptic black-grease-pencil markings, doubtlessly describing their owners, and one shelf containing what Kel knew was a Chinese moon-guitar, was wide open, as was usual in the daytime, showing that invariable straightway view through Jim's own quarters. And which quarters appeared to comprise, at least for sleeping arrangements, one cot hugging one wall, and one matchboard-partitioned roomlet in one rear corner presumably for Archimedes to look upon as exclusively Archimedes' own !

Relieving, in slight measure, the dismalness of the big carpetless, even mattingless, also windowless space was a bright red three-hole gasoline stove, against the wall opposite the cot, with even brighter red tank and with cracked yellow dishes hanging on brass hooks above it ; while, off in one further corner, on rubber-tyred rollers, was the big, gold and bird's-eye maple television radio that Hiatt, in a strange quixotic burst of liking, had given Jim Kee. Beyond all this cheerless view, through a rear doorway, just now also wide open, was the roofed-over back stoop with the huge washing machine which, fortunately for its size, was hooked to cheap mills-supplied current : and, back of the bit of stoop thus visible, was the verdureless, dirt-floored back yard cut off from the alley by a huge sun-blistered fence against which, in exact line with the two doorways, and doubtlessly to show Jim, when Jim happened to be out there, whether customers stood in the front shop, was nailed a jagged section of broken mirror. The gaping gateless opening in that fence by which Jim's famous museum piece, the Jim Kee Ford, moved in and out of that yard, was not visible from where Kel stood, but that the Ford itself was in the yard just now was evidenced by the fact that two side wheels, a running board, and the end of two seats were discernible right now off the side of that rear doorway.

But now a figure came about the side of that rear doorway, stepped up and in, and came through. The figure was Jim



Kee himself. He was a tall and venerable looking Chinaman, and his yellow face was smeared with black grease. He had a wrench in his hand. He came on through his quarters into the shop.

"Hello, Mista Kel! You want laundly—yes—no? W'y you no ling? I joos happen to look in piece millol what you mebbe see on fence—yes?—no?—and see you stan' hea'. So I come."

Jim Kee, in addition to being the most Mongolian-looking Celestial that Kel had ever seen, was grey of hair; it was plain that Archimedes had come to him late in life. Kel wondered what the story was back of that romance. Jim wore a sweat-shirt that, in patches, was spotlessly clean—but, in others, now streaked with black grease. "What can I do, Mista Kel? You want laundly—mebbe—on cledit?"

"On cledit? Hey, have you forgotten already what happened the night I was in here last—and not so long ago, either—and you were drawing those shades back of me to for the week-end, and—" And Kel gestured back of himself to both the huge tattered shade which surmounted the shop-window, and the smaller one which surmounted the entrance door, and both of which, in deference to the white man's religion, were always rigorously drawn by Jim at one minute to twelve Saturday midnight, to stay drawn till at least Monday morning. "Have you forgotten," Kel continued, "that that night I deposited two dollars in advance against that laundry you're now talking about?"

Jim Kee threw up his yellow hands.

"I did folget—may Buddah forgive me. But I no folget now. He is"—he put a pair of silver spectacles on his face, and turned to his rack—"he is eighty cen'—that leave one dollal twenty cen's cledit."

"Minus twenty more cents," said Kel, "if you'll let me use your phone in there?"

"What you tink I am, a lobber?" said Jim indignantly. "You use phone—she cost not'ing."

So Kel stepped around the end of the short counter, and into the dingy quarters. An ancient wall phone, some distance on through, and directly across from the doorway of the match-board partitioned cubicle, beckoned to him. He gained it, and rang Tippingdale 5990. And, turning about and waiting for his number to come through, rested comfortably against

the wall, finding that the cubicle was indeed Archimedes' personal room, for that fact was so announced firmly and indisputably to all such as Kel, who might have occasion to wish to use this convenient phone ; for a card, hand printed in black pencil, and tacked to the matchboard door, proclaimed :

ARCHIMEDES OWN ROOM  
NO ADMITTUNCE XCEPT  
TO RELATIFS.

But now a girl's voice, answering in the receiver Kel held to his ear, turned him quickly about, and back to business.

"This," he said promptly to her, "is Kel Lauriston—and I'll not stop you for a single minute in what you're doing around this eat-and-cook hour. I want to come over and see you to-night, and if, for any reason, you won't be able to see me, say just 'toot'—and if you can, will you say 'tout suite?'"

"Toute suite," came a girl's laughing voice.

"Okay," he laughed. "I'll be there." And hung up.

"Say, Jim," he called, looking at the big radio, "how about letting me view some drama—Ohio River Boat *or* Shakespeare !—some night on your television machine here?"

Jim was in the shop doorway, looking in.

"Dlama?" he ejaculated disgustedly. "What dlama come by telyvision? Not'ing come that way but the fights at Stadium in Tzicago. Led McAfee he like watch fights on it, but I no never can see not'ing but a lot of blulls."

"Blulls? Oh, yes—blurs. Red *is* a fight fan. A couple of blurs chasing themselves over a television screen would keep him entertained all evening."

Kel was extracting himself from Jim's private quarters now—was back, in fact, on the right side—the customers' side—of the shop counter again.

"Well hows about," he countered, pulling over his laundry, "playing me a song on yon moon guitar—some night? I once heard a Chinese gal in New Orleans sing and play on——"

"Pliz!" Kel was arrested by Jim's contorted face. "Pliz to not. Nevel can I again play on moon guital. Since my wife die. For we use' both to play. No can nevel do again."

"Excuse it, will you, old boy? Just stuck my old Number



ten dog in, that's all." He was hugging his laundry to his belly now. "Well now, Jim, before I depart—I want to ask you a question."

"Go ahead," said Jim politely.

"Well here 'tis. Around last mid-March, did you—but say, Jim, what you think, maybe, now that Japan is licked, and peace is back, of—Japan?"

"Zapan?" Jim's face grew black. "She velly bad son-a-bitch Zapan. Still like alway'. Zapan no diff'ent, now that wal holds is gone, than w'at we think she was—dulin' Wal. She still—peace o' no peace—is baddes' people in all wo'ld. Wol' nevel know how bad she is. She—she is w'y Willie an' I leave Brooklyn las' Decembel thilty-fulst."

"How—how was that?"

"Two Zap'nese fix up laundly in my goo' block whel I alway' catch lots bus'ness. Back of paltition, they put lots big nigge' women—to do laundly. In flont of paltition, they put ol' Chinaman—'bout eighty yeals old—iloning same shilt all day. People so velly solly fo' ol' Chinaman, they bling all business. I lose so much tlade, that w'en come time renew lease fo' new yeal begin Jan'aly filst, Willie an' I get to hell out and be dam'."

"We-ell—I knew the Japs are up to all sorts of little tricks like that. I suppose they'd even stoop to do little tricks in Tippingdale Mills—if 'twas in their pocket to do 'em. Though just what kind of tricks—now that peace is here—only a man with a Jap mind could really figure out."

"They do anything," said Jim vehemently. "They lowes' dogs what is." He looked at Kel. "Is sometling long in plan?"

"Search me," retorted Kel. "We do roll a bit of destroyer plate, you know—with all the latest technique thereto toward making it able to take its super-tempering—and repel large calibre shells. And I wouldn't put it beyond the Japs to put a few blow holes in those plates—*if* that could be done with steel—just to see what would happen, and in the ensuing commotion maybe pick up some of our modern manufacturing stunts. For—but say, Jim, around about mid-March past—which was shortly after, in fact, Hung Lu Fong died in China——"

"He clooked pluppet—get in because Zapan scal' hell out of poo' Tsinese people wi' W'ite-Man-Now-Catch-All-Us-Palty, an'—but he clooked—Zapan pull stling—Hung jump!"

"I suppose. Well were you visited around that time by any

strange ginks—sophisticated like—asking a lot of fool questions—about production—maybe about Hiatt ? ”

“ Why you ask, Mista Kel ? You mean man who is wolk fo’ Zapan ? ”

“ Maybe I do. But I did, you see, hear a story recently to the effect that Japan, seething with humiliation because of getting her behind tanned in the War, has carefully calculated exactly how many children to breed between now and 1970 in order to do a bigger and better Pearl Harbour—and with Chinese pilots helping next time ! And in connection therewith—or maybe not therewith—I heard an actual rumour, in town here, that Japan was smelling around last March on what our latest stunts were for preparing destroyer steel for the super-tempering. The guy that told it to me—the rumour, I mean—is the world’s worst bull-slinger. And I suppose I’m trying to be a bit of an amateur detective, that’s all.”

“ Well, Mista Kel, one tling you folget : las’ mid-Malch was big steel meet in Tippi’gdale—and lots big new men was in town—stolly go out, thlough some damnfool jokel, that Jim Kee have eleven fingles on each hand—and ever’ dam vis’tol in town come in see twenty-two fingles.”

“ That settles that then, Jim,” said Kel, his face falling.

“ You no get fal as detective, heh ? You t’link mebbe catch plomotion if you plove man put blow holes in plate—to see how much hull’bloo it laise—and catch mebbe seclet o’ two—plus money f lom Zap’nese agent ? ” Jim’s face showed supreme scepticism. “ Well I so much tlink no man would luin the steel—an’ fin’ out not’ing if he do—that I no even wolly Mista Hiatt with you’ stolly. But I give *you* lil advice—if you like chalactels in books what Willie leads—chalactels what always lookin’ fo’ men who wolk fo’ Zap’nese agents for dilty money. I tell you how you can pick such men.”

“ How ? ”

“ Well all my life I have hea’—an’ from so many peoples it mus’ be true—fo’ even Tsinese they did fus’ say ‘ Whel is smoke is file’—an’way I have alway’ heal—f lom Orientals, too !—that whatevel man is wulk fo’ Zapan, or Zap’nese agent—whethel in peacetime, like as this—o’ in war time, like was—that man he always scaled like hell. Inside. He know that if evel he squeal—paltic’ly now that we have peace, and no jiggery monkey business ’spos’ be pull’—he get kil’. That man, Oriental peoples have tell me, have seclet feal. That



live with him day an' night. Any man do Zapan's wolk catch Zap'nese gol—but he always liv' in tellol of his life."

"Then," laughed Kel, "if I ever go out on a job with a man with his wind up—he might, even today after such things are supposedly done and over with, be working for Japan?"

"Might—yes—if something is be doing in plant by Zapan. Which no I eval heal."

"Well forget the whole fool thing, Jim. A bird with a fantastic tongue got me all worked up. And because a lone-wolf Jap plane strafed me once, down off Lower California—I guess, I just now started to put on a one-man post-war war! Now I'm back to sanity again. And I'm——"

The telephone inside Jim's living quarters rang. Jim hurried to answer it. While Kel waited.

"Yessum. Su' I call. Whah'bouts on Cobal' Stelet? Fo' fo'teen? I pick 'em up in one houl? I come by Fold car."

He returned.

"Listen," said Kel, "I live on Cobalt Street myself. Five fifteen. If you're going to make a call there in one hour, call at my place, will you—and make a pickup? A couple pairs of work pants, two work shirts, and a half dozen bandanna neckerchiefs. I'm going to get everything shipshape."

"I be the'. If Fold hol' out!"

Jim laughed at his own joke.

And Kel left.

A couple of blocks down Silicon Street, he entered a house restaurant. A huge pert sign on the wall, evidently designed to ward off *all* criticism, read:

IF YOU DON'T LIKE OUR  
MEALS, GET MARRIED.

The restaurant was hot, and full of flies. A few unwashed workers lingered at tables. Kel ate dinner atop a stained tablecloth, then got it punched out of a card he carried in his hip pocket.

And he went on. And presently, rounding a corner, came to a big rambling three-story wooden house, one of a short row of like houses, that had a sign in front reading:

Rooms to Rent  
For Millworkers.  
NO DAY-NIGHTING PERMITTED!

"Day-nighting" was, of course, that highly economical procedure used by some mill labourers in which two slept in a bed in the night-time—and gave it up for two more to sleep in in the daytime. A "better class" mills rooming house did not permit day-nighting—and this was such a one!

Kel went inside. A little coloured mite, wearing a dress made out of a Pillsbury flour sack, was sweeping a matting-covered front hallway.

"Clorinda," Kel said to her, "wouldst like to earn a half a buck—payable, however, only next payday?"

"Half a dollah!" The broom had stopped. "Mist' Kel, dey do say you cain't hol' on to money. Whatebbah 'tis, Ah'll do it fo' a dime."

"Plus two bits, *and* fifteen cents," he insisted, "for granting credit. Well, all I want is for you to feed the elephant—twelve pails of water."

"Oh, de baftub, heh? Will twelve pails do?"

"Yeah. But see that they're hot."

"Will do at oncet, Mist' Kel. But will you tell *me* somef'n—on de t. q.?"

"On the q. t. you evidently mean. Shoot?"

Clorinda leaned on her broom as though to show that she wasn't even starting yet, toward the job of filling the old wooden bathtub upstairs.

"Well, it's des dis," she explained gravely. "Is it true, Mist' Kel, dat ghos'es walks up an' down outside one side ob de mills eb'ry night?"

"No, of course not."

"Well dey—dey calls dat one side, on de nawth, w'at ain' got no gate—dey calls dat side Ghos'es' Walk."

"Yea, I know they do. Rather—the area along the outside of the fence. And which area is just a ten-foot-wide, cleared strip of land separating the plant from that big Durkins' Woods fronting it all along that side—and which woods once, so I've heard, were to have been a great dining-car plant, but didn't. And the said cleared strip was to have been a side road—for said plant—and didn't! Anyway, the strip runs from Bessemer Road, fronting the entire west edge of the plant, all the way back to the Railroad Yards, fronting the entire east plant wall. And is cut off from Ye Publicke, out there on Bessemer Road, by a tight screen of poplar trees and thick bushes."

"Da's whut puzzle' me. Dat tight screen ob bushes an'



pop'lah treeses out dar on Bess'mer Road, connectin' de woods an' de plant, an' cuttin' dat strip off. Fo' Ah b'en obah roun' dah lots ob times, fo' de boss-lady whut runs dis heah roomin' house——"

"Good name for Mrs. Bronislaw Kostrowzowski—but go ahead?"

"Well, Ah b'en obah dah lots fo' huh. An' see all whut you tells me. And if'n 'taint to kivvah up what dem ghos'es does back in dar, atween woods an' plant, whut is dat screen fo'?"

"For æsthetic reasons, Honey Chile. Rather, let us say, to cut off said strip of land from public use as a road and to—ah—prevent it from becoming a lover's lane!"

"Don' git dat. But w'y dey calls it Ghos'es' Walk?"

"Oh, that's what got you, eh? Well, that's merely because it fringes the side of the plant where, in the long ago, so I understand, there was only a low wooden picket fence—and that whole plant edge was devoted to a narrow twenty- or thirty-foot wide strip for placing slabs, billet and ingots. Marked as to pour, and chemical composition, and all that. And waiting to be rolled. And—oh, I'm out over your head, eh, infant? Well, the point is that while the slabyard is all hunched down now, and spread out in a large area in the northwest corner of the plant, it's the same old slabyard so far as looks go—looks exactly like a cemetery, see? Hence—'Ghosts' Walk,' that long outside strip that looked in on it when only the low picket fence was there: 'Ghost's Walk'—that same lonely strip today."

Clorinda sighed a sigh of relief.

"Ah clah—dat mek me feel bettah."

"Why should it? You'd never have occasion to stroll along Ghosts' Walk at night, anyway—unless maybe you were trying to cut through from Bessemer Road to the railroad tracks, to catch yourself a blind baggage out of town!"

"Ah wouldn' put mah nose inside dat screen ob bushes, Mist' Kel—let 'lone try to walk dat whole long strip layin' 'tween a—a high wall an' a—a woods!"—Clorinda shivered—"eben ef'n a moon 'uz shinin'. No—sah! Not me. Ah—but heah!—ef'n yo' wan' yo' baf, Ah mus' git goin', musn' Ah?"

The broom was down, and Clorinda, apparently only half satisfied yet that ghosts didn't parade Ghosts' Walk of nights,

was gone—on this job she'd have done gladly—and did do for others—for five cents. Kel went up the creaking stairs into his room. It was hot, and covered with matting like the hallway. The paint on a white bed was cracking off. The bureau was propped up, at one castorless leg, by a brick. The under part of the one window gazed out against a dismal clap-board covered house; the upper part was free and open—to the smoky skies.

A letter had come for him. It was on the rickety spindly-legged stand that stood practically wedged between wallside of bed and nearby wall, propped up against the single lone object which that stand carried: an old-fashioned vertical brassy telephone—a telephone which had been installed not by Kel at all but by the previous occupant of this room. And half clambering across the bed like a dog, and reaching for his prize, he retrieved the letter and, sitting down on the bed, he opened it. The letter read:

Dear Kel:

I appreciate your wishing to give the woman of your choice a diamond ring *if* she says yes, but so far as the little quarter carat diamond of your mother's, which your father had, goes, and which diamond came to light only with those sparse assets of his that popped up so many years after his death in that old stored trunk—assets *and* liabilities too, I ought to put it, in view of the fact there were notes and unpaid bills amongst 'em—and which diamond you left with me—well, you *did* tell me, you know, to pay all the debts in that set-up. But the debts came, Kel, to fifty dollars more than his assets. So I had to sell the ring—I enclose the receipt—I paid everything—but, alas, can enclose no ring. So far as my being able to send you any money for one, it may interest you to know that I'm going through bankruptcy. We've crashed! Sorry.

Sincerely,

JARED KAINLY.

Lauriston gazed at the paper. In spite of the receipt clipped to the bottom of it, it looked very, very blank.

"We-ell," he said, "no ring! But, after all, you *do* have to ask a gal first! And as for the no-ring part, what the hell—I've a job! And rings can be got—on time—even in Tippingdale—*when* you have a job. At least Father's debts are paid. Well, I guess that bath is now ready!"



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LIGHT IN A WOMAN'S EYES

KEL was knotting a neat blue silk tie under the soft collar of a crisp blue shirt, belted into well pressed blue trousers, when he heard Jim Kee's feet tramping slowly up the stairs—as Jim Kee indeed it turned out to be when Kel called out "Come in."

The elderly Chinaman entered diffidently. He wore a sweatshirt, as he had a short while before, but one that was now spotlessly clean. A flopping brown straw hat rested on his greying head.

"So heal is weh you live, heh, Mist' Kel?"

"This is my palace, Jim. A bachelor's dream."

He reached up and turned on the one fly-specked hanging bulb, for darkness was falling rapidly outside.

But to his characterization of his abode as "a bachelor's dream," Jim was replying very saliently.

"Why you no get mallied?"

"Who in hell would have me?"

"If woman take me once—woman take you."

"That remains to be seen. However, I'll see if I can't round me up a wife then. If only to get even with that dump where I eat my meals."

Jim had by now spotted the tied-together bundle, and was picking it up.

"This is she?" he inquired.

"Right."

Jim appeared to be engaged, on the edge of the bureau, writing out a ticket on a square of white paper, about three inches by three inches, evidently cut by his scissors. At least on it was stamped in red ink JIM KEE, and he was making a crude Oriental mark with a black grease pencil. And tearing it apart, down the middle.

"Since when, oh when, oh when," inquired Kel, in down-right surprise, "do us customers—and, I hope, friends—o' yours—have to have tickets? 'Specially—in a small burg like this?"

"Sinz' flom day befo' yestelday," declared Jim solemnly.

"Chief Mon'penny he say yestelday that is now state law that custama mus' alway' catch leceipt fo' any kin' goods—an' if I no issue leceipts, I get allested." He bobbed his greyed head.

"Chief Wilkins Moneypenny, from all I hear, is the best criminologist and police executive in all America," said Kel gravely, and added, sardonically: "when it comes to recovering stolen bicycles—and arresting drunks." But he took the ticket.

"Whoowie!" he ejaculated, as he felt its texture. "How come you ever to use such fine crisp bond paper like this—for mere laundry tickets?"

"Was flee gif' to me," explained Jim proudly. "Fo' hunled big sheets. No cos' Jim not'ing."

"How come?"

"Is spoil' papel I get at papel mills at Blooklyn—two—tlee week' befo' I come heah. Chop up tlee hunled sheet into laundly tickets, and chop up one hunled into quatel sheets—fo' latel tickets, mebbe biggel, mebbe smallel. Papel mills was Attelbolo Papel Mills."

"Oh yes, the Attleboro Mills? I worked with a fellow once who had done wireman work in those mills. But how come—it's a gift?"

"Is big lot of spoil' papel," Jim explained patiently. "Ples'dent mad like hell because—but hol' him up to 'lectlic light?"

This last was more or less useless advice since Kel was already doing so. And seeing the most freakish watermark he had ever viewed. It ran:

ATTLEBORO BOND

"Ples'dent," Jim explained, "as I happen know—he get tiled of ol' walelmalk. Look too ol' fashion, he say. He going on tlip. An' so he older alt depaltmen', w'ile he gone, to make new watelmalk die—die—you call him die?"



"I don't know what the dewdad is that prints a watermark. But go on!"

"Well, w'en he come back ffrom tliip they have make new—new doodaddy—an' have lun off fo' hunled sheet. He take one look-see—at one sheet—and he scleam out, he so mad—he say no wan' no clazy watelmalk like this; he wan' con—con— con——"

"Conservative mark. I should say! An old house like Attleboro? This one looks like a Greenwich Villager's nightmare—probably was. And then what?"

"He oldel doodaddy kill' dead; an' he tuln to me—I was in his office, you see, fo' I had go theh to ask him 'bout papel mill 'zec'tive who had nevel got his laundly out of my shop—well, it tuln out 'zec'tive he had die—but I heah all the lacket an' arg'men' 'bout this papel—and so when Ples'dent he tuln to me and ask me if I wan's some ol' papel fo' laundly tlickets—I say 'yes' quick. And he says 'Take whole damn tliel lun of papel'—this almost went over Kel's head till he realized it was a hopeless 'r'-less rendition of 'trial run of paper'—“‘of papel,’” Jim was continuing with the paper company president's words, “‘what laying heah on this table, Mr. Chin'man.’ So I was lucky. Fo' one sheet so big it make 'bout one hunled fif'y tlickets!"

Kel Lauriston was pinning his to the wall.

And Jim, taking up the laundry, was now saying:

"I go now. But won' be leady not befo' fo' days. Am get ol'—no can wash so fas'."

"Okay, Jim."

And in a second Jim's feet were squeaking down the stairs.

Kel, a well fitting coat over his shirt, straw hat on head, followed him very shortly. So close that, in spite of the darkness that had now completely fallen, he saw the old high-seated Ford disappearing down Cobalt Street.

He went the opposite direction, however. To a point where a street which ran at right angles to the one he was on, and into which he turned, was a street that paralleled that one which fronted the plant on the Executives' Gate side. He soon passed Elbert Gary Street—which ran straight to Executives' Gate, but continued. Continued till, by his bearings, he knew it was time to turn plantward again. And in a trice he was on a narrow constriction of that street which, back at Executives' Gate, and running parallel with the south fence

of the plant, was far, far wider ; here, on Carnegie Road—the extended constriction of Carnegie Street—the high fence of the plant was but twenty feet across the dirt roadway from him. Here, however, things were not at all like on Bessemer Road—in Goosetown. For the tiny and low one-and-a-half-storey cottages that faced that blank plant wall, though extremely cheap in construction, all of them were neat, trim, and well painted. And at length Kel stopped in front of one which, instead of being merely one-and-a-half-storeys in height, as were practically all on the street, contained two full storeys and was, at the same time, at least two-and-a-half in height, yet narrow to boot, and therefore loomed starkly far above its brother habitations on each side of itself ; and which, patently less complicated in construction than those surrounding it—particularly having less gingerbread scrollwork!—seemed, despite its tallness, probably even cheaper than the run of the squat cottages which tried to hem it in.

It was cut off from the dirt-paved road by a wooden picket fence, had a high-roofed porch, resting on four by four stilts, with window boxes full of white and purple pansies, and the mere suggestion of a front yard, before the porch, was studded all about with sunken pots containing flowers.

As the gate creaked under his hand, a girl stepped out from a narrow passageway between the house and its quite dark left-hand neighbour. She had a huge sprinkling can in her hand, and was gazing back of herself, in the passageway, at evidently a cat, for she was saying, “No, kitty—go back and eat your dinner.” The pink-tinged skies showed her to be dressed in a simple black dress. As she came forth, still gazing back of her in the passageway, the sky suddenly lighted up from a “pouring” which was taking place, at the very moment, in the Bessemer Converter Mill, far inside those walls—perhaps a quarter mile away. The red glare revealed, as she turned her head suddenly to confront the figure at the gate, a slim girlish figure, its owner about twenty-two, with a pair of deeply brown, almost black, eyes, and a crown of black hair with little ringlets falling over white temples. She stood motionless for a second. Then she set down the sprinkling can and breathed just the one word—

“Kel!”

In her voice was the peculiar tone that a woman uses to but one man in the world ; but could that tone have been fully



read by its recipient it would have shown that in her mind was the bitter realization that sooner or later the moment was to arrive when she must tell this same man that marriage between them was impossible—hopeless!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MYRENE CARY

BUT Kel was giving solemn, though faintly smiling, reply to that impassioned greeting.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," were his words, "but I represent the American None-Attention Flower Company. Could I interest you in some patented artificial enamelled flowers? Never have to be watered. Bloom winter, as well as——"

She was over at the gate now.

"No such kind of flowers for me, sir—and if you don't go, I'll have to set the only dog we have on you—which is the cat! And our cat——"

"Likes me as though I'm its long lost brother," laughed Lauriston. He turned partly in the half open gate to close it, but the girl put a small, light hand arrestingly on his sunburned one.

"I still don't think I'll let you in. Because—well because in the back of my head was the idea that we might take a walk tonight—to Kelly's Grove. The heat—you know? Or—does Kel Lauriston prefer to sit on a front porch—and look over a fence at the place he works in all day?"

"God forbid," he said. "Kelly's Grove catches forty-nine out of my fifty votes."

From a pocket in her dress the girl extracted a small card and, seemingly, a pin, and went up the steps where, to the front door, she fixed the card. And came down.

"Just a note, Kel, stating that the mistress of this house—the temporary mistress, that is!—is at Kelly's Grove—in case the house takes a notion to burn down or something while she's gone. For with Mother and Father a hundred miles away, in Arlingdale, visiting friends this week—this week is his vacation, you know—I feel sort of—sort of responsible for their property, don't you know!"

Now she joined him outside the gate. Closed it. And

they strolled up the narrow road hemming in that corner of the mills.

"You seem, Kel," the girl said, "to have something on your mind tonight?"

"I very much have," he replied cryptically—and glumly.

And was silent, as they left the mill-fronting road by one equally as narrow—then traversed a short diagonal road and, before they both hardly knew it, were in a grove of tall dark trees, containing a few uncomfortable-looking benches here and there—a trio of high-strung electric lights—current supplied free by the mills!—but inhabitants none whatever. For this was, after all, Blue Monday, when all Tippingdale and its wife had been up late Sunday night—and had barely staggered through the day. On top of which, Kelly's Grove was no Jaworski's Place, where flagging energies could be renewed in cold foaming glasses—nor was it, either, Steel Square, that one-block public square that lay six blocks back of Executives' Gate, containing various gifts contributed by President Hiatt, such as super-comfortable benches moulded to one's anatomy—a fountain playing in the middle of it—ducks sailing in the pond about the foot of the fountain—and—high spot of all on hot nights like this—a loud-speaking sound-wagon radio ever tuned in on the Band Concert at Chicago. Though to Kel Lauriston—considering certain things he had to say tonight—to ask—Kelly's Grove, untenanted, illy lighted, was worth exactly fifty Jaworski's Places—or one-hundred Steel Squares!

They sat down on one of the stiff, hard benches. Sufficiently far from the nearest of the three overhanging lights that it did not glare in their faces.

"Still something on your mind," she said. "Don't you want to—unburden yourself?"

"Yes," he returned suddenly, "I will." He tapped with one well shod toe at the hard packed dirt in front of the bench. "Well, to begin with, I've been here in Tippingdale a long time now. Longer than I usually stay, and——"

"I know," she said. "They call you the King of Boomers."

"I'm only the Prince," he corrected her. "The King, in my estimation, is one, Three-Phases Thripp. Who started out in the electrical game at the early age of—but here!—I'm taking excuses to go 'way off the track. So back I get—on it. Well, it's this way. You see——" He stopped.



"I never saw you before, Kel, so hard put to it to find words. One would almost think—that you were proposing marriage!"

Long afterwards Kel Lauriston realized that the peculiar tone in her words, at that junction, really had said: "Better bring it to a head now—and get it over with!"

But not realizing fine nuances of tone tonight, he replied quickly to this perfect opening.

"By gosh—I was!" he said triumphantly. He faced her in the gloom. "For that's—just it. I love you, Myrene. And I—but I know you've guessed it. When I came to this smoky little town of Tippingdale—a few months back—four-and-a-half months ago, it was—I really expected to work only a short while, and then move restlessly on. Just as I've been doing—for goodness knows how many years past. For even that army hitch of mine was just part of my general booming, don't you know? But just about the time I *was* ready to shake the dust of Tippingdale off my heels—as I have the dust of plenty more steel towns, believe you me!—I—I met you, darlin'. And then the old calculations were all sqeewgee. So here I am—in Kelly's Grove tonight—and no better place for it, either—asking you—no, trying to ask you to—to be—well—to be what? Heavens, what? Not the wife of the richest guy in all England, as it *might* have been——"

"Oh no, Kel. That could never have been. For if that *had* materialized in your life, you'd never have been here in Tippingdale at all, would you?"

"Yeah," he nodded, "you're right, at that. All right. And that, as I see suddenly for the first time in my life, is where I got one real break: the night my grandfather, Sir Anthony Fenstock, fell over dead—in front of my eyes—from that glass of port. I mean, that it's put me here in Kelly's Grove—in the U.S.A.—years after, with a girl I love more than any I could ever have met—in Monte Carlo—or where-will-you—and if she says 'yes'—then that glass of port was tough on Sir Anthony maybe—but Kel Lauriston's piece of luck!"

"Thank goodness, Kel," she said. "If nothing else happened tonight, the most important thing in your life has: for you've suddenly broken the curse of what happened. Oh, don't you see, Kel, what I've known all along—that you've been a bitter wanderer, and a spendthrift, because you thought you lost your entire existence that night—and so you've tried to spend and spend and spend, and make up for it—and now,

suddenly, you've at last realized that one road of Life can often bring just as much sheer happiness as another. And don't feel hurt—because I called you a spendthrift." She put her hand on his. "That's the—the most curable disease in the world, Kel! A wife—perhaps a couple of kidlets—and that ever, ever trying to spend it all—will vanish overnight. Especially since at last, Kel, you've waked up to the fact that your life didn't go blotto—just because an old lord died and failed, by a few hours, to leave you all England—and a scientific education—and all that."

"Well," he said glumly, "thanks to part of that I'm asking you now—to be the wife of a man without a scientific education—and one who'll ever be poor, consequently—oh, not downright poor, no, since I have my trade—but for me, darlin'," he went on frankly, "it'll always be a matter of so much an hour—no technical education—no engineering degrees—and no chance to get 'em now—and you—you may have big ideas. You know? Banker—in the big town? Broker? A pretty girl like you doesn't have to—but I'll wait now, for the answer. To tell you the truth, I've a funny sort of an egotistical hunch that your heart says 'yea bo'—yet I've a curious instinctive feeling—have had ever since I decided to ask you—that your answer is something I won't altogether like to hear." He looked at her quizzically. "Kind of lame—this whole proposal, wasn't it? It sounded like a million dollars—while I was rehearsing it atop a pole—atop many poles!—using some of the lines out of a lot of showboat dramas I saw on the Ohio River whilst booming along—but when it came to delivering it, here in Kelly's Grove—it was just Grade-B stuff!"

The girl did not smile, however. And if Kel Lauriston had been able, here in Kelly's Grove, to see her face, he would have seen in it lines of pain, of distress, of anguish. But her face was turned away. And he was dependent on her voice alone for a verdict. She made several attempts to speak, but stopped each time. Finally, however, she managed to break the ominous silence.

"Kel," she said in a low voice, turning to him, "I—I sort of felt tonight that if this question was on the way—and for some time I've felt that it was, dear—that I'd better hurry it a bit, so that you might understand the full truth: that I'm for sa—. You speak, Kel, of some of those showboat dramas you've seen on the Ohio—well, they say those dramas aren't



life, or anything—yet you're going to meet up with one now—just like some of those you saw—when I tell you that Myrene Cary is for sale only—for sale—just like a slave of Civil War days."

"For—sale?" he ejaculated, a bit aghast. He looked at her, silhouetted against the nearest light. "For sale?" he repeated. "Why, honey, what do you mean—by that?"

"Oh," she breathed, "that's the horrid, bitter part that has to be explained. The part that has to spoil our last wonderful evening together. But the explanation, Kel, is due to you—above everybody else."

"Our last—wonderful evening together?" he was repeating dully. "I can't—don't understand," he added, a note of bewilderment, misery in his voice.

"You soon will, though, Kel"—and she fell suddenly, calmly silent—"but I'm at a loss to explain—to know how—or where to start. It's—it's about"—she *was* floundering—"that is—it concerns Peter—Peter McAfee—or Red, as most everyone else calls him."

"Red!" exclaimed Lauriston. "Is he—do you care for him? Is Red—" He broke off his words abruptly.

She withdrew her small hand from below his larger one, that had crept over it, placed hers on top. Under its touch, Kel sat back against the bench, wondering if he were dreaming—or what.

"Listen, Kel," she began. "I'm going to tell you a little story—one that starts back in Ithaca, New York, six years ago—but which moves here to this simple little town. Yet a town which, simple though it is, Kel, I love dearly—smoke and all—and just always will, I guess. Because at heart I'm just a—but—back to my story! Which starts, as I say, at Ithaca, New York—and not here." She paused. "Picture, then, if you can, a small family—a family who had nothing but the income of their father, but who were happy, just the same, despite the fact that they had little or no worldly goods."

"Your family, of course?" he ventured quietly. "Your father and mother—and yourself?"

"Yes. And one more—my brother Russ who—who was three years older than I." She stopped and swallowed hard several times. Then she went on. "Well, Kel, since Russ and I had secured a fair education in the Ithaca schools, Father decided to move to a smaller town where the struggle to live

wasn't quite so severe. We thought, at first, or at least halfway thought, to move to Port Jervis, New York, the town where Mother was born—perhaps even live in the very house where she'd been a girl, and which has even, today, Kel—as we happen to know from Mother having made a visit there last summer—her maiden name of 'Maydwell' chiselled in the old carriage stone out in front. But we didn't move to Port Jervis. No! Instead, we moved here—to Tippingdale. And Father got work in the——”

“Now wait, darlin’,” he put in, unhappily. “So long as you're in the process of trying to tell me exactly why you think you're not ever going to see me again, I—I want all the details thereof. One being, naturally, why you folks, after half deciding on your mother's birthtown of Port Jervis, New York, why you folks ever even decided on this——” He had been almost about to say, bitterly, “two-bit burg.” But realizing it was her town, and not his, he said merely, and quietly, “little town.”

“Why?” she half countered. “Well, Kel, just the same sort of—of happenstance that brought you—but how did you yourself come here?”

“Oh,” he retorted hurriedly, “I'm a boomer, don't forget. And a boomer, when he gets tired of one place, just, you know, opens the pages of the Steel Industry Guide, closes his eyes and sticks a pin in, and comes on—wherever the pin is. But now you folks didn't——”

“No,” she said, but tenderly, “we didn't use any pins in maps or anything, Kel. We—well, Kel, to dispose of your question, since you want *all* the facts of this story, all I can say is that about six years ago somebody in town here—somebody connected with the town bank, I think it was—got out a cheap illustrated booklet on Tippingdale. Which, it seems, was just then beginning to emerge out of the old Panic days, because of Rearmament—though America itself wasn't yet in the war, you know. And—anyway, the getting out of such booklet had never been done before; and never was done again. It contained poorly printed pictures of the mills, both inside and outside, and some of the streets—some of the better houses—and— But,” she broke off, “Father had been corresponding, about that time, with some lawyer east of us there in Ithaca—a man who was familiar enough with our family—rather, as I perhaps ought to put it, one branch only of our family—



from having closed some small Eastern estate concerning it, that he could perhaps tell Father whether we—more importantly, I suppose, Russ and I?—could be distantly related to some dancer, named Fay Tanjoy, of that same lawyer's city, who had been reported in the papers as having died intestate and unmarried, and possessed of a considerable bit of money—oh, around a hundred thousand dollars or so, I guess—mostly gifts from admirers. Tanjoy having been, as Father told me later, one of the names in the background of our family. And to anticipate my tale just a little bit—in order to get to the part that answers *your* question!—the lawyer's regretful answer, to Father's letter of inquiry, was that we were not related to the said dancer, and for the very, very sad reason that that very morning—the morning the lawyer replied—and he sent Father some clippings to that effect—the said dancer had been definitely revealed to be a foundling who had only voluntarily taken the name she did! Grabbed that 'Tanjoy,' in fact, right out of a city directory because, I suppose, it sounded cheerful—and—and—dance-like! Fortunately for me"—and the girl laughed a bit sheepishly—"fortunately for me, overly interested as I was around those days in wanting all the pretty dresses in the world, Father had been careful, at the time, not to raise any false hopes in me—and so told me quite nothing of his correspondence—I learned about it, such little as I did—such little, in fact, Kel, as I'm able to tell you now—only long after, strangely enough, it resulted in no less than our coming to Tippingdale to live."

"For," the girl now proceeded to explicate, "the lawyer with whom Father corresponded had evidently just done some corresponding with some client here in Tippingdale, and had gotten, from the latter, one of those very printed booklets I described a while back. And which had just been put out around that time. And because Father must have dropped a hint, or something, that he was interested in industrial towns, the lawyer sent him on this booklet." She paused. "And—and—well the town—or at least the pictures of it—just looked so homey and nice—as well as active, industrially—and which, after all, Port Jervis wasn't!—that we—well, we just came on! And that's just all there was to that, Kel, you see?"

"Yes, I guess I do now. Fully. And—but you go ahead now. For this what you're telling me—or trying to—sounds

sort of—of ominous—to say the least. Sort of—so go ahead, honey?”

“Well,” she resumed, with a firm resolved little lift in her voice, “Father got work with no trouble in the Tippingdale Steel Company Plant here, at a fair salary, and for the first time in his life he even managed to save a little money. After three years, he had that two-and-a-half-storey house and lot—where we started out from tonight—all paid for—and he was at last assured of a home for the rest of his life. When I grew a little older, I got work at a small salary over in town. And Russ, who I might as well state here was quite and utterly disqualified for any military service because he had a blind eye in his head—a bit of b-b shot imbedded in it from boyhood, and—oh, not that you could see the blind eye at all, but the recruiting officers and examining physicians of the Army found it every time in three shakes of a lamblet’s tail, and—but anyway, Russ got a job as clerk and cashier with Daniel McAfee, Peter’s younger brother.”

“Dan McAfee?” commented Kel. “Yes, I know him—or think I do—by sight. A full couple years younger than Red, I’d say, and runs a sort of salary-loan business up town—mostly with the foreigners, doesn’t he?”

“Yes,” she said simply. “And that position—was the undoing of Russ. For Dan McAfee, exempt from the draft then in existence, because of some slight partial paralysis in a leg—a paresis, I think they call it—had his irons, at that time, in another fire—he was experimenting with starting up the same kind of business, but in an industrial town a hundred miles from here—and so wasn’t paying close attention to the business here in Tippingdale. And for the first time in Russ’ life, he had the handling of money—that wasn’t his own. As we learned much later, he began to play the races through a poolroom in town which was connected by wire with a bigger, notorious one up in Chicago. And finally came the day when Dan McAfee walked in on Father and informed him that Russ was \$1100 short in his accounts; and he declared that he intended to send Russ to State’s prison for the limit sentence. Well, Kel, Father pleaded and pleaded with the younger McAfee—but he was obdurate. Then Father asked him if he would accept an \$1100 mortgage on our little cottage and lot back there—listen Kel dear, did you ever hear—there on the Ohio river—in the showboat dramas—of—”



"Mortgages?" he said dully. "Yes. But I—I considered them—just elements of drama. I never thought of 'em as compulsion to pay somebody something—I just regarded 'em as a friendly gesture between a couple of friendly birds deciding mutually to—but go ahead. Something tells me I won't ever have to run back to the Ohio river again for dra——"

"No, dear Kel—and goodness knows where you will run to—Prince of Boomers! But—to this story of mine. Father asked Dan McAfee if he'd accept an \$1100 mortgage on our little cottage and lot, and withdraw prosecution against Russ. And Dan McAfee agreed to do it, although he sneered at the offer, and declared that an \$1100 mortgage on a \$1700 piece of property in a small town was an unheard of thing—and a hopeless investment. Particularly in the face of the fact that the house was old—oh, quite old, Kel—and, as you know, without even electric wiring. Or gas. Lighted only at best, with lamps, and all that. In fact, Dan McAfee agreed to accept such mortgage only because, Kel, all the houses facing the mills on this edge are perpetually tax free—did you know that?—it's a fact—for old Milt Hiatt, who originally granted the mills land to the corporation, granted this strip along the plant to the town providing it would be perpetually tax free—the town has long, long ago sold all the pieces away, one by one—but they remain tax free. And because of that little thing only, I guess, was Dan McAfee willing to make an \$1100 mortgage on a \$1700 piece of property in a small town.

"But going back again to my main story. After Daniel McAfee left the house Father called Russ in. My brother wept for a long while, and finally admitted that he *had* squandered \$1100 of his employer's money on the races. About his only excuse was that he was bored because he couldn't get into the War because of that visionless eye of his. And so that afternoon Father went to Daniel McAfee's office, had papers drawn up, and signed a trust deed for \$1100 on the house and lot. Then he went home, happy at the thought that he had saved his only boy from a penitentiary sentence. But when he got home—when he got home—oh, how can I go on—" She stopped. For a long half minute she remained silent. Then she took up the narrative again. "Mother was away at the time, and I was working. And the house was strangely deserted. Father walked upstairs to Russ' room to tell

him what had been accomplished. And there in the room was—was Russ—dead. He—was a suicide, Kel! With his high-power repeating rifle—the very rifle that he had often taught me to aim, and shoot at marks with, in the woods—with that rifle, and a piece of stout cord tied to its trigger, he had killed himself, believing—that he was doomed to a long prison term.

“Well,” she continued, after a pause, “that blow almost killed Father, too. The repeating rifle, with one cartridge used, was replaced on Russ’ wall where it had always hung. After the funeral, the room itself was closed without being disturbed—and the three of us, Mother, he and I, took up life again—or tried to take it up—just where we had broken it off.”

“All this *is* terrible,” said Kel, gently. “But still I don’t see the connection with your words of a short while ago. Surely, Myrene, you don’t feel disgraced on account of the manner of Russ’ death? That wasn’t your fault.”

“I’m coming now to the explanation of those first words of mine,” she continued firmly. “Well, following that blow came another terrible one. Father had to enter the hospital a month later, because of blood poisoning. Not the company hospital, however, for the injury that caused it wasn’t a plant-incurred injury—it was the Lanfryton Hospital, in Lanfryton. A piece of wire fencing he’d been putting up around our house—our now heavily encumbered house!—had scratched his right forearm—blood poisoning had set in—and—well—to cut a long story short, Kel, when he came out of the hospital, seven weeks later, and returned to Tippingdale, he was just as you see him today—a man with one arm—and that one his left one—only.”

“I had always wondered,” said the lineman, “how he lost his arm. But I’ve never liked to discuss the thing with you for fear of wounding you in some way. And I didn’t like to ask Red, who seemed to know you all—because my asking would probably have come to you and—well, then you’d know I’d been poking about. You know? But, as to your father’s loss of his arm—from blood poisoning incurred outside—there was no compensation for him then, was there?”

“That is right,” the girl nodded. “No compensation. No chance for Father even to continue with the work he’d been doing—where he needed both arms.

“At any rate,” she hurried on, “the company didn’t let



him down. Mr. Hiatt tries not to ever let anybody down. For they gave Father, in recognition of his past services, and some short-cut methods he'd evolved, a life job as flagman at that rail crossing where the huge vessels full of molten iron from the blast furnaces are carried to the converting mill. In that job, of course, there is practically nothing to do—and no responsibility to shoulder—but it pays only one dollar a day. One of those strange jobs, Kel—yes!—that you yourself say you've observed so often—jobs that have been found by the Supreme Court not to come under the minimum wages' and hours' law—because of the practically 'workless' nature of the work. And which, therefore—but a dollar a day doesn't seem like much to you, does it, Kel? Even in this post-war deflation we now have. But Father isn't a young man any more, remember—we children were born to him late in his life, and that job is virtually his old-age pension—which he can't obtain from the government because—well, you see, when he came here from England, he never got naturalized—and so he can't qualify now. Nor would he want to try—so long as he could do one thing—anything. So—the situation is he has a life job—or a plant pension—whatever you want to call it; and it's a godsend to a man who is hopelessly incapacitated by loss of an arm, and his age, to boot. Even without my help—or any other outside help—Father and Mother can at least live on the money he gets—in Tippingdale—exist, perhaps is the best word!—providing that their little home in Tippingdale, which as I told you is tax free, remains absolutely rent free also.

"But—" And she squeezed his hand unconsciously, and he thrilled to her touch, "that little home can be taken away from us in an instant—all on account of that very thing you laughed at, hilariously no doubt, in the Ohio River show-boat dramas—but *such* a real thing, Kel, when you've got one!—so real a thing!—in this case, that over-balanced mortgage that Father gave Daniel McAfee to square up Russ' stealings. And—but now let me tell you of that mortgage. Because you'll want to know, naturally, who—in this town—with long black moustachios!—and silk hat!—you see even *I* have seen a few melodramas in my day—well you'll want to know who has it. Well, Kel, Peter—or Red, as you call him—has it. That's right. For, six months after it was drawn—at least that's the way we understand it—Daniel McAfee persuaded

Red—as I'll try to call Peter from now on in this story—persuaded Red to take it as his end of the distribution of a small estate they inherited together from their uncle. The two halves were equally rickety. So Dan took the claims, many uncollectible. And Red—how difficult it is for me to call Peter 'Red'—Red took the mortgage.

"Well, the months flew by. Between Father's now rather hopelessly tiny earnings, and mine, we seemed only able to hold our own; to live and to bring in the \$33.00 interest every six months to Daniel McAfee's office. That was absolutely all we could accomplish. And finally, a few months ago, the mortgage came due. So Red called to see us about it. Explained to us briefly why he happened to have it; and how he happened to get it. And only in that way—his calling, I mean, for the first time—did he and I meet each other really closely for the first time—and perhaps a month before you came to Tippingdale. Oh, we had seen each other many times, but distantly—I was just one of many town girls to him, I guess, till he called in person—and we got into really close conversation, and all that, and—but you know, Kel, how those things happen. And now that he had called and—and had got to know me better, he sort of—of dropped the mortgage matter—temporarily, anyway—and began to call on me really—we-ell—regularly. Father was naturally friendly to him—a mill man like himself—and I was nice to him. And really, Kel, I wasn't influenced by the fact that he—he sort of held our fortunes in the palm of his hand, any more, indeed, than I would have been influenced against him because he did no out-and-out military service during the War. For he was too valuable a man towards creating steel to put in a uniform. He was kind to me—and always a gentleman. From all that I understand, Red is a very hard-boiled man over in the mills—and amongst other men. But whatever is best in him—has always been shown and directed to me. So he wasn't really the man with the long black moustachios—and the silk hat!—he was just Peter—whose only fault might be said that he hates to dress up—and likes to play cards—and such things. And—and perhaps not altogether to blame, Kel," she put in, loyally defensive to this man who had at least been kindly towards her, "for his younger brother Daniel was undoubtedly the favourite in their family—it was Dan who got an education, and not Peter; Dan who—but anyway, as to Pe— or Red, as I'm to try to call him, am



I not?—it was plain, in the days he first began to call, that he was beginning to care. A woman, you know, Kel, always perceives those things—whether she gives the slightest indication of it or not.

“But one evening I was upstairs in my room, above the front porch, and through a mischance—a pure accident in every way, for I was thought to be out, and Red and Father were waiting down on the porch for me—I heard Red talking, in low tones to Father, down there. He was saying how he liked the old Irish custom where the man asks the woman to marry him on his birthday—and marries her on hers!—and he declared very emphatically!—that he believed one hundred per cent. in that angle of the old Irish custom where the bridegroom gives the bride’s parents a present for such a ‘foine broide’—‘and,’ said Red to her Father, ‘I intend, on the day that I marry Myrene—which’ll be her birthday if she says “yes” on mine!—I intend on that marryin’ day to turn over the mortgage note that you and Mrs. Cary have signed to you and Mrs. Cary—marked “paid in full.”’ I heard Father then say, so—of dryly, ‘And what, Red, will you be doing—if the girl says “no?”’ And I heard Red say, in a sort of a hard voice, ‘Well, in that case, Cary, what would you expect me to do? After all, you know, Cary, \$1100 of my coin is sunk in this shack. If I get no consolation prize—like the girl—I’ll have to get my coin back by foreclosing—part of it anyway.’

“But, Kel,” the girl pressed on, “don’t think, for an instant, that Father ever came to me and repeated Red’s peculiar offer—or ultimatum—call it what you want!—to me. Never, never! Even if he were to be thrown penniless and jobless on the streets of Tippingdale, he would never try to influence me to take any step that could affect my happiness. And so, Kel, the whole battle had to be fought out by myself.

“And it isn’t, you see, something that lies far off—in the misty future—over hill and dale. For not only is that mortgage that Red holds and owns overdue—unrenewed—but his birthday, as I happen to know, is two weeks from now—and that he’s going to ask me is plain—if only from the many times he’s warned me that that is one night in the year I must save for him. And my—my birthday—is ten days after that. My answer to him must tell him what I will do—on that tenth day after his question. And—and there you are, you see!

“Night after night, Kel, I have lain awake upstairs, trying

to see my way clear. And oh, how hard it was, how difficult to stand by my decision after I met you. But always, Kel, the decision was the same—I must—I absolutely must—conserve that little tax-free place for Father and Mother, for one dollar a day is barely enough for them to just exist on, even with their rent and taxes free. And if—if Red wants me—and is willing to pay that price for me, what else can I do? I—I—I—” She lowered her head in her arms and Lauriston heard her weeping almost inaudibly in the darkness.

For a full minute he made no comment, no attempt to comfort her, no effort to take issue with her on the question. He was dumbfounded, altogether overwhelmed, at the peculiar situation that she had outlined to him, fact by fact. He remembered how raucously he’d laughed at some of those Ohio River showboat dramas. And now—now he himself was part of one! And Red—Red, his own foreman—was the very man with the moustachios! It seemed to Kel Lauriston that his mind was busier during this long minute than it had ever been before in his life. But suddenly, like a slap in the face, the memory of the past years of his existence flashed over him; years of aimless roving; years in which he hadn’t saved a dollar; years in which he’d been grimly trying to “spend it all”—just because of self pity—because a glass of port had once cheated him from being the richest man in all England—and from other things besides. And now——

He turned quickly toward her.

“Is—is my chance of having you utterly hopeless then?” he broke out. “Is your decision utterly unalterable, dar—Myrene?”

“Absolutely,” the girl affirmed, for she had become more calm. “I give you credit, Kel, for the ability to see my position—from my point of view. I’ve fought the battle long since with myself—and many times over, and I see only one way clear. I—I—must give myself—sell myself—to a man whom I don’t love—for the sake of a father and mother who have sacrificed their own happiness for mine a thousand times during the past twenty-two years. And I can’t let myself lose sight of the fact that they’ve had enough trouble in their lives without being thrown on the streets. No, Kel, my decision is like the needle of the compass. In enjoying your calls—which I could, since Red had not yet asked me what he’s told Father he is going to ask me—and I’ve not answered him what I know



I *must* answer him—I've—I've just been playing with happiness—getting a taste of a greater happiness that I must thrust away from me. And now—now—I guess that you see that I—I do care for you; a great deal more than you think."

"Tch!" was all he said. And added bitterly: "Eleven hundred dollars! Just eleven hundred—piddling—dollars. And Kel Lauriston—Prince of Boomers—King of Spendthrifts—who's thrown it away as fast as he took it in—sits here now next the woman he wants, and the one who really loves him—and who has to solve her life within a couple of weeks—and all this worm has to help her solve it with is a ticket with two unpunched meals in it—\$1.20 credit at Jim Kee's—and an overdue roomrent bill. *You* may call this a showboat drama, darlin', but I don't! It's—it's a burleycue show—like one I saw in Cleveland—where the comic came out, all dressed in—yes—this is that show—and I'm him: The Knight in Paper Armour. That's—Kel Lauriston!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### AT JAWORSKI'S

It was a busy night in Jaworski's well-known saloon on Mill Road, just off Workers' Gate. For the night was hot. The mechanical piano was pouring forth strident ballads. Mill-workers, of all kinds, pressed, three deep, against Jaworski's huge long bar, the rearmost ones taking backward, over the shoulders and heads of those in front, huge thick glasses of foaming beer—else handing forward the empty glasses over the same shoulders!—and, in front of the two great obscene oil nudes, with spotlights focussed on each, two swearing bartenders, with grease-slicked black hair each, worked furiously.

Red McAfee, his stocky brown-clad form wedged in at a tiny booth-like niche the whole width of the room away from the bar, across a tiny cramped table-top from another equally cramped incumbent of the same niche—an amiable-looking giant with blond hair and blue eyes, clad only in a porous sweatshirt—and sipping the remainder of a double-whiskey, glared furiously as the other man, after a brief and to-the-point conversation with a friend, hung up the receiver on a battered

phone, whose long cord, trailing along the entire line of wall-niches, showed it could be transported to any table top.

"Hows-about, Long-Wind," Red grunted scowlingly, "givin' me a shot at the phone?"

"All yours now, brother," said the other, pleasantly, shoving it across. "Though if your parley's private stuff, I'm holding my precious seat here."

"Lissen in all you dang well want," growled Red. Who recognized the big giant as a puddler from Open Hearth Furnace No. 1—though knew that he himself was a stranger. He dropped a worn yet sticky nickel in the coin-box protruding from the wall. "Gi' me West 886."

A monotonously repeated buzzing ensued. Then ceased, as a receiver was raised at the other end. The roaring hum of the big saloon must surely have penetrated to the one who had raised it, and whose words, now virtually themselves roaring out of the over-sized voice-magnifying receiver specially installed because it was in such a noisy location, ran:

"Hal-lo? Zim Kee speakin'."

Red grimaced sourly as the blue-eyed blond giant across from him showed marked, unrestrained curiosity and interest.

"Hi, Jim," Red returned. "This is McAfee. Red McAfee. Talkin' from Jaworski's dump."

"Jawl—, oh yes. Goo' evenin', Mista Led. What can do?"

"Say, Jim, I just learned that th' Golden Gloves finals up at Chi is to be slapped on the tel'vision band t'night. I'd sure like to tune in on that wind-up stuff—it commences in about forty-five minutes—if you don't mind my usin' your machine again. But if you——"

"Glad to, Mista Led. But w'y you even ask?"

"Oh, I thought you might be goin' to hit th' hay. Worse—be in bed right now! An' I didn't want to come 'way over there, an' knock the whole neighbourhood up."

"No, Mista Led, I am no in bed, o' go' to bed. Have many tsilts to ilon toni'. Use telumvisum mazhine all you wish."

"Good! I'll start right over at once—so's to catch th' first bout. Goo'—say, Jim—did a guy named Laur'ston—who trades with you—get his laundry toni—skip it. I'll ask you 'bout that later."

Red hung up. The frank and unalloyed interest being given him, because of his completely non-private conversation,



by the blond giant across from him, roused Red to impotent fury.

"'S wonder," he snarled, baitingly, "'at some people who hang out all evenin' in gin-goints so's their wiff can go to bed with other men, 'd mind their own dam' bus'ness when other guys are phonin'." And waiting, challengingly, with folded arms, for the belligerent retort which, however, did not come, Red dignifiedly extricated himself from the niche, trudged across the floor of the bar-room without even looking backward against a possible crack in the back of the ear, and out and into the night.

## CHAPTER XX

### "IT'S GOODBYE, OF COURSE"

ON the bench in Kelly's Grove, Myrene Cary, at Kel Lauriston's bitter characterization of himself as a Knight in Paper Armour, laid a hand atop his on the bit of bench seat between them.

"No, Kel, no," she said indignantly. "You're a man whose life has be n badly injured—by a most curious and terrible accident. Your coming so near to becoming the richest man in England. That sort of thing happens to only one person in millions and it leaves scars. For you've been trying, ever since, to approximate what you lost—by sheer spending. And such a foolish pursuit—trying to make up for something you lost—when you never really lost anything at all. For it's a fact, Kel. Wealth in itself doesn't have anything in the world to do with happiness—a rich man can't eat a bigger meal than a poor man—he can't sleep any longer hours—he can't—oh it's all such—such a fallacy, Kel—wealth. Why—isn't the spring sun just as warm and—delightful—to a poor man?—as it is to a multi-millionaire? And can a man love more than one woman, whether he wants to or not—at least at one time!—whether he's rich *or* whether he's poor? Why wealth, Kel, is one of the hugest illusions that——"

"Wait!" he put in harshly. "Who on earth honey, ever filled you up—with that phony philosophy?"

"But oh, Kel, it isn't phony. It's not. Truly. It—but I was awakened through a lecture that was given here in Tippingdale by a travelling East Indian Yogi, a few months before

you came here. He was a philosopher, trying to get back to India from, I think, London—by giving lectures across the country westward. He was very pathetic. Virtually in rags, and could hardly make his broken English understood. He charged one dollar admittance; and only five people came. Including me—who really went out of pity—for a man stranded so far from his people. But oh, I was richly rewarded. For he brought forth Truths out of the most Ancient Wisdoms. Truths that——"

"Wait a minute," Lauriston frowned. "A Hindu—here in this small town?—hm?—and a Hindu on the linegang? Couldn't be, of course, that those two gents were sort of exchanging cash, data, and instruct—, oh I'll forget it. The obvious thing in life never has any—any validity."

"I'm afraid, Kel," the girl replied helplessly, "that I don't understand what you're referring to. But, as I say, why this philosopher Hindu ever came to obscure little Tippingdale, heaven only knows. Probably because it was midway between some point where he had taken in only ten dollars—and one where, poor fellow, he was destined to take in only another ten dollars! But he completely awakened me—to Truths I never realized before. And——"

"Such as," Lauriston put in bitterly, "that money is no good what-so-ever! Well, if I had those quite 'worthless' millions I lost, I'd say that a certain problem involving \$1100 would be solved so fast that——"

"Dear Kel," the girl replied seriously, "if you had that wealth you lost—or never got—you'd not have been here in Kelly's Grove tonight; and so thus, with all your millions, you couldn't have solved this particular eleven hundred-dollar problem, could you?"

"That point seems to be proved," was all he could say.

"And so," the girl returned to her argument, "I again say, Kel, that you never really lost anything—that time. And in your recklessly spending your way through Life, you've been trying to compensate—for the loss of nothing. And remember I'm not censuring you at all—in the least—about that spending. It was just a—a phenomenon growing out of the fact that you were, after all, free. A wife and a couple of children would have stopped all that—in short order. Though I'm glad—though maybe I'm not—that you didn't acquire 'em—and *did* boom on here to Tippingdale—so that I could know



you—no, I guess I'm not glad, Kel, for it's brought me pain, and——"

She stopped. And the man took up her words.

"A guy with real strength of character," he said, lifelessly, "wouldn't have let the thing that happened to me knock him for a goal. I've been a weakling. And now comes a little matter of eleven hundred dollars! That—and nothing more—standing in my way—of getting you. Good heavens! I could have had all of that, right in my jeans now—many, many times over—if I'd only known—dreamed—that in one of the little steel towns I was going to boom through, I'd meet up with—" He laughed bitterly. "And now opportunity—Opportunity for happiness—doesn't just knock at my door—she just—just kicks it open with a hobnailed foot!—kicks the door right into my face—and where am I? Sitting—with \$1.20 Chinese laundry credit!—two unpunched meals—proposing to a woman as though I was the head of the House of Rothschild!"

He broke off, disquietedly. Then drove relentlessly on—with his self castigation.

"But no use, I guess, to cavil all over the lot—as to how I'm found wanting. I'm just about to reap the reward of *every* boomer's life, bar none, who ever boomed. That's all." He put one arm about the girl's shoulder, and stroked her dark hair gently with the hand of that arm. "Listen," he said impulsively, "is—is there no way out of this mess, Myrene? I tell you I can't quite realize the set-up. Is this—this showboat mortgage—so disproportionate—to the value of your folks' place—that no third party can be found to take it up? I love you too much to give you up. I can't——"

"But it must be that way and no other," she said firmly. "I canvassed Tippingdale from one end to the other when I saw what was coming. And canvassed a few towns up and down the railroad, too. There just are no demands, Kel, for property in such little towns. Most particularly so in this deflation era, and the people with money to lend are few. Some of them scoffed at the idea of an \$1100 mortgage on a \$1700 place. A place old, and having to be lit with lamps, to boot! Most declared that they wouldn't lend even \$500. And not even that—under conditions as of just now. I even got in to see Mr. Hiatt. He showed me a service gotten against him in a judgment—this is confidential, of course, Kel—a judgment gotten

against him up in Chicago—for \$155,000—for building bonds he'd personally guaranteed many years ago—and he told me frankly that today, even as President of the Mills, he gets only a living for his wife and children out of his berth, and owns not a dollar asset that hasn't been levied on. So you see—the hopelessness of things for me? Even if you had \$1100—I couldn't ask you for it—I wouldn't ask you for a penny of it. But—if you offered it to me—ah, that would be different! Proving—you thought I was a good 'buy'! No, dear King of Boomers, and Prince of Spend-thrifts—which, of course, you'll never be again, after tonight, that I know—and Knight in real Armour, I *am* for sale. Hate me—no, hate meh—as they say it also!—just as much as you wish, but the horrid detestable fact remains: I am on the market—for exactly eleven—hundred—dollars!"

"Hate you?" Kel Lauriston echoed. "Hate *you*? Not ever that, Myrene. I realize your situation is nothing more than that of a mouse in a corner. And I've wandered far enough around this toadstool called Earth to recognize that peculiar tone of voice, that tone of voice, Myrene, that tells me that argument is a waste of time. But I wouldn't even try to argue with you—from my sense of damned humiliation. For who am I that I should try to swing you away from a tough resolution to which you've given—well—given all you've got? Just a boomer—an electrical hobo—and a self-centred, self-pitying ass to boot who lost the one chance he had to snatch happiness, because he didn't have guts enough to make preparation for being in readiness for it—when it came."

"Thank God then, Kel, that you see it my way," the girl replied fervently. "I couldn't bear, I think, the thought of your despising me. In future years, I mean. I—I—do love you, Kel. I do. I do. I do. But how can I help myself?"

He said nothing, for he knew that the chances of an electrical boomer getting hold of \$1100 within a few weeks was as utterly impossible as the reversing of the direction of rotation of a series-wound motor by reversing the direction of the current through it; i.e., impossible! He might, he thought desperately, borrow \$100—the legal limit in Tippingdale—from the Dan McAfee outfit on the strength of the fact he had a job. But what was \$100? And besides, Red McAfee would finally be asked about him. And—Kel Lauriston shrewdly surmised



—the \$100 wouldn't be forthcoming! He might lay his entire next paycheck in a crap game—and just let it ride. He grinned mirthlessly. For he would, he realized, before ever it became a thousand bucks, have exactly 999 chances out of a fat 1000 to ride right out of the game—with nothing! For with the inexorable rule, in all Tippingdale games, of the tripling of the kitty rake-off in every “doubling”—the chances to multiply one's money thirty times or so by a single riding was—well, he had seen it figured out!—and it was—less than minus zero!

And now the girl was speaking again.

“And now, Kel,” she said quietly—and calmly, “there is just one more thing to be said. And it is this. It is best that we part tonight for—for—good, for ever. My seeing you only makes it harder for me. And if you care for me as you say you do, it can't make you any happier to be thrown in my company, now that you've heard all I've had to tell you. The dream—such as all it ever was, Kel—is over. For you and for me. And nothing is to be gained by either you or me—by my antagonizing Peter uselessly—for any oblique reference to you seems to make him—make him——”

“Redheaded?” said the man dryly.

“Yes—if you want to put it that way. So it just has to be goodbye, Kel—it has to—I know now it won't be long before you'll be booming along—and I hope you forget it all—and me—though—before you go away from me—and from the mills I want—oddly—I want to know—all about you. From the beginning, I mean. Where and how you lived—as a little boy. And your schooldays. And your father. And your stepmother, too. And that trip to England. And the trip back—by cattleboat. And how you apprenticed into the game. And some of the highlight experiences you've had—as a—a—boomer. Oh, Kel, this is the last night I can be with you—and I want to know everything. I want it—well I demand it, Kel, as a wedding present from you to—to me.”

“Spendthrift's present!” he commented bitterly. “The kind I suppose I can best give. Well—far be it from me, darlin', to refuse anybody the present they asked. So—here goes. I hate to bore you to death—I really ought to gild things a bit—you know?—dramatize 'em?—romanticize 'em?—but maybe I can yank a highspot or two into the picture. I'll try. Though I'm better at splicing cables than—than events. No foolin'! Yes,” he added shrewdly, “I'll try to

regale you with the Life Story providing *you'll* make one agreement. Which is this: *If* I waste all my precious last minutes with you on my autobiography—I get one more night with you? Is that—a deal?"

"Yes," she said. "But—on the front porch. Not—not any more—in Kelly's Grove."

"On the front porch then," he said sadly. "And I'll fetch my opry glasses I've got; and, if we can get a dozen feet or so above the level of that porch—say, in your front upstairs boodywor!—oh, I mean, of course, providing your mother is back by then, and can sort of come up and dust about—like a—a chaperon—truly, I mean that—anyway, I'll fetch the opry glasses, and if we can get high enough above that porch, one way or another, I'll answer all your questions about that curious wooden tower you've viewed so much from that boodywor window of yours—the oil-switch control tower—for the Slagville high-tension li—, however, that'd be wasting still more precious time, wouldn't it? So——"

"You haven't rendered that biography yet!" she told him. "So that last night—on the porch—isn't——"

"Isn't in the bag," he said hurriedly. "All right. Well—here goes then—for the story of my life."

And he told her his whole, to him, uninteresting life history. Though to her, it seemed fascinating. She snuggled close to him as he talked. In fact, after he'd talked a few minutes, she slipped her arm tenderly around his neck. Even later, she put her head on his shoulder. Having related to her already once before—but only in order to demonstrate what a man can do when he's really scared!—he but mentioned chronologically his experience in military camp—the planting of a bullet in the engine of a strafing Jap—and the bringing of the latter down. After which, Kel jumped quickly on to those more prosaic events of his wandering lineman's life, carrying the story clear up to where the old trunk of his father's had popped up, less than a half year ago, in a storage warehouse of a city not far from where he was then working—that old trunk with the two pitiful \$100 U.S. government bonds in it—and the unpaid bills and petty notes—and the ring of his mother's—Kel didn't tell the girl at his side he'd expected to put that ring on her finger tonight—what was the use? "And along about then," he went on, "I decided to change location again—for the umpty teenth time; and so I—and this, you



know, just to keep this story of mine in strict conformance with m' original explanation of how I happened to come on here, instead o' somewhere else!—I—I stuck that pin in that Steel Industry Guide and—well here I am!”

And pausing but an instant, he added dryly, taking hold of the small hand that hung lightly over his shoulder and looking down at the black-curled head on his shoulder, “If you'd heard some of the swashbuckling life stories I've heard—from boomers like myself—you'd ask: what kind of pale green ink did this deadly dull pole-hiker ever write *his* deadly dull life with? Where did—” He looked down at her. “Well—have I de-livered now—the goods? For a last evening—with you?”

She nodded, ever so emphatically.

“Yes, Kel. Completely! Only—I want now to ask you one more thing—that is, maybe I do—maybe I don't—I hardly know yet—I—what are you going to do tonight, Kel, when—you leave me? And we must start for home now!”

She looked ever so searchingly at him; so troubledly.

“We-e-ell,” he returned frankly, “if I'm consistent with myself—particularly with my own past—that is, whenever before I've caught a nasty blow square across my mouth, I—well I'll probably walk out into the country. Sit on a log. Smoke cigarettes for hours and hours—assuming I raise a few packs on credit from a place where I think I can, and——”

“That's what I feared, Kel. That is, you once told me that was an old custom of yours when things went wrong—so wrong. Only, Kel—I want you to do something for me tonight, will you?”

“Why, yes—sure. What is it?”

“I want you not to go out into the country, Kel. I want you, if you can't go home and to bed, to stay amongst people tonight—and not be by yourself—in the country or otherwise. Will you do that?”

“Why?” he asked, curiously.

“Do you believe—in intuition?”

“Very much,” he nodded frankly. Knowing full well the utter unexplainability of true extra-sensory perception—genuine flashes of clairvoyance—of——

“Well that's it,” she said, helplessly. “Intuition—that's all. I feel—smell—sense—some grave, terrible trouble in the air tonight—trouble that seems to—to enmesh you—well,

that's as near as I can get to it. I only know my whole instincts are that you must 'stay put' tonight. Where there's lights—people—ever'thing."

He was silent for a long dozen seconds or so. Grippled by the very intensity of her feelings. Then he spoke. But sadly.

"Intuition wins," he said. "Your request—is granted. Let's go !"

## CHAPTER XXI

### GRIM DISCOVERY !

THE horrible discovery made by Big Spurzya, head of the plate-handling crew of Plate Mill No. 2, as he stumbled about in the moonlight in the lonely slabyard, shortly after three o'clock in the morning, and following the completion of his night's shift, looking for some catnip for his cat Ferdinandova, was one that made the skin under the big Bulgarian's huge black beard actually seem to prickle—and made the cold sweat spring into the red flannel undershirt he habitually wore as actual shirt.

For the little body, in its pink silk jockey shirt, lay face down—close to the very tall sheet-iron fence along which Spurzya, his own eyes rigidly fixed on the ground for sight of a catnip plant, had been more or less unseeingly edging—unseeingly, at least, till this thing loomed up at his feet. The little, tightly-clenched fist clutched, indeed, the very piece of catnip that, under different conditions, Spurzya himself might have found ; its flat Chinese face, more or less in view because of the half-turned head, was contorted, its mouth half open as in sudden pain, its oblique brown eyes, open and unseeing, carrying a look of agony.

"A-a-achudmedes ! " the big Bulgarian gasped, knowing well that pink silk shirt and that flat Mongolian face. " Whadda-Jesoo whaddahell——" .

Wildly, he cast his eyes about him, in a great arc ; saw nothing, however, but silent slabs and billets and small ingots cutting off vision in practically all directions, like tree trunks in a forest ; and then, far along the fence, in the several-foot-wide cleared path between it and the closest slabs, saw Archimedes' bicycle leaning against the fence, its handlebars toward him. All of which might have told Spurzya some sort of a



story—except that the big Bulgarian was too hopelessly stupified to be able to analyse things.

He did, however, reach down and at least gingerly touch the body at his feet—first, its cheek—and with the tip of his forefinger only—and which cheek was as cold as the metal in one of the billets last touched by Spurzya. Quite dead, he realized. But because accidents—and fatalities—within the mills must be investigated by the first person coming upon them, Spurzya felt ever so gently, with the same fingertip that had just touched the cold cheek, at the back of the dead Chinese head—to see if there were a bullet hole there, or—or—or—well, he hardly knew what. Except that—his finger sunk into literally crumbled, shattered bone, lying under now-loose scalp. He jerked the finger away, shocked. Looked at it—it was not even bloody! He knew now—this was foul play. And he rose with alacrity to his feet, not even attempting to turn the body with his foot. For he sensed intuitively what Dr. Lionel Harrowell, the Chief Physician of the Plant hospital, was to decree twenty minutes later: that the little victim had been killed by one powerful, swift blow from behind—and had been dead at least three hours.

Instead, Spurzya threaded his way hurriedly in the direction of the rickety, deserted flagman's tower at the millward corner of the slabyard which, he knew, though not in use now for years because of realignment of the cooling yard tracks beyond, would be sure to have, upstairs within itself, a plant-phone box. Reaching the base of its creaky, rotted steps, he picked up a broken cast-iron coupling pin that somebody along the cooling track nearest beyond it had picked up and tossed out of the way; and with the pin in his hand went up the teetering steps. The phone box was there, all right, in the upstairs room of the deserted tower, thick with dust along its top, and copiously spiderwebbed from outer edge of top to wall; and he smashed the flimsy lock with his coupling pin. The instrument that should be inside the box was there, too, though Spurzya, not knowing that all instruments connected in any way with railroad operation always had double circuits by which they could be connected immediately with plant switchboard *or* outside Central switchboard, as the caller wished, found himself excitedly trying to identify himself to the plant operator and asking her to get him "Mist' Tarnybo, 'lactreecal so'prantandan" when actually he was in contact with the town switchboard; but,

in less than no time, he made clear enough the identity of the party he was calling, if not himself, to have Turnbo himself on the wire, at the latter's home. And told Turnbo, in fifteen excited words, what he, Spurzyna, had just discovered. And, by Turnbo's immediate orders, after the latter's single ejaculation of "Good heavens!" waited shiveringly up in that tower room, gazing far out over the graveyardlike slabyard—a thing which could not be done when one was in the slabyard itself, because of the countless slabs—seeing the little body in the moonlight, keeping watch on the little body, till Turnbo and a doctor—any doctor!—should arrive.

"Yes, Turnbo," Dr. Lionel Harrowell was saying, some twenty minutes later, as he closed his black medical case on his instruments, and stood stroking his greyed beard, "he's been dead at least three hours. And a swift, sure death it was, too! For the blow from behind that hit him"—gazing down at the body, through his toric spectacles, Harrowell shook his head—"was a terrific one—designed to finish him, then and there—you may feel for yourself how crushed in the bone is under the scalp back there." He paused reflectively. "That rusty coupling pin you found yonder, and wrapped up in your handkerchief, is undoubtedly the weapon—though you'll find no fingerprints on it, I'm certain, in view of that pair of non-assorted canvas gloves lying near it. Instant death, no less."

Noah Turnbo made no answer. For, unlike the big black-bearded Bulgarian who stood off a few feet from the doctor, hand nervously clutching red flannel undershirt, Turnbo himself was kneeling, and ascertaining for himself, ever so gingerly, the condition of crushed bone lying under where the coupling pin, the presumed weapon, had evidently come down. And finding it, indeed, to be like splinters and broken eggshells under a piece of old cloth.

Slowly Turnbo rose to his feet. Automatically, even as had Spurzyna done twenty minutes earlier, wiped his fingers on his trousers. Stood looking down at the little body. A welter of thoughts running through his head.

Then suddenly Noah Turnbo came to.

"Hold the fort, men," he said, turning away. "I've got to get to a phone—and call New York!"



The first question Hiatt, there in New York City, put to Turnbo, after hearing Turnbo's terrible tidings, was :

"Did you find the weapon?"

"Beyond doubt, Mr. Hiatt. A broken, rusty coupling-pin, from the old tracks over beyond the yard. At least, it lay a half dozen feet off from the body, and, slightly beyond it, as though discarded after it, was a pair of ragged, filthy canvas gloves that don't even match—plainly pick-ups from one of the many refuse cans about the plant. As the cuffed one has ash on the cuff; and the other, uncuffed, is greasy. All of which means there'll be no fingerprints on the coupling pin."

"I don't doubt that at all! In view of the cleverness of some of those past circuit breaks. To prevent discovery till—but what time did the poor kid die?"

"It would have been at midnight, Mr. Hiatt, by no more or less than ten minutes one way or the other, according to Harrowell's findings. And he's an expert, on death-hour determinations, you know. He——"

"Yes, he is indeed. Dear me! What does——"

"But wait, Mr. Hiatt! Since you've asked that specific question. Harrowell's determinations were made purely on the medical factors—and were independent of subsequent data I got while I was trying to get long-distance connection with you. Harrowell's determinations are completely confirmed by actual data. For, by the latter, the boy was definitely alive, Mr. Hiatt, and in the Structural Mill at half-past eleven. And was *non est* at 12.15 a.m."

"You don't—say? It—but what on earth made you think to phone the Structural——"

"Oh, I phoned the Plant Messenger Headquarters first. The last delivery he had was to the Structural Mill. The last call-back he made to the messenger despatch office was as to whether there were any pickups around there—and their answer to that was no—and was recorded by them as made at 11.20. They ordered him, however, on that call-back, to ring them without fail at exactly a quarter after midnight—and he promised faithfully to do so. It seems there was a difference of opinion about a certain pickup that never got made earlier in the evening—the official complaining was to be in the despatch office at that hour—and they wanted to put the two into communication over the switchboard to straighten it out and alibi

themselves. And they've been preparing, ever since, to give the poor kid billyhell when he would show up. Since—but anyway, the 12.15 call-back was never made. The point is, the boy was dead, you see, after midnight. And—but that's why I tried the Structural Mill. And which, fortunately for my inquiries, is running on that 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift. Well, Archimedes was seen chatting with two specialized workers, the Rylander Brothers—Cass and George, and left there, according to the mill foreman *and* the Rylander Brothers, with whom I talked, at 11.30."

"Very good. Of course I mean, Turnbo, the accurate determination of the approximate death hour. He obviously went to the slabyard right after leaving the Structural Mill, and learning there were no more pickups around the—but here—what does McAfee have to say—as to any of the linegang who may have been commissioned to stay inside the plant tonight on some after-supper job?"

"McAfee, Mr. Hiatt, isn't here yet—I'm getting hold of him—but he'll be in a position to tell us something of far, far more importance than what you cite—which can establish nothing. For the reason that—Archimedes, you know," Turnbo broke off, "used to call his father now and then in the night, when an outside phone was available to him in some office or shop, or by way of an outside connection from one of the various phone boxes, to which, being a messenger, he carried a key in order to call back at messenger headquarters concerning the various pickups. And McAfee was there in Jim Kee's place, at midnight, getting the Chicago Golden Gloves finals on that television machine you gave Kee. For I got McAfee there at that hour myself—I'd been working late here in my office in the plant on new construction work destined to have to be done sooner or later—was about to get ready to leave, in fact, and wanted to talk to him about whether we were safe in leaving those Slagville lines on the cross-arm another twenty-four hours. He was a bit grumpy at being drawn away from the machine, and—but the point is, Mr. Hiatt, that he must have seen those finals through—they were far from through, then—were due to go at least another hour; so he'll know whether any calls came for Jim Kee from Archimedes; and, if there did—but only *if* there did—we can follow that angle up, for in such case, Mr. Hiatt, some mention might have been made by the boy to his father as to something he had



seen—or discovered—earlier during the evening—oh, I know that sounds cryptic, Mr. Hiatt, but you see——”

But right there, due to the urgency of a previous call-order Turnbo had given the plant operator, an answer—at least of sorts—was to be given to both men on this circuit. For the local girl came in.

“I haven’t been able to get hold of Mr. McAfee as yet, Mr. Turnbo. I surmise—if you don’t mind my suggestion—that he may be over at West-Town Edge—watching that circus unload. You know? But I did get Mr. Kee, the Chinese laundryman.”

“He’ll do. Put him on the wire with Mr. Hiatt and myself.”

A second later a dignified, though slightly irritated, Chinese voice came on.

“Is Zim Kee speak. Who wan’ Zim this clazy houl?”

“Jim, this is Mr. Turnbo over at the plant. Yes, the Turnbo who’s *your* customer—on Nott Hill. I’m trying very hard to get hold of Red. You remember?—I got him tonight—a few minutes or so after midnight—when he’d been there an hour or two—and——”

“Two houl—yes!”

“That doesn’t matter. What I’m trying to find out is what time did he leave?”

“He leeve one ’clock in molnin’, Mist’ Tu’lnbo. Aftel big silvel cup get awalderd to boy wi’ golilla face—face mos’ so awful I t’ink gonna clack telwissen mazhine.” Jim chuckled. “But he leev at one. Aftal gi’ me one dollal fo’ use o’ mazhine. An’tling vellee long mebbe?”

“Uh—no,” said Turnbo curtly. “At least not—never mind. Just—just go on back to sleep and I’ll try elsewh——”

But here the girl came in again. “I’ve got Mr. McAfee for you now, Mr. Turnbo. I tried Jaworski’s place.”

“Good. Put him on. Please take Mr. Kee off. Good-night Jim. Sorry to have disturbed you.”

“No mattel. Vellee happy. Goo’ night.” A click showed that Jim Kee had either hung up, or been cut off.

Now Red was on.

“Hi, Chief! What’s wrong? No power lines down, I hope? The gal said you’d been tryin’ to locate me all over hellan’gone. But I been here in Jaworski’s ever since I left Jim Kee’s. In one of the back rooms. Gettin’ famous!

Together with a friend o' yours, 'Bull' Rehwinkle of th' Power House, who——"

"Getting famous? What in heaven's na——"

"Why—that artist from Chicago who calls himself Bruce Patterson—the fellow who's been about the burg a couple of weeks or so, doing a hundred water-colour scenes to go in a book called Steeltown—well, he's been plucking off a few ginks all night at Jaworski's for sketching. And he grabbed me a'most th' second I stepped in the door after leavin' Jim's. And's been sketchin' me ever since, posin' in a heller of a fist-fight with 'Bull' Rehwinkle, in a picture t' be called Brawl—as types—whatever th' hell a type is."

Turnbo sighed wearily.

"Seems the Patterson birds knows his onions, all right. When it comes to ty——, but anyway, I know about your leaving Jim's at one o'clock, for I've just talked with him. Well, there *is* something very wrong, Red. Something terribly so. So count yourself out of that fisticuffs picture—at least for tonight—or let Patterson work on the Rehwinkle half of it—and get over here, as soon as you can. To my office in the plant. But just now, for the moment, I want to ask whether any phone call was made by Archimedes to his father before twelve—or after twelve—any time, in fact?"

"Archimedes? Jumping sna——, listen, chief, you don't mean somep'n has happened to Arch——," Red broke off, as a man who suddenly realized he was being asked, at an unearthly hour of the night, for salient information dealing with an important something; or as a man who realized that a startling suspicion might not have anything to do with reality, and answered, exactly and thoughtfully, "I don't know, Mr. Turnbo. The machine had been moved into the kid's bedroom for me, so that my listenin' and watchin' that there ground-glass screen wouldn't be intyfered with. For Jim had some rush-shirts to do, and I had paid one good buck o' th' realm f'r th' use o' the machine. Well, there was so much yellin' o' the crowds in the areny—on th' sound band, that is—that if the phone outside had tinkled, or he'd talked with anybody, I'd never have heard it, even through th' matchboard walls o' that walled-off corner the kid occupies."

"I see. Well as soon as you get away, I want you to——"

Click! Somewhere along the line one of the operators, either the plant operator or the town operator, either by mis-



chance, or because bewildered by the tripleness of the connection, had pulled the plug connecting with McAfee. Turnbo did not attempt to correct the cut-off; he trusted that Red would be on his way. He spoke now, to Hiatt, presumably waiting with ears open.

"Well, Mr. Hiatt, as you've heard, we're a bit stymied, as to whether a call ever did get made by the boy prior to his death, and what he may have dropped—if anything. The to-midnight plant phone girl—that Miss Gillie Cuddeback—might remember such call—sure!—but if she'd tuned in on it, 'twould have been talked in Chinese—yes, I've heard the boy talk to his father on my phone, and—anyway, she wouldn't know what was said, nor—besides, she's off duty now. It—however, it doesn't affect the set-up as now exists: the boy is plenty dead!"

"Terrible! But how did the killer get to him, Turnbo?"

"Saw him, obviously, ride into the slabyard on his bike. Cut through, probably, by one of the lanes. Whether the kid—keeping his eyes and ears open as was—was suggested this morning—in my office—oh, I'll—I'll explain about that later on—tomorrow—well, whether the kid saw too much, somewhere in the plant—I mean, came face to face with someone who maybe shouldn't have been there—or whether the killer just thought the kid saw something—or even thought the kid saw him, the killer, when the kid really didn't—well, your guess is as good as mine. But the killer tailed him—picked up the coupling pin on the way—and in carefully gloved hands, moreover, in view of those gloves there—and got him. The bike itself is still there in the lane between the slabyard and the fence."

"What was the kid doing in the slabyard?"

"Searching for catnip, Mr. Hiatt. For a sprig of it was clutched tightly in one hand. And the big Bulgarian plate-mill crew-handler who found him, came there himself to look for catnip that one of our men told him could be found there; and he says this man has practically claimed that he's the only person who knows about catnip growing in the slabyard. At least——"

"Why this—this is significant, Turnbo. If this man—whoever he may be—has told the Bulgarian, he probably also has told the child. Who probably has a pet cat. In short, this man *sent the child there!* And if he did——"

"Mr. Turnbo?"

It was Red, back on the circuit. By expert work from the other end.

"Listen, Mr. Turnbo," he said rapidly, "I got myself put back on. I don't know what th' hell this is about. But it sounds bad. Now if they's anything went wrong in th' plant t'night, I've got som'thin' ser'ous to report."

"You have? What is it, Red?"

"I rang Laurs'ton t'night—around 2.15 a.m., that is!—at the place he rooms—while th' Patterson guy was givin' Rehwinkle and me a posin' rest—and takin' one himself—well, I rang Laur'ston to ask him point-blank what in th' blazin' hell right he had to be havin' private confabs in the mill about things in an' of the mill what on'y him and the other guy knew about—y'see, a certain message got relayed to him today through me—some Bohunk hadda see him private, see?—anyway, tied up there posin', I natchelly got to thinkin' about him—grew hot under the collar—I—I—well y' see, I got to wonderin' if maybe he was settin' on some dame's front porch, right then and there, pokin' fun at me and—y'see, he don't like me, and he'd poke fun at me with any—anyway, I rung him, see? In that Cobalt Street dump where he lives. For I had the number o' th' insterment—in case o' any emergencies on th' lines. He wasn't even sleepy sounding—as though he'd jest come in. Well, I ast him first—sort o' sarcast'cally—w'ere th' hell *he'd* been all night. He musta thought I meant it—an' had been tryin' to get him all night, f'r he—well, you know what he said?"

"No. But it doesn't matt——"

"He said," persisted Red, "'I b'en traipsing around inside the mills, o' course, tryin' to find my wallet with the hundred bucks in it I lost.'"

"Drunk, of course. But——"

"Drunk nothing! As sober as a judge. And as for ever owning a hundred bucks, why that guy— Listen, couldn't——"

"McAfee?" This from Hiatt on the other end. "I heard all you said. This is Seth Hiatt talking—at New York. McAfee, I want you to go straight to Chief Moneypenny's, while Mr. Turnbo's doing other things, and, by my orders, have this man taken up immediately and arrested. For something terrible has happened in the plant—between, roughly,



midnight and 1 a.m. You'll have to wait to get the details from your superior. Just now, get Lauriston grabbed. For while that answer of his to you could be pure—ah—sarcasm—it could have been rendered because he thought somebody had reported him to you as being inside the mills—anyway, have Moneypenny make him account for every minute of his time since he rang out—assuming he did go out of the mills tonight. For this further business you speak of—him having private matters with people in the mills——”

“I'll get to Moneypenny at once, Mist—er Hiatt. You bet! Goodbye, Chief.”

Red was off. Turnbo gave a rueful shake of his head.

“I wish, Mr. Hiatt,” was all he said, “you'd talked to me first. For——”

“Talk? Good heavens, Turnbo, instead of our talking, we should be clamping down on every linegang member who can't account for his whereabouts at——”

“Now just a minute, Mr. Hiatt. Keep cool! In the first place, the ‘private talk’ that was held this evening between two millmen—one Lauriston—was between Spurzya and Lauriston. Yes. And the matter ‘privately talked about’ was the very catnip growing area that figures in this case. And Lauriston merely happened to know it grew over there. Nothing very incriminating about all that. Even if Lauriston later told Archimedes—as he plainly must have—and—but the point is, Mr. Hiatt,” Turnbo broke off abruptly, “that, reconstructing events as we well may, to the effect that the Chinese boy spotted one of our linegang members inside the mills somewhere this past evening, where the latter shouldn't be—or doing something he shouldn't do—and then later foolishly put himself—yes, the boy, I mean—over there in that lonely slabyard after catnip—well, what I'm getting at, Mr. Hiatt, is that whoever killed the boy is out of the plant long ago, unobserved and all. For——”

“Why? The gate-guards may have been unusually observant tonight of people acting excited and——”

“Mr. Hiatt, I talked to Pottgether at Railroad Gates, Gilgreary at Executives' Gate, and Moscrip at Workers' Gate while I was getting you. Now Railroad Gates were wide open tonight from midnight till two, to shuttle in and out some various ore trains and slag trains, and getting one derailed train off one track—derailed right within one gate. All excitement,

you see, there, and scurrying to and fro of many workers through the gates. Now Moscrip at Workers' Gate was off his gate entirely tonight for three-and-a-half long hours—a fact!—from a quarter of twelve till a quarter after three—sick with ptomaine symptoms. Only Gilgreary, at Executives' Gate, *has* been on the job, and can testify not only that nobody came in or went out who didn't act right, but that neither did the one member of the linegang whom he knows—namedly, Lauriston."

"I see. However, have Moneypenny go to every linegang member's house tonight—and find out who's absent from home right this minute. For—oh, it'll have to be handled by him—since it's police work purely on the outside of the plant—but it won't hurt him to stir his stumps a bit, in view of the fact that we pay him half his salary, and—but have him and his right-hand bower also put each man on the pan as to where he was toni——"

"I'm afraid," returned Turnbo, trying not to be too impatient with this man who held, in his hands, Turnbo's own tenure of position, "that that wouldn't be any good what-so-ever, Mr. Hiatt. For there's a circus unloading tonight at West Town Edge—a lot of the linegangers will be over there, out of curiosity—nothing much happens, you know, in a town like this!—and others will be pulling down a bit of loose change stringing wires. You just couldn't, you see, postulate anything on the matter of who wasn't at home. Nor, so far as that goes, who isn't home now. Nor can you, Mr. Hiatt, dispute very much the alibi of a man who claims to have gone to bed before midnight, in his own home, and to have been fast asleep at that hour? Can you? Oh, everybody's alibi—such as it is—will be asked for—certainly!—checked as much as it can be—but I can't help but feel we'll still be right smack up against the same old proposition we were facing; either to—or not to—fire all the linegang out of the mills, if we're to stop this grudgeworks sabotage whose source is so mysterious."

"Well, it's no longer mysterious, Turnbo. Nor is it grudge-work. For I have the full lowdown on it now—yes, a fact!—because of a long-delayed letter I received here in New York late last night—from Vice-Admiral Gilbert Nym. It—it clears the whole thing up. And as far as I'm concerned—if this will cheer you up any!—you can now, if it turns out we



can't solve this killing, you can now fire all the lineangers—bag and baggage—married, single, and whatnot—the whole kit and kaboodle of them without excep— wait!—in the event of any such wholesale firing, you can just retain my protégé, the Hindu—yes—and the bright boy we've awarded the scholarship to—he's just not the type at all, at all, at all, for—anyway, you can fire 'em all now, so far as I'm concerned—all but those two, that is—if this killing remains a riddle as does the sabotage. Since——”

“But,” Hiatt broke off, “I—I feel ever so confident, Turnbo, that the murder of this poor little boy is to be the answer to our sabotage problem; yes, that's what I mean—for if by some circumstances not yet in sight we catch the murderer, then—we've got our saboteur. We've—but call me back again from your home later, will you, Turnbo? For I realize you've got many details to attend to, and I'm awfully distraught about the thing—all of a sudden. It's—it's just beginning to dawn on me how truly horrible it is. I'll be flying back tomorrow—first to Chicago, and thence to that Parktown Airfield, and will be in in the late afternoon. I shall have, of course, to ring Hamerson Hogg, our chief director, by dawn, if not before, and give him the facts—and you know Ham Hogg!—he'll want to fly back with me. In the meantime, I'll—I'll have to walk the floor a while—call me later, will you?”

And Turnbo, glad to be free, said goodbye and hung up.

Turnbo sat in his office in Executives' Building Number 3, an hour later, when Spurzya, coming embarrassedly through the empty connecting anteroom, the doors of which, both to Turnbo's own sanctum and the building corridor outside, had been left ajar, troubledly entered the comfortably wicker-furnished room. Turnbo looked up.

“Yes, Spurzya—what is it? Why don't you go home?”

“Mister Tarneybo, me Om hoving som'tang to tall yu.”

“To tell me? Something—about your discovery—of tonight?”

“Yas.”

“Well, go ahead! What is—but why didn't you tell me then?”

The big blackbeard looked quaintly sheepish.

“Too—too moch oggsidemant, Mister Tarneybo—after Om finda liddle—a body—with dockator com'—an' yu—an'

lots talk an' all—then men wid stratchers dey arrivin' to gat body—n'y now is aver't'ang all qviet-like."

"I get you. Well, go ahead then—with what you want to tell me. What is it?"

Spurzya, however, but scratched his head. He was plainly quite troubled.

"Go ahead, man," Turnbo urged, realizing that some deep secret in Spurzya's soul was being touched.

Spurzya sighed. Shrugged his shoulders. Hopelessly.

"Wall," he said, at last, "what me Om gonna tall yu, Mister Tarneybo, yu gonna fin' out an'vay—whan dockator mak' foll repart. It is som'tang only Om know—and Meesor Spurzya know. Not that it mak' no dafrance nohow."

"Something," repeated Turnbo curiously, "that only you—and Mrs. Spurzya know? Well—what on earth is it—Spurzya?"

"Jost, Mister Tarneybo, that liddle Arch'medes Kee is liddle Chinee gal—an' not Chinee boy. But yu fin' out—whan dockator he mak' repart."

## CHAPTER XXII

### TURNBO MAKES A PAINFUL CALL

NOAH TURNBO paused a moment on the threshold of Jim Kee's laundry. The late morning sunshine outside bathed the street in gold, as well as the cottages across the way, but the big, tattered shade of the shopwindow was down. A crudely lettered card back of the glass in the door, said :

NO WASH FOR TWENNY—4 HOUR  
NO CAN SEE PEEPLE  
DETH HAS COME JIM KEE

Turnbo reached forth to pull the ancient rusty pullbell; then realizing the horrid jangle it would create in this house of death, tried the doorknob. The door proved not to be locked.



He opened it ; stepped in.

Jim sat behind the counter, as a man in a daze. The jagged holes in the big shade of the shopwindow allowed enough sunlight to diffuse through to gloomily light up the small store interior. Jim wore a black rubber Chinaman's coat. His head was bowed. A sticky bottle, with an unintelligible Chinese label, stood on the counter ; and a small, sticky glass. He looked at Turnbo stonily, faraway, almost unseeing. And Turnbo, who had closed the door gently behind him, uneasily approached the counter.

"Jim," he said, "I'm—I'm terribly sorry—about this awful thing that's happened. Chief Money Penny probably has used none too much finesse—in telling you. And this—11 o'clock in the morning—this is the very first I've been able to get here."

"Much thanks," was Jim Kee's laconic and utterly toneless reponse. He did not even move.

"But Jim," Turnbo went on, uneasily, "why did you never tell us that Arch—, well, Willie—was a girl?"

Jim looked wearily off into far space, thousands of miles through and back of Turnbo. "Becoz," he said simply, "she no can get wolk. Lil gals no allow in stee' mills. Nowhell else in Tipp'dale can she get wolk. She too li'l to get an' cally laundly. I need she money velly bad. No much laundly in milltown."

"Did you know—that Mrs. Spurzya knew she was a girl?"

"No." The Chinaman, despite his being obviously completely crushed, showed a faint trace of surprise. Rather, as Turnbo shrewdly analyzed it, gratefulness that somebody, anyway, had helped a poor laundryman to keep a foolish secret.

"Well, she did, Jim," he explained. "For Willie—but here, Jim, what was the poor kid's name?"

"Willymena. She boln in San Flancisco, but name' aftel Hollan' queen because she boln on Hollan' Queen bi'ltday."

"Well, Jim," Turnbo resumed, "Wilhelmina was overcome by the heat—or nearly so—one scorching day in late June—when riding on her bicycle past the Spurzya house. She reeled off, and fainted, right at the gate, and Mrs. Spurzya ran out and lugged her inside—fixed her comfortably. Put her to bed, and all. Mrs. Spurzya has a dozen children of her own, you know, and knows what to do—and how to do it. And that day she learned Wilhelmina was a girl. But your little daughter made Mrs. Spurzya promise never to tell. And she—and her

nusband, in whom she confided—never did tell—till early this morning.”

“I see.” The tonelessness betrayed that it was now of little interest to Jim Kee.

Turnbo fidgeted uneasily.

“Jim, what would you say—if I told you she was killed by a man taking pay from—but wait!—a more or less hopeless, so I fear, question ahead of that. Jim, the ring Wilhelmina gave you on the telephone last night at 11.37—and which was about twenty minutes or so prior to her murder—you see, we’ve only this morning managed to get to talk to Miss Gillie Cuddeback who plugged it in. She remembers it only because she stayed on the connection long enough to hear your daughter’s high-pitched voice talking Chinese, and remembers setting her wristwatch at the time. Now did your little girl—and think hard, Jim—did she drop any remark that she had discovered anybody in the plant who shouldn’t be there—or doing anything——”

Turnbo stopped. Waited half hopefully.

But Jim only wearily swung his greyed head in halfwise manner, from side to side.

“She ask me only,” he explained, and with obvious effort, “to—to have clack-w’eat fo’ oul bleakfas’ tomolow—that now today—instead of pollidge like often. She say notling abou’—now wait.” Jim passed a wrinkled hand bewilderedly up and down one side of his face. “She say—she do say we gon’ have much inteletin’ talk—at bleakfas’. She nevel talk like that, befo’. She—” He turned uncertain gaze on Turnbo. “You mean—she know sometling—she no should——”

“I’ll say!” said Turnbo fiercely. “Or so it certainly seems now, since—well, Jim, again I’ll put my original question to you: What would you say—if I told you she was killed by a man—taking pay from Japan?”

“Zapan?” Jim shook his greyed head fiercely. “Zapan she—she bad countly. Becoz she sign pleave tleatly no mean she at peace. Nevel—nevel! She do an’tling a’light—to stop mill mak’ gunboat steel. O’ to lealn ’bout plates fo’ to be use’ as skin on flyin’ supel-foltlesses. She—” But now his voice broke. And he said no more.

Turnbo waited for Mongolian stoicism and calm to fully reassert themselves. Then resumed:



"That's confidential, however, Jim. Not the fact that electrical sabotage has been going on inside the mills—no—for that's leaked out now—will be referred to openly in the story in tonight's *Bugle*. No, it's the source of the sabotage that's confidential. Meaning—you must not repeat it to anyone, anywhere, see? I got the facts this morning from two different people—Mr. Hiatt was one, on long-distance phone. And he got them from another source, which is unimpeachable. And—but the point is that we're not going to destroy the chance to catch your daughter's killer, as we would have if I had gone through with what I was ready to go through with this morning. In short, to fire them all—all the linegang. Yes. For—but by linegang, Jim, I mean the electrical workers.

"Yes. For it was pointed out to me by one of them—the other man who gave me the inside facts—pointed out to me in the jail but thirty minutes ago—that if I let them all go, they'll all scatter, over the whole length and breadth of the country, and gone will be the only chance, ever, to catch the killer of your daughter. So-o—I've even cancelled a pink-ticket on this fellow himself."

"W'at man poin' all this out?"

"A man who was under arrest all the latter part of the night and all morning. Refusing to give his alibi till about an hour ago."

"What man?"

"Kel Lauriston is his name. He's a customer of yours, living on——"

"Lollyston? He ask many question las' evenin' 'bout Zapan—an' 'bout Zapan mebbe can do many bad tlings in mill—he ask on'y jus' las' evenin'."

Turnbo looked pained. "Well, as I say, he happens to know something about the—inside of things. He——"

"He—he mebbe Zap'nese agent," said Jim, clenching his fist fiercely.

"No, oh no, Jim," Turnbo insisted, "he's not. He got the information from a buddy of his—who had worked in a Japanese steel plant."

"I—see." Jim showed signs of an inward slump that something—something had failed as a lead to the death of Wilhelmina.

"Well, now, Jim, I——"

"You paldon—if I tak' nothel dlink? It is special dlink—

fo' w'en Death com' to Tsinaman's house." The old man tipped the bottle to his lips. A smell of rancid bamboo filled the air. Swallowing some, he became instantly calm, majestically so. He drew in a resolute breath. "I calm now. So much so I ask—what al'bi—that mean w'ere was at?—w'at al'bi this man Lollyston have?"

"Well, Jim, he was in Kelly's Grove up to near 11 o'clock with a gir—, ah—girder-inspector from one of the structural mills," Turnbo hastily corrected, remembering his and Money-penny's solemn promise to Lauriston that they would not reveal to anyone whatsoever the identity of his chief alibi witness, some girl by the name of Cary—. "Then," Turnbo went on, "he strolled home with this party, then walked straight to—and past—Executives' Gate to McConico Archdeacon's Roulette Parlour and Poker Rooms above Skillanville's Hamburger Palace—it seems Lauriston had been dead broke, but he borrowed a half dollar on the way from a Greek named Papatheororis Alpogenis whom he knew—and to whom he promised to pay the loan back fourfold next payday!—anyway, Jim, inside the gambling rooms he lay the whole half dollar on the red, at the roulette table—from here on, Jim, this whole thing isn't going to be intelligible to you, but—well, he let the half dollar 'ride,' as the saying is, while the red came up five straight times—something, Jim, that doesn't happen in a month of Sundays—then he 'pulled'—pulled what was now \$16, and entered the 50-cent-limit poker table—ran his \$16 through most astounding hands, up to \$168 at 3 a.m., and then—dumped!"

But Jim had been following this recountal, at least as best he could.

"Dum' mean w'at?" he inquired, face grim.

"Lost all," explained Turnbo succinctly. But the Chief and I have thoroughly checked the alibi, and it checks completely: the gir—, ah—the girder-inspector confirms it in every detail—the Greek Alpogenis the same—and the croupier, Tony Palmisano, at the roulette table. The only possible instant that Lauriston could even have entered the mills would have been when he passed Executives' Gate—but the plant guard, on duty there, a man named Gilgreary, knows him—and affirms he didn't. Moreover, when he was passing would have been when your little daughter was making what appears to have been her last call-back to the messenger despatch



office—from some box-phone in the plant—to find if there were any pickups in the northwest corner of the plant. No, Jim, Kel Lauriston is a hundred-and-one-per cent. clear. For which I wish I could say I am sorry—since I do want to see the killer caught, only——”

Jim waved away this somewhat quixotic expression of sentiment firmly.

“Jim no wan’ see man hang fo’ kill his lil gal—if man no do. No! But—if man *do do*”—and Jim’s face became contorted—“Jim wan’ to spling gallums tlap wi’ own hands. He—.” He clenched his lean, yellow talions; then calmed himself. “Lollystan is out then. Okay. Who else—is allested?”

Turnbo sighed.

“I’m sorry to say, Jim—that no one is. You see, most of the alibis given by my linegang men are alibis that can’t be disproven—or, in some cases, proven either! Mostly—party ‘asleep.’ ‘Went to bed early.’ Some ‘watching circus unload’—from out in the dark. The only man who has a really one-hundred-per-cent. corroboratable alibi—outside of Lauriston, that is—is, strangely, the one man who is actually known to have been inside the mills when your daughter was killed—the so-called night trouble-shooter, one Dead-Eye Fawcett—yes, he was tied up, at the rail-straightening sheds, in sight of lots of millworkers, on a mean trouble job caused by the very sabotage that’s at the bottom of this whole case. Oh, there is one of the linegangers, yes—who was in Madam Lily’s joint across the tracks. He’s clear, therefore. One man—at least, Jim,” Turnbo broke off uneasily, “thanks to Lauriston’s arguments, we’ve at least got the killer of your little daughter safely on tap—by continuing, I mean, to retain the linegang as is. For if any man so much as quits in the next few days, he’ll be taken up before you can say Jack Spratt. And he knows it! No, Jim, there’s nobody arrested. Oh, there is one—yes—but not for killing your little girl. He’s a lineman—big Yuce Joly—known as ‘Six-six-six’ because he’s six feet, six inches, and six-tenths-of-an-inch high, and——”

“Six-six-six? Ol’ man Joly’s boy? Oh, he—he nevel kill Wilhelmina. He goo’ boy—except dlink too much——”

“I well know that, Jim. I mean—I know both! And the former, for the simple reason that he was in my house last night from ten in the evening, till three in the morning. A fact!

He came there—drunk, yes—to talk to me about a week's salary advance; I wasn't there, but my father saw he was the worse for liquor, and had him lie down on the living room couch. He fell asleep. And was asleep there from eleven till three, then got up, and went out. Went over town, and raised a disturbance, and got arrested by Chief Moneypenny's night man. And is now in a cell sleeping it off."

"Then," put in Jim, meaningfully, "nobody—is allest." And added bitterly: "W'en Tsinese people get hult, w'ite people they——"

"Now listen, Jim, everything's merely in—in *status quo*. Hold ever'thing. Hamerson Hogg, our chief director, is flying here with Mr. Hiatt. Hogg's a man who is mixed up in many businesses in the East—knows the quickest way to get places. Will you be patient? Someday—someday, I tell you, we'll be trying your little girl's killer for murder. And——"

"An' acquillitin' him," said Jim, with still-bitter fierceness. "Whoeval heal of w'ite man get hang—fo' kill ig'nant Tsinese, membel of infeliol lace? Who——"

"You're all wrong, Jim—and don't think any more along those lines—now. Keep in condition—for you have to go to the coroner's inquest this afternoon. I must go now. Will you be—all right?"

"I be all li'. I keep okay. Don' wolly."

"Good." And Turnbo, turning on his heel, went silently across the room, opened the door and passed out.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### RED ASSIGNS THAT MIDNIGHT JOB!

KEL LAURISTON, hastening along the narrow curving cinder road that led to the linegang shanty, realized that he provided a considerable contrast with the homegoing workmen he had met. For he was dressed up in his best—his only, so far as that went!—blue serge suit; and his straw hat, and a spotlessly clean soft white shirt. Clattering up the low steps of the shanty, he found the time-clock, standing just off the doorway, reading a full minute after six, and the shanty empty of all except its foreman, who sat within the glass-encased office at one side, the door, however, wide open.



"Jeho—," Red McAfee began.

"—sophat," Lauriston was already finishing for him. And in the open doorway of the office, moreover. "Why in hell don't I get here sooner? Why in hell don't I—well, I got here as fast as I could, after McInvor MacIndosh rang me for you."

"Sure is mighty swell of you," said Red, with biting sarcasm. "F'r I don't even know, no more, by hang, w'ether you work f'r us. I sure never see you days, no more."

"Be yourself!" retorted Kel. "Didn't I lose all of last night? First, being with—"

"I know—I know," retorted Red impatiently. "The guy you were tryin' to borry twenty-five bucks from in Kelly's Grove—excep' 'at he turned you down flatto—no, Moneypenny nor the Old Man didn't tell me that—I guessed *that*: then gambling the rest o' the—say, who was that guy?"

"Fellow who," said Kel unblinkingly, "was trying to argue you to be a low, mean stinker! That's how I lost most of my evening—taking the negative. Only he won the deba—"

"Okay," grunted Red. "None of my business, heh?—okay. Well, couldn't you get around this morning—"

"Now, Red!" expostulated Kel. "I was locked in doory-ance wile till near 11 a.m.—thanks to some idiot's hypothesis that I was mixed up in that killing—so what the hell was the use of coming out then? I just went home—and hit the hay. For—but anything new—in the matter of the killing?"

Red made a helpless gesture, with both freckled hands. "Nothin' newer than they was this mornin'. Exceptin' 'at the couplin' pin that conked the kid was free o' fingerprints—jest as Turnbo was certain 'twould be. They's nothin' officially new, exceptin' that Ham Hogg's arrived. He'll prob'ly dope out some angle."

"How are the boys taking it?"

"Hell. They're lookin' askancy, all of 'em, at each other. Why wouldn't they?"

"Right enough," Kel nodded emphatically. "For—but here I am. Slept all day, and rarin' to go."

"Sleep ever'day all day, if you want," snapped Red. "Only—don't bellyache to *me*—when the old paycheck comes around. For—but where th' hell you goin' tonight—dressed up like a plu—"

"Plush horse—yes?" Lauriston finished for him. He gazed down at himself with mock surprise. "Does I look

like 'ums going somep'ace?" And having circumnavigated an answer to *that* question, he asked: "We-ell, what's cooking?"

"Well," Red explained, "it's that Slagville Cement Plant line job, of course. Turnbo sent over word that it'd better be did t'night without fail. Because o' the fact that—but wait'll I get in your helper f'r tonight. So's I don't have to rehearse this fakealoo twicet." He rose and went to the door of the office.

"No Kidding!" he bellowed. "Where th' hell you keeping yourself?" Then, as somebody must have appeared in the doorway of the toolroom, back off the rear end of the office, added cuttingly: "What the hell do you do with yourself—in there alone, anyway? You oughta—step this way."

He returned, and plumped down heavily into his swivel chair. As Lauriston himself now came on in the rest of the way, and draped himself insouciantly on the edge of the desk, even as, five seconds later, the helper himself appeared in the doorway.

Oswald Sweetboy, known in the linegang as No Kidding, was a youth who might have been anything from twenty to twenty-five. Under one arm was his now emptied, black-jappaned tin lunchpail, showing he had been held over. He was a none-too-strong lad, and far, far, too intelligent, at least in looks, to remain forever an outside workman; he wore gold-rimmed spectacles, his cheeks were hollow, which, in conjunction with the gold spectacles, gave him the appearance of a youthful Doctor of Philosophy in workclothes. A most bizarre part of his work costume was an amazing Joseph's coat of hundreds of irregular pieces of cloth, matched meticulously for colour and size and shape by one with an artistic sense—himself, no doubt, since he lived alone; it was a garment which, on Fifth Avenue, New York, would have cost a pretty penny. Unlike the other helpers in the linegang, the youth's cheap yellow work trousers, devoid of oil stains and dirt, were evenly pressed. A light black cap on the back of his head showed somewhat thin hair atop the slender skull.

He took up a humble, silent position near the wall. As Lauriston threw him a half-facetious salute. And turned back to Red.

"Drive on, Mr. MacDuff," Lauriston invited. "For now that I know I'm here on that night-job—I'm very relieved! For I know I wasn't called here to catch the old pink ticket."



"Pink ticket?" said Red blandly. "Now what makes you think," he demanded, almost hurtfully, "that I'd want to fire you?"

"Instink!" retorted Lauriston coolly. "But let's not finook, Red. Let's get down to business. Here I be!—at yer full service—ready to pay off on all the loafing I hain't did!—so what's the set-up?"

"Replacement," said Red, "of three high-tension insulators. Slagville line. All on th' same cross-arm, too. The lines are laying right now on th' dry wood. But far, far too damned clost to each other, from an en-gy-neerin' standpoint—at least so claims the Old Man, anyway. 'Twas done with a rifle ev'dently—the de-struction o' them ins'lators, I mean—which'll mean th' bolts'll be bent all out o' line and'll have to be replaced, too; and—what's that?—who done it?—who th' hell d'ya 'spose done it?—th' saboteegin' son-of-a-bitch who's done all the saboteegin' what's been did—done two days back, however, th' bastard ev'dently figurin' rain was due. Except that th' rain she veered off. And so the lines have b'en let lay. It's at Pole 147—about three mile out in the country—put that down—yes—1—4—7. And the shutdown's been decided f'r midnight t'night account the cement plant's backlog bein' et up—an' th' load curve also bein' a minyimum at midnight—an'——"

"And rain promised for tomorrow night," finished Lauriston. "Werry good! Except for three 22,000-volt lines spitting at each other on a wet cross-arm!"

"Well, you got it all, then," declared Red. "I've called you out here in person—and helt No Kidding back after his time was out—so's they'll be no chances later what-so-ever of no damned argyments as to what the job was—when it was for—who was to do it—or that 'twas even assigned. Now you've had this job assigned to you—th' both o' you—the dope all given you—and in each other's presence. So watch your clocks th' both o' you—if you want to hold on to the salary rolls around here." He reached into one of the pockets of his brown coat. "Here's two passes—one for each o' you—to get by the Workers' Gate gate-guard at eleven bells or so. F'r with ever'body in the linegang def'nitely checked off as really goin' out o' here t'night—all, that is, but the night troubleshooter, Dead-Eye—right!—jest got the highball on the phone that all the sigs. but yours and No Kidding's are in

the check-out book which is now at the gate—well, it'll be puhlenty tough titty now, le' me tell you, to get back in by that gate-guard later—without no pass. For—but here's one pass also—to pass you both out Railroad Gates on the handcar." He dug down in another pocket now, and produced two keys on a loop of steel wire. "An' here's the keys you'll need—the long one for the linegang shanty here—th' short one f'r the handcar shanty. And abs'lutely all you'll need for th' job in the way o' mater'als is three ins'lators, three bolts, an' a couple o' yards o' tie wire. Plus, f'r tools, outside o' your hooks an' your safety an' your tried-an'-truly, your small sledge to knock them crookened old bolts out, your monkey to tighten in the new ones, th' portable phone, an' a handline. An'——"

"*And*," put in Lauriston chidingly, "one additional double-length handline and a length of good weighty stuff like, oh, say, three-twist anyway—to cross those three overhead wires with after they're deaded, and see that they *are* dead. And—but go ahead."

"You don't take nothin' f'r granted, ever, d'you, Laurs'ton? Damn me if I c'n figger out how th' hell they ever got to callin' *you* High-Tension. But, okay. Except 'at since you need—or at least think, blow me you do!—somethin' fairly weighted t' make your test-out with—somethin' what'll sure lay in contact with anything it's drawed over—an' we're temp'rarly out o' messenger wire, both three-twist an' six-twist—you'll find some lead wire—K-8 Fusolite fuse—in the empty locker f'r fuses. A ten-foot len'th of it, at least. So now you've got the dope. They's a full moon, but take a lantern, anyway. All your junk—cep'n this here fusolite stuff which you'll get out'n the fuse locker—is b'en laid out on the bench in the tool-room by old Joly." And he flicked his thumb toward the wall that cut the little office off from what was the tool and locker room of the shanty. "All clear, so far? Any questions?"

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world there is," retorted Lauriston. "And here 'tis. I don't see Host Joly around here. So *do* I—or *don't* I—get him, himself—to stand guard over that oil-switch in that south high-tension shanty there in 'No Man's Land'—as you people damn rightfully call that god-forsaken corner of the plant? For if you figure now to give me some silent gin-guzzler—or some lug mooning in love like a calf who"—Lauriston waxed wrathier and wrathier as he spoke—"you know tootin' well, Red, that I warned you



I wasn't going to flirt around with those rattlesnakes with some screwball covering the——"

"Aw, have off," returned Red disgustedly. "I jest f'rgot, that's all, t' tell you that that's all b'en arranged, jest as you, M'Lord, wished it. I fixed it all up this p.m. with Host to be custod'an, if, as an' when!—and he's accepted. Hope t' hell you're satisfied now, lacy-pants. For the devil himself couldn't lay a finger on that switch with that pernicky old cock coverin' it. And besides, ain't that switch pervided with a lock an' lock-rings—f'r both up an' down positions? And th' only keys to it an' the shanty in the office there off th' South Gates? Oh, Host'll be there on duty—a half hour before you an' No Kidding even head over t' the handcar shanty. And he'll pull that juice off at twelve midnight, or as soon thereafter as he gets your highball over that phone line. Now for goodness sake any more questions?"

"None—no," said Lauriston, relieved. He had picked up the three slips of paper and the two keys, and handed one of the three slips to No Kidding. "Pole 147," he confirmed carefully to Red McAfee. "Juice off at midnight—or as soon thereafter as I give Host the pull signal—well, I guess there's nothing more to ask. The kid and I will be on the job at eleven. For I'll leave—where I'm expected to be—plenty early enough to be out here."

"And what," asked Red, frowning, "will you be doin'—before you do leave?"

"I'll be paying a farewell call, if you have to know, to a party in Tippingdale whom I think a hell of a lot of."

"Ah—a dame, of course." And Red looked downright relieved at something in those words of Lauriston's. "Some dame, eh—who's going away—from here?"

"At's right," assented Lauriston, with poker face. "Going away—as it seems—yes!—one hell of a long ways from here *and* yours truly. Yeah—one hell of a long way."

"Meaning?" queried Red, frowning. Then: "Aw—skip it."

But the furrowed, narrow brow that was part of that frown was the brow of a man in whose brain some faint glimmerings of a light were dawning. And the black scowl on Red's face, as he quickly gazed off the desk and towards the wall, would have told a reader of such things that Red did not at all like the nature of the light that was dawning in his being!

## CHAPTER XXIV

### FAREWELL VISIT

KEL LAURISTON, taking the hands of the slender girl, in the simple low-throated sea-green wash dress, who stood in the faintly lighted doorway of the gaunt, tall, old cottage on Carnegie Road, just off the south mill fence, realized with a dull feeling in his own heart, that no more again after tonight—according to that bargain he had made, last night, in Kelly's Grove—was he ever to hold those hands again; ever, perhaps, be this close again to the black ringlets atop that so-white forehead; ever to——

"Well, darlin'," he said, swallowing hard, "I've come—to collect. Exactly as you told me today on the phone—I could. To—to collect that last night with you—that I earned by telling you all about my fool life; only, I want to go all over this situa——"

"Don't, Kel," she begged, shaking her head. "It just —isn't any use. I beat my own brains out on the problem—since then—and landed right where I was. Let's—oh, let's be happy tonight—casual—friendly—as—as though there's going to be thousands of nights, instead of—" A faint tear came into her voice. She said no more. "Would you step in, Kel—a minute only—till I get a handkerchief?"

He stepped into the cramped little hallway, with its rag rug bearing the tape-stitched word "Welcome," its ancient mission hatrack, its coal-oil lamp with the globular hand-painted globe, turned only about three-quarters up, its narrow stairway leading upstairs, and its bead-hung portieres leading into the dark parlour sitting room.

"I really wanted to say, Kel," she now explained, closing the door gently, "in safety from anybody who might be short-cutting along in front, late for the next shift, that Peter—or should I, when with you, call him Red?—Peter called up this evening and asked me, oh, so many questions about myself: such as what did I expect to be doing tonight; and was I going to be busy; he didn't seem to indicate *he* wanted to come over—nor would—yet was seemingly interested in what I was going to do. So—" She stopped.

"Yes, I get it," said Kel frowning. "He's sort of put a



certain two and two together—and got a theoretical four. Well, if he calls up again, suppose you just tell him that—um ? ” He stopped, ruminating.

“ He won’t call up again, Kel,” the girl said simply. “ Merely because—he can’t ! ” She paused, a bit shamefacedly, it seemed to him. “ You see, Kel, we’ve—we’ve been figuring, around this house a bit—mother and father and me—on a few economies !—and one decided upon was to—to cut out our phone service. Which costs us \$1.75 a month. And so, I—I just decided tonight to kill two birds with one stone. For after Peter hung up, I called up Mrs. Torgerly, who handles all the exchange business at night, and had the service cut completely off, from that moment on. Oh, I hated,” the girl added impulsively, “ to have to do it—yes !—because this is the only house in this whole region that has a phone—and the phone line was run here solely for it—but—needs must, you know, when the devil drives ! And—anyway, Kel, not only can I not get anybody now on our phone—a fact !—for when I forgot, a few minutes later, and tried to make a call, the line was as dead as—as a last year’s lilac sprig !—but the point is, Kel, that neither can Peter now get me. For if he does, he’ll only be told that the line is out of service. And—” She stopped again.

“ Yeah,” asserted Kel, “ and he may thereby get curious bugs in his bean. Well, all I can say is that if he does try to ring up again, and does get those bugs, and comes up that road out there tonight snorting fire and brimstone, I’ll knock him into the middle of next——”

“ No, Kel, you mustn’t do anything like that. Besides—he won’t come. Because I told him a—a sort of white lie—I said I was going across town to see a friend. I really did—and have now come back ! And I—I guess it was because of my very foresight that all that might happen that I asked you, when we talked on the phone, not to get here tonight before nine. So that, you see, I could go across town—on that little call. And could truthfully tell Peter I was going to.” She looked distressed.

He gave a wry, mirthless smile. “ Well, with Truth nibbling an hour off the beginning of this precious evening—and my having to leave at ten bells tonight—that leaves exactly one round hour ! So where—” He gazed at the bead-portiered parlour.

"The porch," she said hastily. "Let's go out—on the porch. Where we'll be conventional—anyway. And where nobody—not even Peter—can say a single thing. For Mother and Father aren't back yet from Arlingdale, you see—Father's coming in tonight, so he phoned me, with Horrie Siratt, in Horrie's car—will be here, he thinks, about eleven or eleven-fifteen—he wants to sort of fix things up a bit about the place, for a couple of days before getting on the job Monday morning as usual—things like—like replacing some of those four by four stilts that hold the porch up out there, and—but Mother's remaining on there at Arlingdale for a few days, and consequently—anyway," the girl broke off flounderingly, "it'll be cooler and all—on the porch."

"I understand," Kel nodded. And added: "A louse who can't toss in eleven cents—let alone eleven hundred dollars—to prevent his own gal's marriage to protect her parents—has no right to monkey with that marriage. Okay—let's sit!"

A few seconds later Myrene Cary was placing two rockers in the deep shadows at the end of the porch. For but the faintest illumination from that half-turned-up lamp filtered through the bead-portieres into the parlour, thence out the window closest the house door. It was, Kel realized, Perfect Conventionality! After closing the house door, she quietly took up the doorside chair of the pair. And he, waiting meanwhile for her to seat herself, and trying also, at the same time, against the acrid smell from the mills, to sniff the fragrance, such as it was, that came from those white and purple pansies in the flower boxes on the windowsill, dropped into the end chair.

An embarrassing silence fell.

Out beyond them—beyond the railing of the porch—across the almost non-existent front yard and the picket fence thereof—and the narrow road cutting off the mills, the great twelve-foot-high sheet-iron fence faced them starkly, sheerly. With quite nothing visible above it—not even a power line!—thanks to their own relative depression, even when atop the stilt-supported porch floor, below its top. Only, at most, a pink-tinged sky—no more.

And it was she who, gazing off into that pink sky, broke the silence.

"I suppose it would be foolish for me to reiterate—what I



did on the phone. I mean, how terrible it seems—about the murder of that poor Chinese child, and—but what are they doing about it, Kel?”

He gave a mirthless, ironic laugh.

“Goodness knows. What can they do about it?—with no fingerprints on the weap—uh—I just recollect I’m not supposed to divulge that!—Red told it to me confidentially—he and Turnbo—and probably, no doubt, Hiatt—seem to think it may make the killer uneasy, and—anyway, in the face of that fact, what can they do? I only know that the Great Hogg is here! He’s the Big Directorial Cheese, you know, from N’Yawk. I even know that he agrees with Turnbo that it wouldn’t be at all wise to fire the linegang, and give ’em a chance to scatter all over the U.S.A. Which suggestion, incidentally, was yours truly’s—for Turnbo was plenty agitated this morning—intended firmly to bounce every man in it, in view of the fact that the specialized nature of the sabotage that’s been getting pulled—of course you read of that in the *Bugle* tonight?—well, anyway, in view of the fact that that sabotage has resulted finally in a person’s murder—but is sabotage done by a lineganger. Anyway, no wholesale firing is to take place. As to how the men are taking it—well, I didn’t report today. I got what I got—about Great Minds moving in like channels—yep, Hogg’s theories agreeing with mine own!—through ringing Turnbo a minute this evening to ask him to get that arrest of mine erased off the town police books. Which it will be.”

The girl’s next question referred to a quite unnarrated aspect of that “arrest.”

“Did they—did they third-degree you, Kel, this morning?”

He laughed harshly.

“Well, Moneypenny’s a plenty tough old buzzard, not to omit that Neanderthaler right-hand bower of his, Gus Hufnagel, who—but why not?—with half their salaries paid by the mills? However, Life was all a dish of cherries—after I laid my alibi full on the line. I just hated to drag you in, that’s all. There’s always people in a small town who think that if a man and a girl sit in a dark park—but skip it. Turnbo and Moneypenny agreed that the name of my chief alibi witness—yes!—yours!—was not to be divulged *if* the alibi was okay. So stands it.”

“Thanks a lot, Kel. I’m not afraid of what a town can say—because I sit in an open park with a man. But the real facts

might have caused me—oh, some complications—with Peter. And hence—but you're not discharged, then?"

"Oh! no," he said. "I'm even working—for the comp'ny—tonight!"

"Tonight?" she asked, a little startledly.

"That's right," he returned. "Just a short and simple job—and one that doesn't have to be done until midnight on account of load conditions. But in my own field—for a change! I merely have to replace three insulators on the 22,000-volt line to Slagville—about three miles out in the country."

"Oh! That terrible high-tension line!" she said, with a little terrified note in her voice. "Some evenings, when the weather is damp—and I happen to be upstairs in my room, which looks out, as I think I told you once, some eight feet or so above the roof of this porch—and consequently above the top of that fence yonder—I gaze over there into the mills at those three strands of wire—going out of the plant across the east fence—and all surrounded with that peculiar blue haze—and I can't help but think of them as three strands of death." She shuddered. "Death! That's what they make *me* think of."

Lauriston laughed lightly, yet offered no contradiction. For those "strands of wire" were indeed things that just couldn't exactly ever be laughed at. *He* knew!

"Yes, Kel, death," the girl went on, interpreting his laugh as a chiding of her for her feelings. "For I can never forget the day, three years ago—long before you ever even heard of Tippingdale, I guess—when three linemen were killed instantly out on that Slagville line—just—just burned to death. It—it seems that a switch was accidentally thrown shut somewhere—in the Power House, I think—yes!—in the Power House—and then,"—she pressed her hands to her eyes as though to shut out some horrible sight—"even yet tonight I can picture them bringing in the poor burned bodies—along this very road from the railroad tracks east of us here—covered with rubber sheets—men carrying the stretchers—and——"

"Come—come!" he now said gently. "You're talking about something that can never happen again now. For that was just one o' them things—that have a chance to happen once—but once only. Indeed, what took place that night—oh, I've heard all about it—what happened that night can never



happen again for the simple reason that"—he wondered gropingly exactly how to explain a technical thing like this to a woman—"for the simple reason—well of new rules and new checking facilities for confirming that lines are dead and due to stay that way and—and—that's why," he said.

"I'm glad *you're* so confident, Kel," she returned, uneasily. "But I—I saw three bodies being carried along, and I——"

"Well now here," he said. "Since I've faced the fact of what a poor imitation of a knight I am—I feel far too ornery and low to try to make love to you. I—I came here tonight intending—and still do!—to play ball tonight—just casual and all—like a friend." But he wondered, as he spoke, how long he could keep that up—with this girl. "And having told you that when next I came here, I'd bring along my opy glasses and explain a few things to you—in particular, a certain insolent tower that keeps flirting with you nights—well, I brung 'em." He tapped his side coat pocket. "They're small, but really field-glasses—and werry powerful. However," he went on regretfully, "there being nobody home—to sort of come along as chaperon-like—I can't go up in your boodywoir to explain ever'thing—but how's-about you and me going up atop the roof of this porch, which is about level with the top of that fence? Is there any way, other than the window of your boodywoir—and which looks to me to be fully eight feet above the porch roof—and so too much for you even to step out from—to get atop this porch roof?"

"Yes," she told him, "there is. There are some ladder rungs nailed to the front of the side of the house. Right up to the porch roof. And clean, besides, for they were just painted before Father left. Not that that would make any difference—at least to me—for this green dress I'm wearing is washable, you know. So—if you'll go on up ahead of me on those rungs—so as to sort of give me a hand off onto the roof—I'll climb up after you."

"Good," he said, rising. "Let's go—to school!"

A minute later they stood atop the porch roof. Back of them, yet some feet still above their heads, hung the window of that little front room, the view from which, down over the mill fence, had contained so much of puzzlement to the girl, according to her own admission. At least with respect to a certain wooden tower. A tower which——

And now more than a pink-tinged sky greeted the two. For out over the spile-studded rim of the fence, now several feet below the level of their eyes, lay the deserted and as yet unproductive area called No Man's Land that filled this corner of the plant, and, back and beyond that, the great mills themselves, a medley of black buildings against the darkish pink, queer intermittent blazes of brilliant light, pouring, bubbling, through faraway irregular-shaped crannies, hot metal forms passing, shuttling, back and forth past wide-open doorways that were but slits from here, shrunken headlights of apparently tiny chugging engines carrying ingot trains. And midway in that quiet and lightless area filling this corner, some thousand feet or so beyond the fence—perhaps the same distance likewise from the rear edge of the plant and the railroad yards—was the thing Lauriston desired to show her—through these fieldglasses.

Just a narrow wooden tower, visible because silhouetted vaguely against some light-tinged area far, far beyond; a tower which, built on stilts as Lauriston happened to know, was yet encased all about with plank sheathing, and carried an extremely narrow outside stairway. Bright illumination pouring down from an apparent cluster of electric bulbs presumably in the ceiling of its topmost room, brought out a vertical section of the room for the reason that only a tall window gave off from the room—but a window facing this very house. Near the opposite wall, a gleaming white oblong could be made out, crossed by some darkish device, and on the upper half of that oblong, above the device—and almost invisible at the distance—a seeming point of red light scintillated through the smoky atmosphere like some far-off planet.

Apparently close to the wooden tower—but actually a full two hundred feet away, as Kel knew—loomed up a much taller steelwork tower, supporting a huge boxlike structure at its top. Outward—rightward—from this steelwork tower could be seen the three stout cables of copper—threadlike at the distance, and against the sky tinge—faintly bluish, however!—which, coming on smaller steelwork towers straight from the transformer station at the rear of the power house, a half mile back of this one stout steelwork tower—and turning here—dropped again to a line of smaller steelwork towers, ran to the rear plant fence—crossed the railroad tracks—and then, dropping in the distance to a line of poles, actually one hundred



feet apart, disappeared over the eastward horizon towards isolated Slagville, eleven miles away.

Lauriston, nodding satisfiedly at the perfect view of those mills he worked in, now handed the girl the small field glasses.

"In due course," he said, "I'm going to have you direct these glasses out there into No Man's Land, as that corner of the pla—, but I suppose you know that the plantsters here call that more or less godforsaken corner of the plant, which is being left undeveloped for future expansion, No Man's Land?—yes, I thought you would know that, if only from your father—well, anyway, as I started out back there to say, in due course I'm going to let you look right into that wooden tower, situated there at practically the middlemost point, I guess, of No Man's Land—except that, of course, *we* call that wooden tower the Slagville high-tension shanty!—anyway, I'm going to have you look right into it, and see every detail of what I talk about, as though you were right on the spot. But first I'll 'explanation' things to you—on the larger scale."

He paused.

"Now you see, of course, those three strands of copper coming out of that tall steel skeleton, off to one side, and disappearing over the rear of the plant and the horizon towards Slagville? Well, those three strands—known technically as 'phases'—carry part of the current—the alternating current, that is—that's generated here in the great gas-engine power house. Just why that current travels—when in alternating form—in *three* pipe lines, to so speak, instead of two, as in most ordinary direct-current systems, is something I won't try to explain here and now—because it would unnecessarily muddle you up. And have no particular bearing on things, anyway. The point I'm merely trying to bring out is that those strands you see over there carry the current that *is* in them at a potential—a—a pressure, that is—of 22,000 volts—22,000 volts, you understand, between any two of those three strands—**exactly** as does one other trio of strands that you can't see at all from this side of the plant—a trio going to Specialtown—but enough, that 22,000 volts, to kill instantly twenty-two men standing hand in hand in a circle. Indeed, that's why those strands are carried—at least while traversing the plant itself—on expensive steelwork towers; but once outside and into the country—as you can see over to the east, and past the railyards—go along merely atop ordinary poles. Which don't cost a

hundredth what steelwork towers do! And that particular steelwork tower from where you see those strands apparently emerging, is a particular expensive one because it's a 'turn-tower'—it turns the line, see? And—anyway," he broke off, "industry buzzes underneath those strands inside the plant—and has to be protected! While outside, in the country there, only life—life passing along roads underneath the line!—has to be pro—, but here!—I'm waxing anti-capitalistic—and this is supposed to be a five-minute engineering lecture! All right."

He paused a moment, then resumed his explanation at the point where he had diverged slightly from it.

"So getting back now to that enormous pressure of 22,000 volts that exists between the individual members of those three strands, the reason for this is that if the power to run the subsidiary company—the Slagville Cement works—we'll disregard the other line, just now, and that Specialtown steel mills—though all I'm saying covers them also—if the power were transmitted as direct current, and at the ordinary low and safe voltage, the actual current strength in amperes would have to be so enormous that a huge proportion of the energy would disappear in the form of heat losses before it ever even reached Slagville."

She seemed a little puzzled.

"Power," he explained, with considerable difficulty, "is the—the rate at which energy is sent—or delivered. But energy—at least electricity—is a simple multiple of pressure and current. But losses of that precious energy in the quite useless form of heat—in the transmitting mechanism—vary as the *square* of the current used. So-o-o—if you raise the pressure by ten times—and cut the current to one-tenth—you still transmit the *same* energy—the *same* power—but you cut the heat losses to one one-hundredth. While, if you shoot the pressure way 'way up—and you can do that only in alternating current because, by use of devices called transformers which depend, for their operation, solely on alternation of magnetic flux due to alternations of current, you can bring it down again—at the using end—to practicable, handleable pressures—well, you don't waste the energy on the transmitting lines, but deliver it—and practically all of it—at the receiving end. Where it's of some—get it?"

She was plainly, however, as he saw, over her depth, yet did now ask one significant question.



"Well now, that blue haze, Kel—which even tonight is commencing to show around each wi—— that is, each—each phase!—isn't that energy escaping—somewhere?"

"It's just," he explained patiently, "stray electrons flying off the cables and electrifying the air about them—into ozone—charged ozone, that's all. Something along the lines of a neon light to the—the minus umph power!" He waited for a further question, and as none was forthcoming went on.

"Now," he continued, "the question of heat losses may not be quite clear to you, but it's not essential that it be, anyway. And in a few words I can dispose of the question of what happens to the power after it reaches Slagville. By means of those same devices I called transformers—and which are stationary—and revolving machines called rotary converters, it finally emerges for use there at the cement works in the low commercial pressures of 110, 220 and 440 volts, direct current. And in that form it runs the hundreds of slag-crushers, grinders, revolving kilns, and whatnot else. All clear—thus far?"

"All—but that darned wooden tower!" she said, feminine like. "With the—the bloodshot eye!"

"Ne' mind that wooden tower," her instructor cautioned her, "till we gits to it! Now fasten your attention specifically on that tall steelwork tower, will you?—yes, the one we've been talking about—and which, though it seems to be not so very far across No Man's Land there from the lighted window of that wooden tower *you're* talking about, is actually at least—but, by the way, once again, that wooden tower is, technically, anyway, the south, or Slagville, high-tension shanty. You'd better remember that—so long as we talk about 'towers'! But just now you fasten on the steelwork tower."

"Yes, I see its top—against the sky, and some big—big box-like affair on that top."

"E—zackly, as Chief Moneypenny of your fair burg likes to say. Well, that big box-like affair is an electro-mechanical device called an oil switch, designed for just such a pressure as 22,000 volts. If the Slagville works were running full blast, and that switch were suddenly opened, a terrific, dangerous dazzling arc would pour forth from all three of its moving contacts. But those contacts rest inside of a tank of insulating mineral oil—with the result that the arcs, destructive as they might be, would be smothered in five or six seconds."

"But isn't it terribly dangerous," the girl asked, "for a human being to operate it?"

"I'll tell the world it would be!" assented Lauriston. "If he had to operate it—directly. For mere rubber gloves, you know, are utterly useless—against voltages like 22,000! Neither cloth, nor clothing, nor anything else, protects against such a voltage—nothing insulates against it but space—and puh-lenty of that. Why—if you even put your hand, with fingers outstretched, between two 22,000-volt wires—but without even touching them—your hand, being a conductor, and not made of, say, dry wood, which is a non-conductor—would become a bridge—the current would jump right into your hand from one side, and out the other, and—well, you wouldn't have a hand any longer! In fact, you'd be dead—dead—dead! And if all this sounds too—too dawgoned swiftish to be credible, let me just say then that if, while those three transmission wires up there were temporarily dead, an iron or steel wire, or any kind of a wire, for that matter, were laid across them all—and the oil-switch were thrown in, making the transmission line alive—well, that wire covering those three 'phases' wouldn't melt—not at all!—it would simply vaporize!—and instantaneously!—it would vanish as such in a mere flash of light—nothing more—wouldn't even rain a single hot drop of molten metal down below. Again, if—but here!—it's the operation of that oil-switch—without human hands—that I'm going to explain now. So-o-o—class will now raise opry glasses to pretty brown eyes—and adjust thumb-screw to focus. Try and catch the high-tension shanty, however."

She raised the glasses to her eyes, moved them a trifle side to side, turned the screw a trifle.

"Oh—how plain!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Why, Kel, I can see everything in that little tower room from the floor up. At least over the width of that unusually tall window—which now looks to be pretty wide, too—for——" She was adjusting the screw of the binoculars further.

"And glassless, too, that window," he pointed out. "For ventilation of that important nerve centre of the transmission system. For if 'twasn't, that dove-cote you're looking at would be hotter, in summer, than a Turkish bath built right inside of a Turkish bath in the famous Black Hole of Calcutta. And which'd mean that some handful of waste left up there



at some time by some idiot cleaning up—or some oil-soaked work-glove the same—might start a-smouldering all by its lonesome and—but you get the idea. Go ahead?”

“Well, that oblong of white,” she now announced confidently, “is a vertical marble panel, supported on apparently iron legs, and with some kind of a—*a thingumajig* on it that—but of course, it’s—it’s a switch. And there’s a——” She stopped abruptly.

“Go ahead,” he urged. “Give me a perfect feminine description of what you see?”

“We-ell,” she continued, entranced by the closeupedness of the view she was enjoying, “I don’t really see such a terrible lot after all. Just a tiny empty room—at least such of it—and of its floor—as shows through that tall window; and nobody obviously in it. A cluster of very bright lights—surrounded by a reflector—on the ceiling—though how on earth I glimpse *that*, Kel, I don’t understand—when I see most of the floor from here, yet the window itself, though plenty tall, still doesn’t seem to go clear to the roof. So——”

“You catchee that,” he told her, half amusedly, “in a—but here!—do you, maybe and mayhap, also see a door, too? Or part of one?”

“Why yes, I do. At least the front half of one—where it closes. As—as though standing right off, completely detached from the rest of the world—alongside the panel. But I don’t understand, Kel? How——”

“Well it just happens, my dear,” he explained to the girl, “that you’re transcending Space limitations a bit tonight! For you really see neither those ceiling lights nor the door—at least directly—since the door, or such of it as you see, is straight off to one side of the very window through which you’re looking. Actually, you’re viewing this—this off-stage stuff in a fool reflecting arrangement fastened to the side of that switch panel, and consisting merely of a tall narrow pivoted-bracketed vertical mirror, containing, within itself, near the top, a further small circular double-pivoted all-angle mirror.”

“In short,” he continued, trying his best to make fully clear how she could view what she wasn’t even looking at, “that’s a so-called Kittermaster switch panel you’re looking at—and the reflecting junk on its side is some idiotic idea in switch-board manufacturing where the makers, trying, I suppose, to get a new sales talking-point, made up a panel, for a change,

where the operator could keep his glims on his work, the while he chewed the fat with anybody in back of him, also watch a clock on the wall, the lights up above, the weather outside—and what-haven't-you! Both of those mirrors—and which, as I happen to know, from being up in there a few weeks back, are rusted fast and tight in their fool sockets—just happen to be angled enough—not that it makes a particle of difference for this lecture!—that you're just as good as in and on the very spot you're a-gazing at! Even better than if you were in your room up above, for up there you'd no longer be able to catch the ceiling lights from the smaller of the two mirrors, though you probably still would be the door in the longest one. And—but all right for this, and which has nothing whatsoever to do, anyway, with what we're driving at. Now what else do you see—but on and about that marble panel—which you are surveying direct?"

"Well," she resumed, still gazing through the glasses, "there's a couple of telephones—as I can see now—on a wooden shelf well below that marble panel—but why two, I wonder? And then on the panel itself is that—well, it's a single light copper switch—that's what—with its black handle pointed upward, and its—its—its——"

"Blades," he prompted.

"Yes, its blades touching a pair of catches, and——"

"Contacts—not catches!"

"Yes, touching a pair of contacts. And fixed to the end of the black handle is a little steel ring that's padlocked, by a—a sort of brandnewishlike padlock, to another little steel ring embedded in the marble panel. Yes—it seems to be locked right in that position. And directly above the catches—or contacts, I should say—is a little red electric bulb, glowing brightly. And—and—and that's about all, Kel."

"Nothing else?" he asked.

"We-ell—yes," she said slowly. "Directly below the switch is another pair of contacts, another little steel ring, and another tiny glass bulb—but not glowing. And—and—that's ab-so-lute-ly all, Kel."

"Right you are," he said with a laugh. "You didn't miss a point. Now that innocent-looking little switch governs a somewhat intricate electric motor and gearing arrangement up in that oil-switch cabinet on the top of the steelwork tower. And we call it—yes, that one little switch you're looking at



right now—the relay—or even relay motor—switch. For, thrown upward, it causes the motor in the steelwork tower to revolve in one certain direction, and to close the oil-switch within about three seconds, and the Slagville transmission line becomes directly connected to the 22,000 volt leads from the transformers back of the Power House here. Of course the motor is wired to automatically cut itself off after its done its work, and the closing of the oil-switch, moreover, brings together two little further relay contacts which, by separate circuits of their own, light up the red bulb on the marble panel, and tells a warning story to those who know what it's all about—in the standard langwidge of *red* all over the world.”

Kel paused for this to sink in. Then continued :

“Thrown downward—that switch you’re still looking at, I mean—the current is sent into the motor in the steel tower in a reverse direction, and the motor, being what we call ‘shunt-wound’ and not ‘series wound’, runs backward until again it automatically cuts itself off, but in so doing operates a set of gears, and opens the oil-switch with no danger whatsoever to the man, off several hundred feet in the shanty. At once, the whole Slagville high-tension line becomes dead. And in a manner similar to that I just described, the opening of the oil-switch breaks the circuit that lights the red bulb, on that panel you’re looking at, and completes another circuit which lights up the one on the lower half of the marble panel. And which is green ! And then, with the switch locked to the lower steel ring, by that ‘brandnewishlike’ padlock you described, or any other kind of padlock so far as that goes, that green bulb glowing, and a good trusty man like, f’r instance, a certain old boy in our linegang called Host Joly, standing guard over it, the Slagville line is as harmless as a kitten. Where ordinarily it would mean death to be on one of the cross-arms along the line—and not even touching one of the strands—one could now play solitaire up there with perfect confidence.”

“It’s all very simple now,” the girl said, a bit relievedly. “But how is it, Kel, that that terrible accident happened three years ago ?” She dropped the glasses, for the time being, at least, into what hitherto had been, in her sea-green dress, a seemingly ornamental arc of black embroidery, but which now miraculously proved to be a pocket, and faced him.

"Simply this," Lauriston told her, grinning at the way pockets materialized out of ornamental embroidery. "The Slagville transmission line—and when we speak of a high-tension line we mean, of course, all of its strands or 'phases'—well, the Slagville transmission line stems out of an old and original high-tension transmission line that went—and, of course, still goes—to Specialtown—stems out of it some distance off from the transformer station directly at the rear of the power house. So that now the two lines are like—like the two branches of a forked tree. And——"

"My goodness," the girl replied, "how can the company tell, then, which branch—the cement plant it owns, or the small steel plant it sells power to—is using the most current? Or—or even how much current?"

Kel gazed at her wryly. "Are—are you ribbing me? If so—but no," he said, "you're not. Why—my naïve chee-ild—the power isn't metered where it's created—it's metered where it's delivered—at the other ends. By so-called watt-meters in the pressure-reduced circuits, and—no," he broke off helplessly, "you must have been ribbing me, with *that* one! So I'll get on.

"How those branching lines are 'balanced' here at the Tippingdale works, so as not to electrically 'vibrate' ag'in each other, and all that, I won't attempt to go into; but each branch naturally has a cut-off oil-switch—like that one you've been seeing—to make it dead—in case of trouble—without affecting the other branch. And so that brings me, therefore, to why and how three of my—er—confreres got—ah—cooked—three years ago.

"You see," he went on hurriedly, having conjured up a picture which, of a sudden, had become painful, "trouble developed, that time, in the main stub of line which came from the transformer station to the branching-off point. And so the power house had, in order to get *that* fixed up, cut off the whole system right at the switchboard. But, since a complete power house cut-off was in order, with both branches necessarily having to be dead for a while, it was decided to do, at the same time, a certain job that had been impending out on the Slagville branch—to do it at the same time, you see, and take advantage of the enforced cut-off." Kel paused. "Well, the three men who were doing it should have been doubly protected, of course, by *their* cut-off switch being pulled—but due to a fool mixup



in telephoning—relaying of orders, see?—through intermediates in and at the power house—the wrong branch got thus protected. The Specialtown branch. Nothing particularly lethal in *that*, to be sure, since the branches were killed at the power house switchboard.

“But,” Kel now pointed out, “when the hi-ball came to the power house from the gang working on the stub of main and unbranched line that their section was okay—and confirmed that the cut-off switch was safely open—the power house threw on their power—but, you see, electrified the wrong branch!—the one where the three men were working—and killed them. Now today, the rule is—and things have been fixed so that it has to be—that the only telephonic communication between men and switches is direct—not through any switchboards, or anything—in short, the only telephonic communication possible now between men on the lines is with their own cut-off switch only—and such communication as their switch may have with the power house switchboard is through another phone entirely. And that’s why—those two phones you saw down there. One is marked ‘Line.’ And it is absolutely impossible today, for a man, out on that line—and the line dead, of course—to get that line electrified on himself. All clear? Not, I mean, about the foregoing—which you’ll more or less have to accept on trust, if you don’t savvy it—but it is all clear—as to that red light that winks insolently at you, sometimes, in your boodywoir winder—and those towers—’n all?”

“I am sure,” she nodded, “that it’s all clear now. The steelwork tower that *I* see is the Slagville line oil-switch. The motor of the switch, up in it somewhere, takes care of the actual connecting and disconnecting of the awful voltage; but the operation of that motor is controlled by the little switch on the panel of the wooden tower with the ever-lighted window? Is that right?”

“That’s the situation,” returned Lauriston. “When the little relay switch is down, and the green light burning, the Slagville line is a playground. And the man guarding the switch is ever in exclusive communication with the lineman—or linemen—out there—which prevents any conflicting orders or signals or wrong deliveries of signals. But when the relay motor switch is thrown upward again—and the red light flashes on—three or four seconds later—the oil-switch in the

steel tower is closed—and then—the Slagville line means death—and nothing else!”

She shuddered again. And noticing the tremulous movement of her shoulders, he spoke up.

“Let’s go,” he said, gruffly. “We’ve talked far too much—about 22,000 volts—and death. Let’s go—down on the porch again, and talk about——”

“Let’s,” she said hurriedly. “Considering that this is our last night—let’s.”

Three minutes later they sat again in their chairs, in the gloom at the end of the dark porch. Again facing that implacable blackish iron wall across the narrow road—and the pinkish sky above it.

He was the first to break the silence that had dropped suddenly over them like a thick, furry rug.

“Must—this really be our last night?” he pleaded. “After all—I had to come late—because of—well—your wanting to live up to that little white lie you told Red—and I have to go early—soon, in fact—to get ready to get over into the plant. So couldn’t——”

“No, darling,” she said faintly, yet firmly. “This is an instance where it isn’t that the ‘first shall be last’—but that the ‘last shall be last’! After all, Kel—I’ve sort of got to observe proprieties, since I am going to marry a man who can hand my folks back an \$1100 paper that involves their whole future. Yet it’s as much for your sake, Kel, as mine. For Peter hates you bitterly, you know. Every word—every remote reference, that has a bearing on you in any way, seems to—to inflame him to the point where he—he seems to see red. So why should you—or I—stir this sort of thing up in him, in the face of the fact that I’m going to agree to be his wife—in less than two weeks, when he told Father he’s going to ask me—and to actually be his wife, moreover, ten days after that. So the dream of these past months, Kel, is over. Just over, see?”

Kel Lauriston said nothing. For, as before, he saw himself once again as the Knight in Paper Armour, who, when his lady needed eleven hundred miserable pieces of silver to save a castle, had not even two copper farthings rattling in the pocket of his paper suit—much less a golden-feathered dragon to slay.



He did, however, after a few minutes, essay one remark.

"You know," he said bitterly, "I find myself wondering, right now, whether I'm some kind of a man—or just a mouse—that I don't at least try something—anything—to get hold of \$1100 for you; but the rub just is, dear girl, that real life isn't like fiction where there's always a way."

"Awfully true, Kel," was the girl's sad response. "When I was a child, I badly needed eleven cents once—badly!—and there just was no way to get it at all. Except, maybe, to steal it from mother's teapot, which I wouldn't do. But that eleven cents was just as big as—as this \$1100 I'm now selling myself for. And——"

"You were lucky," he burst out. "For I haven't even a way to steal eleven hundred smackers. Unless I chiselled my way into the town bank and——"

"And into a nice warm penitentiary for twenty years," the girl laughed uneasily. "And even granting you'd gotten and hid the money before they got *you*, I'd be an old grey-haired woman when you got out!"

"In twenty years from now, Myrene," the man said, "you're still going to be a mighty fresh-looking, pretty brown-eyed, pink-checked woman. While I—well, what else would a guy be who has some expertness in his fingers but brains in his head none—oh yes, *if* I really had ordinary intelligence I'd be using it somehow against this miserable \$1100 problem, and—but what else, in twenty years from now would a guy be whose address never stays the same over more than a few weeks or so, and who uses his paychecks to—well, he'll be a lineman-hobo, exactly as now—that's all."

She made no reply to this. And conversation fell away utterly.

And now they sat and sat, each saying nothing; this last precious night degenerating finally into a wordless morass of self-recrimination.

At last he took his straw hat up from the railing where he'd originally laid it down.

"My move," he said tonelessly. "What use, anyway—to stay?"

And she did not ask him to remain, but stood up instead, resolute.

He looked up at her, distressedly.

"Since it's goodbye—and it is, all right, all right—since

bank vaults are now made out of Special Steel Company's drill-less steel—well, since it is goodbye—may I kiss you—for the first—and the last—time?”

Her only reply was to fling her slender arms fiercely about his neck and cling passionately to him. Her lips drew to his in the darkness of the porch, and remained there for a long ten seconds.

“I'll never forget you, Kel,” she told him, brokenly, as she drew off from him a few inches, “because I do love you—so much. My only fear is that in time to come you'll—you'll hate me—because I thought of two other persons than myself. But whether you do or you don't, I do know that no matter where you are in the world—and I hear about you from anybody in this town that you might write to—I'll be tense to know all about you—where you are—exactly what you're doing—the slightest thing about you—everything. Nothing else could be—but that. So long as you're alive, Kel, you'll be right square in the back of my—” She kissed him again. “Forgive me, now—and try to understand.”

His only answer was to draw her still closer to himself.

And then a man who had been kneeling in the shadows under the stilt-supported porch, beneath that very end where the rockers were, listening carefully to every word spoken there, crawled silently, noiselessly, out, on hands and knees, to the dark passageway at the side of the house—continued down that a ways in the same manner, his egress entirely unknown to the two who stood on the porch close to each other, after which, the man arose catlike to his feet and tiptoed rearward along the side of the house clear to where a dark lane served as an alley. Along this dark lane he hotfooted it, for a couple of blocks, till finally he turned out of it at a dark street, and within a trice was on Carnegie Road, fronting the same mill fence, but only a block from Executives' Gate. Here, in front of the corner, he flung open the door of a narrow sort of nameless place, which, when he had flung it open, revealed a sawdust-covered floor, a sticky bar devoid of customers, and a chain-suspended coal-oil lamp hanging from the fly-specked ceiling.

Only once within was the full identity of the place revealed, and that by a crudely-lettered but huge sign on the end wall, next to and above a drab-looking, black-painted but double-glassed phone booth, that said:



## WELCOM TO BLACK SAM MOGRUB'S JOINT

Whiskys Only, but Evry Kind for Evry  
Taste, from Rair Imported Skottches  
at 50 cents the Shot, to Tax-  
Paid Kaintucky "Moon" at  
8 cents per Drink.

A white-aproned Negro—genial looking, however, and round-faced—who mopped away at the sticky worn counter, did so in the proprietorial way that revealed himself to be Black Sam Mogrub himself.

The newcomer, however, had already stalked up to the bar. And the light from that coal-oil lamp suspended from above showed a face that was contorted with fierce rage and hate. The negro bartender-proprietor hastily mopped off a spot on the counter, and essaying a gleamingly ivory-toothed smile towards the customer, spoke.

"Evenin' an' howdy, t' McAfee. Whut kin' ob w'iskey will yo's be?"

## CHAPTER XXV

## A 22,000-VOLT LINE—DEAD !

AT 11 o'clock that night, Kel Lauriston, clad in his shiny, oil-stained, and frayed working pants, and wearing his thong-laced grey flannel shirt, his faded red neckerchief and his dark knitted lineman's cap, ran hurriedly down the short flight of steps of his rambling, weatherbeaten rooming-house.

The moon was up now—well up—but a few clouds that drifted briskly across the sky suggested that possibly, before the night would end, they would coalesce together; and that same sky would be pouring forth rain.

Thanks to the swiftness of Kel's pace, it was no more than fifteen minutes later that he was fumbling for his pass at Workers' Gate and, finding it, presenting it to the huge dour guard on duty tonight.

Another ten minutes, at unslackening pace past coke ovens, cooling tracks, and mills buildings, and now Kel was almost to the linegang shanty. Sitting on the low steps thereof was the gold-bespectacled, Joseph's-coat-shirted Oswald Sweetboy, apparently consulting a cheap nickel-plated watch every few

seconds. Catching sight of Kel hurrying up the cinder road in the moonlight, Sweetboy jumped up impatiently and came forward to meet him.

"Good gracious, Mister Lauriston," he exclaimed. "I thought sure you weren't coming! Old Mr. Joly was over here, a full twenty minutes ago, asking me if I could figure out what was keeping you. And—but he says he'll be at the high-tension shanty, and for us to stop there on our way to the handcar shanty."

Lauriston unlocked the linegang shanty and flung open the door. He groped across the soft-wood floor and with a snap turned on the solitary bulb that lighted the place. Entering the tool room, he retrieved his climbers, his safety belt, and his wirecutters, from his locker, and leaving the locker unlocked, emerged.

"All right, No Kidding," he ordered in a dull monotone. "Bring out the junk for our job, while I put my hooks on, on the steps, and buckle on this sleep-baby-sleep. Fetch first, though, from my locker, the very few tools we'll need: my short sledge—my big monkey—and a double-length silk handline you'll see hanging in the back. And lock that sardine can after you. Then bring the stuff itself. Which is presumably all laid out on a bench in there, but there'll be a couple of newspapers atop it, which means the night trouble-shooter may have robbed it of this item or that item for some hurry-up job that—anyway, it'll be three type-B giant insulators, and three metal cross-arm bolts—with nuts. One ordinary handline—and don't leave *it* behind because we're bringing along this silk doublelengther—for we'll be using both. One lantern," continued Kel tonelessly. "The portable phone. One length of tie wire; and wait!—one long piece of lead fusolite fuse-wire you'll find in the fuse cabinet, for our testing out with. And—that's all."

Two minutes later they left the linegang shanty together, snapping the padlock shut, Sweetboy, in rigid conformance with his caste of "helper" laden down like a pack mule with the "junk," and Lauriston accoutred only with his climbers and safety-belt. A now-generous and ever-higher-rising moon lighted up their progress, and the terrain above them, and belied all possibility of use of the heavy lantern that dangled from the crooked forearm of the helper. After proceeding for about a quarter of a minute along the cinder road, they left it as by



mutual understanding, and shortcutted south-westward across various narrow-gauge tracks and unknown locked shacks. They were entering no less than No Man's Land now, as it was called in the mills: that region, for future expansion, devoid of actual operating mills, and whose general roadlessness and pathlessness as well caused it seldom to be traversed, even by a passing labourer—unless perchance he were shortcutting. After a minute, the heavily-laden No Kidding began to lag behind.

And when Kel, first to reach the high-tension shanty, curious isolated tower-like structure with narrow wooden steps winding up the outside of two of its sides to its upstairs cubicle, actually got there, Sweetboy was far, far in his rear. An elderly little man was sitting in the moonlight on the base of the steps, smoking a corncob pipe. His silvery hair was thin to actual wispieness, as was made fully evident by his hatlessness. His back was just enough bent from his sixty-five years or so of age, plus perhaps a touch of arthritis, that his shoulders, still stocky, thrust forward markedly even when sitting. He wore black trousers held up by a pair of bright red galluses crossing a spotlessly clean, freshly ironed blue shirt, open at the neck and with sleeves rolled up to the elbows. With his pipe in his somewhat gnarled fingers, and the trail of smoke from his lips drifting gently off in the moonlight, he represented a peaceful and casual sight, indeed, in contradistinction to the warning enamelled plaque nailed to the shanty-face right alongside the base of those steps: that standard plaque used in steelmills all over the world, and designed to warn a man of any race or mentality that electrical apparatus or switchboard was within, for it showed a human hand, against a split background of screaming crimson and black, holding a jagged bolt of lightning and with, underneath the hand in huge white letters, the single synthetic word "ELEKTRIKA" made out of the word "electricity" in all the languages of the world.

"Hi there, Kel—'lias High-Tension," the old man on the steps greeted Lauriston. "I was gettin' afeard you wan't goin' to show up."

"Oh, I'm generally on the job, Host, when I say I'll be," explained Lauriston laconically. "As for the rest of my team, you can see it coming along over yonder. Well, all set—for the cut-off of the power?"

"All ready, Kel. Waitin' on'y on you and th' midnight

whistle—and your highball. The Slagville plant jest told me over the wire upstairs that they'll be cuttin' off their rotaries at 12 sharp, or mebbe even a bit earlier. So as soon thereafter as you shin up th' pole and give me that highball, I'll cut the juice off here. I reckon the whole job oughn't to take you over thirty minutes, heh ? ”

“Forty, I'd say, Host,” Lauriston amended briefly. “Between seeing that the job is done in the manner Lauristonian—i.e., to stay did l—and having, on top of that, to shout down a full life-history of every operation to the kid, which, as a helper, and being on free time besides, he's at the least entitled to—but say, Host,” Kel broke off, “about that relay motor switch up there.” He pointed up with his thumb to the lighted upstairs of the tower. “You'll keep her locked, won't you, in the 'open' position ? I go to dam'fool extremes on care, you know—even if somebody hurls a lacypants epithet ag'in me, as Red did today—when he learned I was actually going to test out those phases before going on up.”

“Red McAfee sure is a hard-tongued man, Kel,” sighed the old man who had seen a score of linegang foremen come and go in the Tippingdale Mills, “though to be fair to him, too, he's a downright gen'us—at co-ordinatin' jobs—and screwin' work out of the linegangers. But—have no fear, Kel, about that relay motor switch.” And Host Joly patted a trousers pocket which gave forth a keys-like jingle. “I got the key m'self over at th' office, by signin' at least a dozen papers ! And that relay-motor switch don't go 'open' till I hear from you on the wire—and when it does, it locks there, and stays locked, believe you me, till I hear from you back again. Any questions—now ? ”

But here Oswald Sweetboy came shuffling up, shifting the heavy high-tension insulators, which he'd tied together, to the slim shoulder that had been holding the three long bolts, also tied together, and the two heavy tools, likewise held one to the other in a sling, and vice versa.

“Spell yourself off a second, kid ! ” said Lauriston. And turned back to Host Joly.

“Well, Host, the only question *I've* got is—is why the hell are you quitting at the end of the week ? When you don't have to. As toolman, you can go on till Kingdom Come. My—these mills have been your stamping grounds for half a century. You'll never, never be happy puttering around



the house. Despite the pension you'll be getting. You'll—you'll go plumb nuts, Host. You—why you doing it?"

Host Joly bit his lips.

"Druther not discuss it," he grumped. He knocked out the hot ashes of his pipe dignifiedly, on a piece of flat rock he had laid carefully to one side of him, and tossed rock and ashes well away from the steps.

His answer had been so peevish that Lauriston felt as though sprayed with cold water. Then said to himself, only, "Oh, he's an old man and testy; he——"

"Forget I asked, Host!" he said, out loud, and magnanimously. Turned to the boy. "Keep on going now, kid, on to the handcar shanty. And I'll be along in a—but here!—for goodness sake gimme that sledge-and-monkey sling! Social rules or no social rules, around here, you're too slight to be toting a tonnage of—there!—I reckon you'll make it now!—so on to the handcar shanty, and I'll be along—a minute after you."

Off Oswald Sweetboy trudged. And after he was well out of earshot, Lauriston resumed his parley with the old man.

"Anything new, Host," he asked, "on that damned bump-off?"

Host Joly was all amiability again.

"Well, yes, they is, Kel. An' it'll prob'ly be new to *you*. Sence I on'y read it, on th' way over here, as 'twas jest bein' posted up as a bullytin in the window o' th' *Mornin' Sun*. It's that—but 'spose you heard"—and Host sighed dolorously—" 'at they got m'boy locked up—for bein' on 'nother drinkin' bout?" The old man looked pained, but courageous. "He tore off 'nother toot las' night. Don't know where he was th' first part o' th' night, but they cotched him in th' early mornin' raisin' billy-hell. He's—he's sleepin' it off in jail."

"Well," comforted Lauriston, "so long as Six-six-six has always had the good judgment not to try to shinny a pole the day after one of his—his—blow-offs—I wouldn't worry. After all, he only breaks out in one every few months. Not even enough—to get canned."

Host Joly sighed regretfully.

"I on'y fear, Kel," he objected, "'at Yuce won't outgrow it—like I did. Yep, a fack! For I had that there—per'od'cal likkerin'—or per'od'cal hankerin' for same—when I was his age. I went on them same toots. But I got a-holt o' religion

—at the right moment. Tu'k th' pledge. And it stayed tu'k. He 'herits it all f'm me."

"Oh, don't worry about it, Host. He may outgrow it, really. If not, he'll get married one of these days—and if he so much as looks at a snifter, his wif'll clout him over the dome with two rolling pins, or—fact, she'll get his paycheck each payday, and that'll fix him! For—but here!—what's that news that's just posted up?"

"Oh yes, yes, yes. I plumb f'rgot. Gloomin' 'bout Six-six-six. Well, it's jest this, Kel. The town bank has posted \$1203.61 as a reward, valid at midnight t'night an' in force from then on, to an'body catchin'—or, as the offer runs, 'th'ough inf'mation or oth'wise causin', or makin' it poss'ble, to be caught 'l—the killer of Archime—— that is now, Wilhelminy Kee. Through means of inf'mation, that is, what pins the guiltness on him."

"Whoa—Tilley! A bank—that interested in civic aff——, but wait!—twelve hundred *and* three dollars *and* sixty-one cents?—what the—why the hell *that* figure?—for—but where'd the bank itself get the twelve hundred plunks from? Rather, the twelve hundred, ought-three, and 61/100 plunks from? The mills?"

"No, Kel. From Mr. Hogg. He's provided it pers'nally. 'Taint no money of, or remotely from, th' mills. Mr. Hogg, it seems, has 'nounced 'at the plant won't issue nary rewards—'cause it may make 'em leg'lly li'ble for the little gal's death. And he cites some industr'al law cases on that. But to git one a-goin', he has himself pers'nally donated the twelve hundred an' some odd dollars to th' bank out'n pers'nal funds—it repr'sents, I s'pose, some cum'lated fund in some pers'nal budget—anyway, he's donated it to the bank with the private understandin', no doubt, that they were to offer it—for offer it they have!—accordin' to the specyfications what he laid out."

"Heavens, but they're all cautious! 'Specially Hogg, giving the money first to the bank to be re-given to the—well, a piece of change is perhaps the only thing that may bring anything out, though from what I know of the boys—those, I mean, who are—well—in the clear—they'd have volunteered anything they had, or knew about——"

"If they knowed it, Kel! Yep. If they knowed it. But now that you an' me is here in No Man's Land, discussin' this affair, I'd like f'r to ask you a bit of advice. Do you mind?"



"Hell, no, Host! A boomer's advice, eh? Ask away?"

"Well, it's jest this," replied Host Joly troubledly. "Do y' think, Kel, 'at I oughta reveal—oh not for to get in on no money—no, because I got 'nough money put aside for me and the Old Lady—but do y' think I ought to reveal that—well, that Bombay is—a actor? 'S fact, Kel. I was out at his shack one night, and acc'dentally seed his passport layin' open atop a table. Now if he's a actor, why by Godfrey, he's here in the mills under false pretenc——"

"Wait, Host!" And Lauriston, almost amusedly, shook his head. "Being a damned expert pole-hiker, he's not at all operating here under false pretences. But he's explained that 'actor business'—and to Turnbo himself—for I was present at the time. A fact! For I had something to unkink on my own papers. And we were both called in. As he told Turnbo, when he applied for the passport in India, he'd heard that technical workers couldn't even stick their schnozzolos into America—because of the post-war labour glut; and so desp'rit, and having seen Hollywood fillums galore, with Hindus in 'em, he gave his profession as—actor. Oh sure—backed it up—had to—by a letter from an Indian theatrical manager who wrote, over his own sig., that he—yeah, Bombay—had travelled a year with one of his comp'nies. Of course," added Kel wryly, "the said manager didn't state that Bombay had travelled with said Company—as electrician—and lights-operator, and all that; and so with Bombay's fakaloo—and the letter—he had 'documentary confirmed' identity as an 'actor.' And so got here. Once safely inside America—though he'd have had no trouble to get in as a lineman, I'm cert—once, inside, he was a lineman again. That's all there is to—well—ah—that's his story, at any rate. It—hm?—it is all *his* story at that, isn't it? It—however," Lauriston broke off, "the point is that Turnbo knows a-a-a-all about it, see? And so 'twouldn't amount to a hill of beans phoning it in, or conveying it."

"I'm glad," returned Host Joly relievedly. "I wouldn't want to be messed up in the affair, noway, nohow—not f'r a million dollars."

"Neither, obviously, does Ye Greate Hogge," commented Lauriston, sardonically. "In view of his perfect and bee-ootyful handwiping on that reward mazuma which—but here!—I better be going, or Oswald Sweetboy, Esquire, may get sore

enough to knock me out t'night with a chunk o' slag. Which'd make a new mystery, hereabouts. And—well, I'm off."

And Lauriston, with a sigh, left, and trudged on another five hundred feet, to a low shanty, built apparently right over a spur track leading off from a standard-gauge railroad track nearby. The wide sliding door was open, revealing a handcar, standing inside, atop the spur rails. The stuff that Oswald Sweetboy had been carrying had been loaded on the end of the handcar, and he himself sat on the car gloomily resting.

Kel tossed his acquisitions with the rest of the material, and without a word the two, getting behind the handcar, shoved it out of the shanty, along the spur, and onto the nearby track. And still thus shoving—for the distance was too short to start pumping—they finally rolled up, as it were, car awheel, and men afoot, at a small flagshanty no bigger than a country "backhouse," in front of which stood a porcupine-faced flagman-gatetender. Some hundred feet off beyond the shanty, a great rolling gate in the rear wall of the plant had been slid open, revealing, thanks to the plentiful moonlight now falling both in plant and outside of plant, the several parallel railroad tracks outside.

"You th' two goin' to Slagville?" the flagman inquired, as Lauriston and the youth stood erect.

"Not to, no," Lauriston replied succinctly. "Just a few miles out from here." He had now produced his pass.

The other looked at it.

"Okay. Gate's open on this track—as you c'n see."

"How's the track tonight? All clear?"

"All clear. Last train till dawn—and that one only empties f'r more slag—is just in, and they's nothin' out till mornin'. Track's yours!"

"Sure of that are you, now?" demanded Kel, the ever, ever careful one! "I don't hanker to try and outpump a slag train pounding along behind me by ten minutes or so, just to keep the red off *her* block, and——"

"Jerk up the old guts, lineman!" came in friendly tones from a lank smiling man, in grease-stained striped jumper and overalls, and carrying an unlighted lantern, who had come up while Kel had been talking, and who had immediately grasped the subject of the discussion. "I'm Dorcus Jucker, the brakeman-switchman who just came in with that train, that you see yonder. And comes in with it, moreover, every night—or



at least every night except one, now and then, when there aren't enough empties at Slagville to justify a run." And in objectification of his words "that train," he waved his unlighted lantern towards what must have been a string of standing gondolos, with perhaps a now quiet and engineer-deserted locomotive, off some thousand feet, but which more or less fused with the many isolated cars all about. "And I don't get the train that goes back, made up ever before 3 a.m.; while the pull-out on same is set for 5; and the porridge in the electric cooker in my bachelor shack at Slagville Heights Crossing is set for 6. Satisfied now, Lacy-Drawers?"

"Plenty, Shuttlecock," conceded Kel. "When the great and only choo-choo-shifter of this great transcontinental line—the Tippingdale and Slagville!—gives me the 24-carat lowdown, I am satisfied!" And then because Kel was appreciative of really first-hand information, he added, more friendly: "Thanks, Jucker," and turned to Sweetboy. "Okay then, kid, let's put our go-cart into high!"

Kel and his helper resumed their pushing now, but in a new manner—with the youth up ahead on one side of the handcar—Lauriston back on the other, and letting the speed and momentum gather, and trotting along in company with it till, at a sharp command from Lauriston, they sprang aboard at one and the same moment, and together began pumping at each end of the oscillating handle.

Hardly a second later they were rolling out of the gate, then bumping violently over the several intersecting parallel tracks which made up the rear railyards and routes for passenger trains going through Tippingdale. Now, across the yards, the line of steel towers that had been carrying the overhead high-tension line came to a stop with one last tower, and the line proceeded to drop gently to the first of a line of tall powerful poles. In front of the handcar now stretched just countryside, split by a single pair of cross-tie-connected rails, alongside which a line of poles ran, and all, rail track and poles, vanishing over a distant horizon line.

Now clear of everything, they pumped harder and harder at their ends of the long lever, making no attempt at speech. And faster and faster they flew. While farther and farther they receded from the steelmills in their rear, the tall sheet-iron fence rapidly shrinking to a mere low strip on the horizon in back of the handcar, till, suddenly, as the car glided down a

gentle but long incline, all that remained of the Tippingdale Steel plant was a pinkish glow along a wide stretch of the horizon, seemingly trying to fuse with full moonlight pouring down atop it.

And now, as pole after pole flew by, and they pumped silently, the youth suddenly put a question to Lauriston which the latter knew many had wanted to put to him, but hadn't, perhaps, known how to formulate as well as this naïve infant.

For the youth asked : " Mr. Lauriston, do you mind telling me why you, with all your—your techn'logical experience—ever came here to this small, sleepy town—and these rather old and—and inefficient mills—to work ? "

Lauriston pumped reflectively a few pumps. If such they now could be called, for the handcar, being well oiled, and containing mostly aluminium fittings instead of iron ones, seemed now almost to fly on its magic wings. Then Lauriston spoke.

" Oh, I guess I've no objection, kid, to telling you. The real lowdown, I mean. For the last time I answered almost that identically same question—said answering being rendered to a—a young lady here in town—I just disposed of the question quickly by saying 'at I stuck a pin in a book containing the names of steelmills—and came on—where the pin was ! But tonight—no, I've no objection to telling you the real lowdown. Since it may hold a sort of a half lesson to you. And since, I'm—" He had been about to say "—getting the hell out of this damned burg, for good and all, at the end of this week—and—how !—" But let that latter part go unsaid.

And proceeded to explain to this friendly and eager youth what he'd never yet explained to anyone in Tippingdale !

" Well you see, kid," Lauriston explained, " I came near inheriting some money years ago—in England. Quite a bit. No fooling ! But I missed out. Because of a certain quite essential will not getting made out !—and the last-made will leaving the mazuma elsewhere, see ? But there were two witnesses to that will. A man and a girl. The man elderly, the girl young. The man, Enoch Peddiford by name, a gardener—the girl, Ellen Chesrow by name, a maid or something—in the mansion house of my gra—er—the old gentleman who was to have left the money to me. And this maid, she—"

" Listen, Mr. Lauriston, you're not bunking me, are you ? "



"Gracious no, kid, I'm not. I'm on the level. In fact, my telling you this is my good deed for the day. Well," Lauriston now went on, ironically, "I had a suspicion from something I picked up over there in England years ago that growed and growed on me, like Topsy, that the younger of these two witnesses—the maid, of course, this Ellen Chesrow—was 'way under age when she'd witnessed that will. The suspicion, I might state, was based on my having heard mention of her, with respect to a certain incident she'd participated in, mentioned as a 'mere infant'. And she had witnessed this will, you see, not a very great time after the incident in question. Anyway a snide American attorney convinced me, a few months back, that I could maybe make a nuisance value of myself—for maybe a thousand bucks or so—if I could establish that the younger witness hadn't been of age. By some sort of fool English law that I don't quite underst——"

"But Mr. Lauriston! If all this happened years ago, the estate would have been distributed by this time, so how could——"

"Oh," Lauriston said wearily, "all of the mazuma hadn't gone through its final distribution. About twenty-five thousand p'nds sterlin'—that's about a hundred thousand kerplunks, kid—was in a way-station called 'in trust.' This was in England, remember, not here in H'Amurrky! The said trust—if you have to have 'facks'!—was the so-called Seamen and Sailors' Institute Trust. And——"

"Well, this Ellen Chesrow, so I figured, might more than likely be dead today, for the date of that will lay plenty far back of even *my* birth. Enough so, in fact, that Enoch Peddiford, the elderly man witness to it was dead, and a long time to boot. But whether Ellen Chesrow was dead or no, that wouldn't have anything to do with how old she'd been when she'd witnessed the will. A detail—her age, I mean, at the time of the said witnessing—which could have been figured out puhlenty easy enough if one could only have known where in the devil in England she'd been born; rather, exactly where her birth was recorded.

"But unfortunately," Lauriston now proceeded to explain, "all I had on her, in that respect, was the fact of the eccentricity of the old gentleman himself—yes, the man who wrote that will by which yours truly inherited nothing!—of his eccentricity in hiring only servants who could show conclusively that they'd

been born in Suffolk County, England. Oh, he had some weird ideas, it seems, that the only really honest servants came from that county. But, whether or no, Suffolk County, kid—if you look at a map of England—is a puhlently large chunk of British area—and dotted all over with 'amlets, as they term 'em, besides."

Lauriston paused but a moment. Then went on.

"But having," he now continued, "picked up, while over there, young and innocent as I was, a bit of a—a—a scandal, so to speak, that had centred about this Ellen Chesrow just prior to her signing the said will—right!—that's the very 'incident' I was referring to a few seconds back—the one in which she'd been mentioned as a 'mere infant'—a scandal which had given her a chee-ild!—a son—I wrote over to England—to the attorney of the estate in question—to get the lowdown on her—rather, on the chee-ild. Intending to make a play, anyway, at working out my little problem through the latter, and such records as *he* doubtlessly had on himself and his mama. And—now listen here, kid.

"But the point is," Lauriston broke off, "that child had in his possession a sworn life-insurance application, made in another city, and where, under the medical blank asking this mother's age when he was born, he had set down—giving as his authority fer same his birth certifycate—22 years, 5 months, and 16 days—and so there," finished Lauriston, "y'are, my dear No Kidding! Since the English gal in question witnessed that will after the child was borned, then she was *over* 22 years, 5 months and 16 days when she witnessed it. And if that isn't being over age, I jest don't know nothin'! And so my chances of making a nuisance value of myself in that British estate were zero—exactly, in fact, what they are today; for in just this last month alone, as I read in the papers, the Seamen's and Sailors' Institute Trust of Great Britain has at last been paid over, to its beneficiaries, and damned glad I am that it has."

And now Lauriston was peering out to a single pole that shot forward at them, and then dropped away as quickly in their rear. A large black enamelled disk nailed to it bore the white figures 1—4—1. He leaned forward and tapped the now puffing youth on his multi-patched shoulder.

"Easy now, No Kidding," he commanded. "Six more sticks—and we've reached our job."

They pumped very slowly then. In turn, they crawled



past poles bearing the white numbers 142, 143, and on up to 146. Then they relinquished their grip on the handles, and allowed the handcar to come to a creaking, whining stop but a few yards from Pole 147.

"Shall we hoist her off the track, Mister Lauriston?" Sweetboy asked troubledly. "You know—there's always chances of mix-ups—about train movements and everything—that flagman—that fellow Jucker—might——"

"You telling *me*?" retorted Lauriston almost sardonically. "About mix-ups?" But shook his head. "No, we have their 'clear track.' But on top of that, even if there was an 'extra' unexpectedly shunted down this line, this handcar, don't forget, 'shorts' these two rails and throws a red signal a mile off each way. No train could ever even come into this block. We'll let her stand right here."

With only his double-length silk handline about his neck, and the regular handline in his waist, and the portable telephone swung from his shoulder, and his safety belt swinging aside his hip, Lauriston went over to the base of the pole, and proceeded to go gracefully up. Up, that is, but two-thirds the distance, where a double pair of phone wires, affixed to the pole, created two independent sets of connections. Hooking his safety belt about the pole, and to himself again, and bracing himself back in it, he affixed the spring clips, which terminated the short flexible leads of the portable phone, onto the higher pair of wires, and gave the magneto handle of the device three quick turns. A second later he heard, in its receiver, Host Joly's friendly "Yes—sir?"

"Kel," announced Lauriston briefly. "We're here at the Pole now, Host, and waiting on you. Anything new?"

The voice at the other end of the wire replied at once.

"No, Kel—that is, ever'thing's ready for you, boy. Jest got word from the Slagville switchboard, in fact, that they're co'pletely off the line. Sence it's on'y ten minutes o' midnight, they 'pear to be sort o' clearin' the tracks f'r us here. An'way, I'm ready to pull. Hold the wire, Kel."

But a quite considerable pause ensued. At least for the mere simple operation of inserting a key in a padlock and turning it. At last, however, Host Joly's voice came back on the circuit.

"Ever'thing's okay now, Kel. But I 'spose, though, you wondered why'n cricky it tu'k me so long to unlock a simple padlock?"

"We-e-ell, maybe yes," ventured Kel. "Not however that it matt——"

"Well, 'twas because, Kel, that whoever fr'm the 'lectrical admin'stration office installed this obv'ously new padlock here last, in place o' that old and slightly rusted one that used to be here, went off without markin' *which* o' the stock o' keys—f'r padlocks, you know?—to other offices and letter files and so forth?—b'longed to it; so they had to give me the whole durned stock bunch of eighteen or so t'night, tied to the tower key itself! I had to try out seven, jest now, afore I found the magic 'un!"

"Damn fools," grunted Kel. "And it'll stay that way the next hundred years. Yank it off tonight after you leave there, Host, and keep your eye peeled for a good, big and dirty piece of six by six timber, and turn it in tied to that. It'll teach 'em a lesson in key sequestration."

"By godfrey, I'll do that," concurred Host Joly.

"But ever'thing's okay now, you say?" Kel now queried.

"Right! Voltage is off. And line, it's dead!"

"Relay motor switch locked open?" asked the lineman cautiously.

"I'll say," assured Host Joly from the high-tension shanty. "Open and locked thataway, and that bunch o' keys in my britches!"

"Green indicator light burning?"

"Right! Like a traffick light."

"All right, then," declared Lauriston. "I'm going on up, now. So—but wait, Host!—before I disconnect this instrument, I want to say I'm sorry about sticking my fool nose in your private affairs tonight. I mean—your personal, private reasons for quitting Saturday. Just forget I asked, will you, and——"

"Oh shucks, Kel, that 'uz a'right. I should a-brung it up ag'in after the kid went. I jest didn't want to talk afore him, see? Kids always have sich a contemp' f'r age an' its infirm'ties. Fact is, I'm quittin' on'y 'cause th' doctor he ast me to. M' own private doc, I mean, not the comp'ny sawbones who hasn't nothin' to do with m' case."

"Doctor? Your arthritis—you mean? Hell-fire, Host, you haven't any arthritis worth a—say, you mebbe haven't been up a pole now for ten years, but I'll bet you could make Big Swodock half scrabble a bit if it came to a stick-shinnying contest for——"



"No, Kel, not that. My arthrititis, I mean. It's—it's some fool trouble with m' heart—the doc he calls it fibrous myocarditis."

"Fi—brous—myer—cardyie—tis? Prob'ly one of the fifty-seven varieties handed out to the paying customers who have to have something for their mon—— oh, I never could figure out medical terms. What is it? Does it cause you troublesome symptoms?"

"Not p'ticly," declared Host. "Never knowed I had it till he unknivvered it in a 'zam'nation. It—well w'ile I c'n pernounce the trouble, Kel, I can't say I onderstand it. The doc., however, jest wants me to quit. So's I—well, as he puts it, so's I won't be in the way of gittin' mental and 'motional shocks—from run-ins and set-to's with the boys in the gang 'bout tools—and—well, ever'thing like that."

"Shocks—from run-ins with the boys? Or maybe—seeing guys jolted, perhaps. Hell, Host, you're top dog with the boys. And as for jolted guys, you've seen more than the doc. has or will see for the rest of his career. And—listen, Host, I'll bet your wiff,"—but here Kel stopped, suppressing a chuckle—mirthless as it would have been had it escaped him—as best he could. Realizing, suddenly, that Host's wife, who was reputed long ago to have tried and tried to get Host to leave the mills, had finally found a way to achieve it!—"your wife'll be glad," Lauriston finished lamely.

"Reckon she will," replied Host unperturbedly.

"Well, that makes it then, Host, that your heart's pride and joy—yep, Six-six-six! —'ll have to get married now—and get another young lineman started to be on the gang. You know? So's to carry on the tradition—of a Joly on the line-gang? Okay then, old top. Now I am going on up."

Lauriston disconnected the spring clips of the telephone, tied the instrument to his single handline and lowered it groundward. The youth came over to the pole in time to recover it deftly.

"Now, kid," Lauriston called down, going on up a few additional steps, but without bothering as yet to unleash his safety belt, shoving it, instead, fastened, along with him, "I'm going to fling this double-length silk handline over the whole three phases. When I get it over and she falls one length each side, and I think she will if I'm any good, I want you to tie on one end of it, by three slipknots, that long piece of lead

fuse wire we brought, and pull on the other end till the three phases are short-circuited. We never take anybody's full word, kid, for anything in this game."

He removed his silk line from his neck, and with a deft circular arm motion flung it. It was a beautiful fling, half of the line going over the three gleaming overhead transmission cables, and dropping, one half plus five feet or so on one side, one half minus five feet or so, on the other.

The youth had gone to the handcar, and gotten the fuse wire. Was knotting it on one of the fallen handline lengths. Now he looked up inquiringly.

"Pull on the free line now, kid," Lauriston called, "and keep pulling—till I tell you to stop. But keep your glims shielded just—you know—in case!"

The fusolite test-wire rose higher and higher. Lauriston hung where he was, watching it intently. He drew one spur out of a rotten spot in the wooden pole, and with a vicious thrust planted it more firmly several inches to the right. At last, in response to Sweetboy's dragging on the free handline, the fuse wire slid slowly across the first of the three transmission cables. Immediately Lauriston, more from habit than any expectation, raised his arm and shielded his eyes. The fuse wire reached the second cable, and then, with a final jerk, it lay flat and heavy across all three of the parallel transmission cables. No ear-splitting report. No disappearance of the test wire in a cloud of green vapour.

The Slagville transmission line was dead !

"All right, kid," Lauriston shouted through his cupped hands. "Pull her off and down out of the way now." The youth did so, hopping out of the way as the lead test wire fell to the ground. "And tie on this regular handline of mine the sledge, and one cross-arm bolt. At least for a starter. And shout—when you're ready."

And snapping free the broad band of leather against which he had been resting, he went quickly on up the pole the remainder of the way, letting his handline uncurl as he went, where he hooked the belt again near the top, and here leaned back in it, his hands lightly on the bevelled top of the pole. And from which lofty position, his midriff crossed by a wooden cross-arm, a gleaming copper transmission cable hugging him each side—he looked far out over the moonlight-covered country at the zig-zag fences and green fields that stretched in every direction.



But Kel Lauriston saw no fields, no fences, no moonlight; nothing but the face of a girl with jet black ringlets and eyes of tender brown.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### IN THE HIGH-TENSION SHANTY

THERE was one person who was in no mood for conversation that night! And that person was Red McAfee.

He stood at one far end of the bar of Black Sam Mogrub's sawdust-floored whiskey emporium, brooding, staring down at the dusty and tobacco-juice encrusted footrail, thinking, planning, wildly plotting—occasionally, and at really far intervals so far as Red's regular drinking methods went, taking a single gulpy furious swallow from the generous-sized glass of "tax-paid moon" which stood at his elbow, but never for an instant neglecting, in those instances where he came suddenly back to earth for a second, and found it drained, to curtly order the toothy, round-faced ebony Sam to fill it up again. As the quarter hours ticked away, customers came—customers went. And when the hands of the greasy-faced fly-specked alarm clock ticking away just off of Black Sam's cash-register pointed to five minutes of midnight, the narrow, ill-lighted barroom was as devoid of persons as when Red had entered it, a now long and considerable while—three glasses of slowly drank moon, to be exact!—back.

Three glasses—of whiskey.

But Red, with his practice in stowing firewater away, wasn't drunk. Ugly, perhaps, yes. And far, far more so than when he had entered. Gloweringly ugly. Sullenly ugly. But not drunk. And the hands of that clock reminded him that no matter what happened in his personal affairs, he was responsible for a certain job being done. And—

He fumbled in his pockets for a nickle.

"Bring me two this time, ya—ya black bastard," he unsmilingly greeted Sam, just coming through a door to the bar. "F'r your danged rotgut's watered—I can't even smell it."

Black Sam shook his head dubiously, but Red did not see that, for he was traversing the sawdust-floored barroom, entering the double-glassed phone booth. Now that the third whiskey was entering his blood, he felt meaner than ever. He

didn't know, of course, that instead of being watered, Black Sam's stuff actually was—at least tonight—running 101½ proof!

"Th' mills," he snarled, when the town girl operator answered him. He popped the nickle viciously in the slot. And then, as he got a mills girl operator he snapped, equally pugnaciously: "Forty-five," that being the official plant number of the south high-tension shanty inter-communications phone.

And but a second or so later, he heard the undoubted tones of old Host Joly answering:

"South high-tension—shanty?"

Red did not even bother to identify himself. For talking now to a man who was working with Lauriston—working on a job that Lauriston himself was working on, or at least supposed to be working on—made Red so choleric he couldn't see straight.

"How's 'at danged job goin'? 'D that son-of-a-bitch what's on it with you—show up? For if he didn't, he c'n get his time; and you—you old cock—for workin' with him—c'n do the sa——"

"It's—it's Red, of course," said the old man, utter bewilderment in his voice. "Why—uh—ever'thing's okay, Red. Sure he showed up. We've even deaded. We—listen, Red—you sore ag'in me t'night for some reason—callin' me somethin' you never called me afor——"

"No, I ain't sore at you," snarled Red. "I—I—" And in view of the fact that Host Joly was working at this moment with Kel Lauriston, Red's following statement was true, momentarily so, anyway. "I—I just don't like your whole rotten tribe, an' never did, but that ain't nothing to do with——"

Now Red was to be confronted with the sight of an old man rearing up.

"You—you see here, Red—my—my tribe's as good a tribe as an'bodys in the mills. You don't need to ride me thisaway with names, for—in fact, you can't ride me—because you can't fire me, an' you know you can't—besides if you could, I'm leavin' Sat'day. So get that. I want f'r you to keep a civil tongue in——"

"Why you—you danged ol' hoary-eyed——"

Red was malignantly furious now from being, as it were, "told off."

"Why you danged old rheumy-eyed son of a bitch,"



he replied, "you—listen, how th' hell can your tribe be any good w'en"—and here genius came to Red's aid. Evil genius, to be sure. But genius descending to his help with black outstretched wings—"w'en your—your young whelp, over in the jail, jest confessed to killin' that kid las' night."

"Wh—wha—what's 'at?" quavered the old man on the other end. Then laughed re-assuredly. "Didn't quite git your words right, Red. Sounded like you said my whelp—meanin' my boy—but o' course you didn't; so——"

"I said," roared Red, frustrated because his beautiful and perfect shot to bull's-eye couldn't even get heard aright, "'at your Six-six-six 's just confessed to killin' that Chineee brat. And—and doin' all the sabyteegin' that's been did, and all. An'—an' the fingerprint on the weapon is his. All his, see? Oh, ask Turnbo—'f you don't b'lieve me—ask Moneypenny—ask an'body. Or—or call up th' *Mornin' Sun*. And you—well you c'n sit in the front seat at Six-six-six's hangin', you old cock, and watch your danged tribe swing off into——"

"Oh—my boy—oh—my boy—my boy!—oh——"

It was plain the old man had gotten the full import now of Red's words. And it was a good thing, perhaps—for Red, that is—that the latter was a bit anæsthetic from liquor. For the frantic, almost gasping cries, at the other end, would have broken even his composure.

He had hung up, however, triumphantly. Had he waited but a split second, he would have heard a receiver frantically thrust back on its hook at the other end. So that its holder could call—ring somewhere—anywhere!—find out full details of—get hold of—get a lawyer—find——

But Red was now coming out of the booth. Actually chuckling, his own thoughts and emotions derailed for a dozen seconds from the most hateful subject in the entire world: K. Lauriston.

"The old fool—with his brain all cat's-vomit. He'll stew an' sizzle like a sausage in a pan—till he gets hep 'twas all a rib. Or—or he'll burn th' wires up all over town—tryin' to find out if—boy, 'at's a hot one. T' tell th' boys t'morrow."

He went back to his original place at the still empty bar. And found, not two whiskeys standing there, but three—one being, though he knew it not, a gift to a customer from an appreciative black saloonkeeper, now out of sight again, and——

"Three w'iskeys, heh? Well!

"Challengin' him, heh? Why, th' black scum—tryin' to rib him—rib him that he couldn't even handle his liq——"

Red downed them one by one, though with a couple of good breaths in between each. "Challengin' him, heh? For two cents——"

But, by the time the third was gurgling down Red, something else was descending on him, too: Drunkenness.

For, as he set the third glass down, the clock next the cash-register flew right out of vision, then came back—but without its hands! A red-headed man in a brown suit stared at Red from over the tops of the queer-looking bottles ranged along back of the bar. "Who the hell—oh—oh yeah—himself. What the hell is he—that is, me—what the hell am I hangin' around here for? What t'hell time's it—that dam' clock——"

But here the mill whistles came to Red's aid. By starting, almost in unison, the blowing of the hour of midnight.

So Red, slapping down a half dollar alongside the three empty glasses, stumbled forth into the dark and dusty street. A short block ahead of him was Executives' Gate, lonely looking and practically unused at this hour; a full mile away, diagonally leftward, lay his boarding house. Now that he was out in the air, he seemed suddenly to feel quite clear—mentally; but physically, he found himself so unsteady on his feet that he stepped over to a wobbly oil-lamp post and leaned heavily against it, trying to arrive at a decision of whether to fill out the night with more drinking in Jaworski's saloon, a mile away, and off the other gate, or to go home and try to get enough sleep to enable him to come out on the job tomorrow.

But now that completely distracting and diverting episode with old Host Joly on the phone flew entirely out of Red's field of consciousness, exactly as had the clock face in Black Sam's. And Red was right back again—contemplating that other ever-persistent vision. In short, drunk though he was now, there was recurring to him the passionate conversation he had overheard take place on Myrene Cary's porch tonight between her and the big impudent-acting lineman who had entered the Tippingdale Plant but four months or so back, and, in particular, her fervent assurances to Lauriston that though she was indeed going to marry Peter McAfee, she would ever and always want to know what Lauriston was doing—wherever in the world he might be; would, in fact, always



love him. And over and over, against this boomer-interloper in his own life, Red's hate flamed up till he found himself clenching his hairy fists and cursing softly at the empty air.

As the whistles finished blowing, he glanced in the direction of the gate. A group of "heatsters with water-up passes"—workers who worked continuously at temperatures so hot that they had permission to go out at midnight and fill up copiously with liquid!—were swarming out towards a commodious saloon in the other direction from where Red stood, in order to "water up" with a few huge schooners of beer in the brief half hour allowed them at midnight. Strangely enough—perhaps because one wore a red bandanna neckerchief, not unlike Kel Lauriston—the mere sight of them seemed to rouse Red to fury again. He cursed them soundly and roundly, as only Red McAfee, drunk or sober, could; it was an amazingly adroit and meaty combination of obscenity and blasphemy that poured forth—he continued right on with it, launching forth into a torrent of abuse directed at, for want of anything else at the moment, the plant, then the town of Tippingdale, and then, in turn, the electrical department. With these all properly disposed of—and now hitting on all conversational fours!—he began to vent the anger of his words on separate imaginary individuals. In a low snarl he castigated President Seth Hiatt, then Director Hogg, and then, in turn, young Oswald Sweetboy, old Host Joly, so—so stupid the damol' fool 'at he b'lieved any fakealoo ladled out to him on a phone wire an'—

But at the mental picture of old Host, Red suddenly stiffened up. In his frame of mind at this moment, empty air was no longer satisfying to him as the recipient for his vitriol. He needed somebody to—lay out—dam' proper. And Host—well, right now old Host was over in the south high-tension shanty, guarding the relay switch which controlled the transmission line that "High-Tension" Lauriston was working on. And now, in conjunction with Red's eavesdropping of almost two hours back, the mere fact that Host Joly had even consented to work with Kel Lauriston—and not the old man's stupidity, or even the telling-off he had tried to give Red—was enough to cause the fury in Red to rise to the surface again and bubble right over into a new stream of vituperation.

But already he had relinquished his grip on the lamppost. For he had made up his mind, on the instant, to go over into

the plant, ferret out Host at the south high-tension shanty, not so dam' far from here, and not only give the ol' sonuvabitch a complete and prolonged "burning up" for every dam' wrong tool he'd ever laid out—plus all the right ones he hadn't laid out!—since he'd been made toolman, but order the—the old sonuvabitch to work every dam' night from now on till his week was up, an'—

A few uncertain steps along Carnegie Road, viciously kicking up great clouds of black dust, brought Red to the gate. He fumbled for his foreman's pass with one hand, and with his brain for words that, since he was a foreman, would almost make that pass unnecessary: words which would set forth simply that he was "cuttin' through to git out by Workers' Gate"—but he needed, as eventuated, neither pass nor explanation, for the gateman was turned towards a wall phone and talking busily to some superior on duty in some office.

So Red passed right on in. A little unsteadily, perhaps, but not so much so that he wasn't, a quarter of a minute later, leaving in his rear the Executives' buildings that clustered around that gate. Soon indeed he was lurching past a couple of shut-down coke ovens, skirting a dark mill building which once had been the Structural Mill, but was to-day but an occasionally operated emergency structural mill, passing the wall-less column-supported roof-attached to one side of it and which covered its black and just now practically invisible "soaking pit," now crossing diagonally a network of narrow-gauge tracks.

But now, as he headed definitely into that illy-defined area of the mills called No Man's Land, and in the exact direction of the tower-shanty that was his objective, the while occasional clouds, drifting across the face of the moon, obliterated all the landmarks familiar even to Red, the whiskey he had consumed in Black Sam Mogrub's—rather, no doubt, that last triple-whiskey!—commenced to go to his head with a real vengeance. For three times—once in actual unclouded moonlight—he stumbled over either the tie or rail of a crossing switchline, and fell prostrate, scratching his face in two instances on the ragged surfaces of pieces of near-lying slag.

He stumbled to his feet each time, however, wiping his hands furiously off on his brown pants, cursing all the louder, and vowing worse and worse vengeance on Host Joly for—for even bein' willin' to work with Kel Lauriston on the insulator-replacement job. And within a few more minutes there



commenced to actually bear down on Red the high-tension shanty standing, at this particular moment of the moon's progress, in the very shadow cast by the steel tower containing the oil-switch.

Except, however, that the shadow disappeared suddenly, as even of course did the moon—blotted out by a particularly elongated cloud, and Red's final 150 feet of progress was a matter of sheer orientation by the vertical band of light resulting from the foreshortened shanty-tower window. The moon was still in abeyance as he found the base of the narrow outside tower stairs, and tiptoed gently up like a fox, to make more devastating his appearance on the scene. Finding the exact location of the door at the top, he drew back one thickly-soled shoe, and, with a vicious kick, sent the door flying open. Opening his mouth almost the same second to launch forth into a torrent of abuse that would be so great that the other would not be able to put even a single word in.

Except that—Red's mouth remained thus !

For, stretched out motionless on the floor of the little switch-panel room, on his back, his rheumy blue eyes wide open but his old face ghastly white in the brilliant illumination from the cluster of incandescent bulbs in the ceiling, lay Host Joly.

Dumbfounded, thunderstruck, Red stared at the still figure. And which, had it sat up where it lay, would have partly faced the door—partly faced the window. Since, in this oddly diagonal position on the floor, and with right arm, moreover, clumsily outflung—a position which even Red could perceive was never that of a man stealing a bit of sleep—its head and shoulders cleared the further edge of the switchboard base by only a couple of feet ; while its feet lay in the lee of the window base.

And now, at last, from Red, riveted there in the doorway, came but one ejaculation. The one word.

“ Jolted ! ”

For in those few seconds Red had become, as it were, a sober drunk man, destined, to be sure, in but a few minutes more or less, to be fully as drunk as when he had clambered up those outside steps. For though alcohol was still pouring, surging, raging through his veins, so also was a mighty flood of neutralizing adrenalin, catapulted straight and instantly into his circulation from his adrenal glands, practically on sight of what was obviously a grave emergency. And thus sober, even if

but transiently so, and acting on the knowledge gained from past experiences with other electrical workers who had been knocked temporarily unconscious by accidental contact with low-tension voltages, he strode quickly forward, the door closing itself gently back of him because of its weight and a tilt in its hinged supports, and dropped to his knees by Host Joly's body. He was conscious now that the supine man's right hand, off some distance from the body because of the outflung arm, was clenched fiercely—ah!—spasmodical contraction, heh?—all quite clear—quite clear!—Host had gotten “jolted” because, the damol' fool, he's tried to do somep'n and at the same time operate a hand-switch. But here, by dint of both throwing back his head and twisting his neck at the same time, Red's gaze rose critically to, and then over, the simple switch panel looking down on him where he rested on his knees. Everything, though, appeared to be in perfect order there; Red passed his hand dazedly over his forehead. It seemed impossible that this old man on the floor here had received a shock from such a simple contrivance as that on the marble slab, with generously-sized insulated handle, contact points too far apart to be bridged by even a hand—and operating only, anyway, on 110-volts. And yet—something *had* gone wrong. And so, without any further delay, he swung his gaze back again to its original object: the old man on the floor in front of him; he leaned over, in fact, and pressed his head tightly against Host's chest. He could hear nothing, however. He felt for a pulse in the wrist closest to him—the wrist of the hand that was not so clenched. Cold and collected as he was now—even cold sober!—he could detect none.

He decided, however, to essay another try, for a heart sound, but unimpeded this time by the thickness of shirt and undergarment. And so, seizing the sides of Host's blue shirt, open at the neck, he tore the shirt wide open, the two uppermost white buttons flying off into the air, in order to do the exact same thing with the undershirt that would be beneath.

But undershirt Host wore none tonight! No kind of undershirt, in fact. He had, as appeared, but slipped a blue shirt over his bare torso. And Red leaned well over, and tried again. Ear pressed this time to the very skin of the now none-too-warm chest. Nothing. He stopped his upper, free ear with his fingertip. Nothing!



He raised himself up. Helplessly. Trying—trying—trying to figure it all out. If the old bozo'd got jolted, where—where'n hell did the jolt come from? Where—then suddenly certain submerged events of the past fifteen minutes came to Red in a sort of flash of illumination. Black Sam's—the phone booth—

Indeed, though the momentary overload of adrenalin that had poured lightning-like into him a minute or so back had just about fulfilled its function now—and which was to make him, for a few fleeting moments or so, 101 per cent. alert, 101 per cent. capable of hair-trigger action, if needs be—and he was about now to become almost as drunk as when he had come into this room!—he was still quite able to grasp the full implications of what had just poured in on him.

"Jee!" was all he said. "He—he had a ticker d'sease—an' shouldn't never ha' got shocked!—prob'ly one o' them cases w'ere the blood vessels o' the ticker goes into a spasm, cuts themselves off, an'—an' gangreeny sets right in."—Red, from being long about mills and accidents therein, had picked up a smattering of medical knowledge.—"That's—*that's* w'y he was quittin' at end o' week—ticker d'sease!—an' I—I give him his knock-out shock—with that fakealoo about Six-six-six—a—a shock what's drawed them ar'tries to, or—or choked his ticker, or what't'hell ever happens in heart d'sease—an'—an' now he's dead." He stared helplessly at the dead face, gazing upward. Feeling as though he had been kneeling here now, unravelling this really simple puzzle, a thousand minutes; whereas, had Red but known it, it had been exactly three-and-a-half minutes, no more, no less, since he had swept across this floor and dropped to his knees by this silent body.

"Well," he said uneasily, "I cert'ny didn't go for to let him have this acc'dent—f'r acc'dent's what it really is—I—I on'y give him a rib—I—I—I—oh hell, he'd a-died an'way in a few months or so—old buzzard like him, with one foot in the gra—, 'tain't my fault—why dam' him, he—he shoulda tolt us—we coulda watched our steps—we coulda—oh hell, he'd prob'ly have dropped dead in a month, an'way, growsin' with his Old Lady about the house, an'—hell!—he's—he's died happy, that's what. Th' way he'd-a liked to. With his boots on. Workin'."

And with a philosophic gesture of two hands—perhaps because he had perfectly resolved this complicated problem

into a matter of full blame for its victim—perhaps, too, because nobody knew of that phone call!—Red rose to his feet. Unsteadily, and not altogether because he had been kneeling, either! For his drunkenness was coming back, though he knew it not, like a bounding herd of Buffalo! Indeed, now, as he gazed downward at the four telephones on the wooden ledge below him—not two, but four in *this* case!—he could not, for the life of him, tell which of the four was the mills phone, and which the line phone, much less what'n-hell the other two were for. Till, realizing suddenly that two of the phones were but reflections in that 45-degree-poised panel-mirror pivoted and bracketed to the side of this Kittermaster switch panel, he gave it a vigorous shove with his raised knee, and breaking the rust that had apparently frozen its pivots, sent it swinging, out of the way, in back of the panel. Whereupon the four phones immediately shrunk to two! Except that which was line phone and which mills phone—he still couldn't figure out. And as he struggled, through a swiftly growing alcoholic haze, to figure which was which, and his gaze rose to the switch-panel itself to get some mnemonic help, his eyes fell upon the green light. And a thought smote him with such intensity that he hastily drew out his silver-plated watch and stared fascinatedly at its hands.

"Twelve—sev'teen!" he gasped. "An' Laur'ston—a-workin' on the line." He paused; something in him seemed to be struggling to overcome the half-formed thought that was taking possession of him. "Laur'ston," he repeated slowly. "Laur'ston." Da—da—damme, I'll—I'll do it! I'll—I'll——"

He stopped abruptly. Drunk as he again was, the sweat broke out in little beads on his forehead. And his drunkenness fell, automatically thereby, by a slight yet definite fraction of itself. But the mental struggle went right on. And now, with startling distinctness, every word of Myrene's admission of love for Lauriston, her assurances that always she would want to know of him, about him, seemed to sound in Red's ears, and his temples pounded until they felt as though they were bursting.

"Out—out on that—that there line," he repeated slowly. He glanced quickly down at the man on the floor. "An' Host—done for! An'—an"—once more he paused—"I'll—I'll—I'll do it!" He turned and shook his fist furiously in



the direction of Slagville. "Damn you, Laur'ston, I'll—I'll—I'll give you th' last taste o' th' juice you'll ever get: I'll—I'll get you outa that gal's mind if—if I never do anything else on—on this damn'd earth, I will!"

He laughed, drunkenly, and glanced again at his silver watch which he had not yet replaced in his pocket. "Yeah," he went on, "ten secon's f'r you, Laur'ston! Jest ten secon's—o' th' 22,000. An' when they go to investygate, they c'n ast themselves w'y in hell's name ol' Host here went plumb cuckoo an' done it—jest afore kickin' off. Right!"

Red had always been a creature of impulse. He reached out furiously, with his free hand, to the down-hanging handle of the relay motor switch, and pulled fiercely, viciously, at it, despite the fact that it was obviously locked there, to a steel ring whose support was sunken into the very switchboard panel. For the black rage within him had made him feel, for the moment, that he could pull th' dam' thing right outa its dam' socket in the dam' switchboa—. But the anchor for that ring, held within the purely synthetic marble panel substance by spread legs, did not thus simply pull out. As even Red should have known would be the case. The switchboard, atop its comparatively slender legs, and with its coiled electrical connections at all points, but drew closer to him by a bare half inch or so—then, as he released his pull, drew rigidly back. He put a raised knee against the switchboard panel bottom; pulled harder. And quite nothing more happened than at the first pull. Sheepishly, though not without a frustrated grunt, he let go. Though realizing, however, almost as he did so, that this—this was the berries! Would definitely, conclusively, pin it—on the guy on the floor. Would—And now, in a mad whirl of exultation, of delirious triumph, he turned, stepped over and across the body, to the window of the shanty and peered out into the night. An action by no means fruitless, in the face of that previous rapid gathering of cloud outside, since, at the very moment he peered, a clean-cut hole in a now practically cloud-coalesced sky lined itself up perfectly with the moon, giving him vision in all directions about him. This region of the plant lived up well, he knew, to its name of No Man's Land, and his quick inspection, during the brief unleashing of the moonlight, showed him that not a soul was prowling around the spot, nor anywhere within eyeshot.

And even as the momentary flush of moonlight faded com-

pletely out, he turned from the window, stepped back and across the thing on the floor once more, dropped to his knees again and thrust his hand gingerly into the dead man's trousers' pocket. His fingertips met, however, only a handful of change. Leaning across the body again, one palm flat on the floor, he did the same thing with respect to the other pocket. And his fingers closed on an entire bunch of keys. He jerked it out, and found that it consisted of a ring on which were not less than a dozen-and-a-half Yale-like padlock keys, all of a like and similar category, yet all obviously different, and to which ring was tied, by a piece of twine, the unmistakable long blue-steel slotted key for the tower room itself. Red gave a sour grimace. The old story! Somebody, installing a new padlock, forgot to mark its key—and here was a whole dam' service bunch servicing a single dam' padlock. But no matter! Easy enough—to find the correct one by trial. He rose to his feet again, turned back to the switch, and commenced trying out the intricate padlock keys, one by one, making sure, each time, by a little gentle wobbling about of the key in the socket—a little withdrawing backward or forward as he tried to revolve it—that he was not accidentally passing over the right one.

He was more collected now than at any time in the past couple of minutes since he'd first risen from the side of that body and had become, as it were, halfway re-drunk—though but halfway at most! Not only, as a matter of fact, did he fully realize that after this thing was done, he must wipe that switchhandle clean, with his handkerchief, of his fingerprints, but that, even more, these very keys must be replaced exactly where he had found them.

He continued to try out keys. And more keys. And—it required the trying out of no less than fifteen, before Red found the magic one that unlocked the padlock! As it snapped open, he removed it deftly; set it up atop the upper panel edge. Seized the switch handle, and drew its blades clear from those lower contacts which, for the time being, had done *their* work—of opening the bigger oil-switch, some distance off from this shanty. Drew the relay-switch out far enough, in fact, that it stood practically at right angles to the panel. Then, leaving it thus, he turned back to the body, and dropping down on his heels, clumsily worked the bunch of keys back into the nearer of the dead man's pockets—the one which had contained the loose change.



But now came—though in curious and perhaps even unexpected manner—full objectification to Red of what he was about to do. Of all he was about to do, in fact! For, circling clumsily about on his heels, to rise—but to rise facing the switch panel—yet casting his eyes momentarily downward, for general good measure, he was brought to a standstill—or perhaps in view of his odd heels-squatting position, wherein bottom of switch panel was higher than the very top of his red head, it was a sit-still!—by the sight, between upper vertical edge of door and its casing, where both hung quite far apart, of three short parallel glowing streaks—each glowing bluish-purple against the jet dark of the gap itself—and Red well knew what they were: they were segments of the three leads from the power house into that oil-switch which he was about to throw—phosphorescing in a now definitely oncoming dampness. Leads which, the instant they were connected to those three Slagville cables, would make the latter instantly glow likewise—would turn that Slagville line into a strange fly-killing machine—but for human flies!—one in which a human fly, if stationed closer to any two of those three strands than each now was to the other, must become transfixed by a blinding, searing, killing bolt of green-blue flame—and, if caught in very contact with those strands, must curl right up into a bit of cooking, smoking, stinking flesh—would—and Red hesitated there, in his grotesque heels-squatting position, utterly appalled, almost sobered.

Though not one-tenth as much appalled, perhaps, as would have been another man—some three miles away—if at this very instant the latter could have seen Red, squatting thus in front of that opened control switch, and obviously figuring out the devious pros and cons of a difficult situation! For this other man was sprawled out upon the wooden cross-arm of Pole 147, of the transmission line that ran to Slagville, in what might have seemed from below to be a highly precarious position—except that that was exactly what it was not! Neither from the point of view of illumination, nor stability. For a work lantern, hanging from an improvised twist-wire hook to the left outside “phase” of the transmission line, that “phase” being now reared atop its new insulator but not yet “tied” thereto, threw generous light, in the now moon-obscured night, over the cross-arm—and the debonair sprawler! Who, lying longitudinally along the narrow wooden beam

on his left side, his body over and hard upon the middle "phase" of the line, the latter still "down" on the cross-arm and its fixing being purposely left for the last, had his right lower leg and right foot hooked tightly about, under, and over again, the right outside "phase," that "phase" having by now been not only raised firmly to its new insulator, but tightly tied thereto; and anchored thus perfectly from rolling off, especially since, resting on his left elbow, he held firm grasp, with his bare left hand, to that left outside "phase" atop its insulator, this reckless incumbent, with his equally bare right hand, was dropping a length of tie-wire about the insulator nubbing and the cable in preparation for an expert one-hand-tie.

A triple human "short," as it were, for these three cables spanning the night between Tippingdale mills and Slagville, if they should become momentarily electrified with their 22,000 volts.

But that their electrification in this manner was a thing very much in doubt, was being exemplified by no less than Red, squatting on his heels there in the high-tension shanty, in front of the switchboard, and worriedly watching the glow from those bits of powerhouse leads showing through the crack of the door. The while he pictured, wincingly, on all that would happen to a human fly—on a flytrap connected suddenly to those leads. And wondering drearily why oh why he was being confronted with a decision on a nasty matter like this. "Why, oh why, oh why'n'ell," he was asking himself, "did this guy Laurs'ton hafta be out there on th' line t'night, anyway?—why'n'ell didn't the sunuvabitch get outa town shortly after he come here, th'—th' dam'ed boomer?—why'n'ell did a guy like him, Red, who never killed nobody in his life—cert'ny not old Host, for that 'uz an acc'dent—why'd a guy like him, Red, hafta go an' act'ally kill a guy jest to git him outa th' love-picture?" But right here the memory of all Red had heard on the little porch on Carnegie Road tonight returned—full force!—instantly!—and gripped his alcohol-tinged brain with a set of red-hot fingers.

It was too much, for "Red" McAfee!

"Ya—ya got it comin', ya—ya dirty sunuvabitch!" he cried fiercely. "An' it's—it's all your own dam' fault, too. An' now, s'help me, ya—ya git it!"

And gritting his teeth, Red rose straight up off his very heels, seizing the outflung handle of the switch in the very course



of his upward rise, thrusting it on upward with him over the remainder of his rise, till, standing fully erect himself at last, he continued shoving it on the rest of the distance toward that waiting upper pair of contacts.

And at that same instant, the while those glowing leads, out in the darkness near Red and the tower shanty, continued to pour forth their lethally-bluish luminescence, Kel Lauriston, three miles away, still sprawled out on the wooden crossarm of Pole 147, and still "hooked" across all three of the "phases," was commencing his one-hand-tie of that outside "phase" to its insulator.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### AND—MEANWHILE !

SLEEP refused utterly to come to Myrene Cary's eyes that night. But every few moments the tears silently flowed afresh.

In her tiny upstairs room fronting the mills, she lay, in the semi-dark, tossing back and forth, twisting and turning this way and that, and wondering all the while whether morning would ever come again.

The minutes dragged on. After what seemed to be another infinite chain of unhappy, heart-breaking thoughts, she heard, from the old wall clock downstairs, the single "ting" that announced the hour of but 11.30. 11.30—and not even midnight yet ! Oh, would the night never pass, she wondered dully ? Would morning never come—and bring with it its work and duties that would help toward forgetfulness ?

She could not, she knew, distract herself from her own thoughts by going downstairs and chatting with her father.

For, dog-tired, he had arrived home tonight but a few minutes after she had drawn the front door sadly to on a house containing only herself—so dog-tired, he had thrown himself down on the couch in the parlour—had dropped off almost at once to sleep, to rise only, as she well knew, around pre-dawn, and climb sheepishly into his proper night clothes, his proper bed. No, she could not break into his rest.

But she did spring out of bed, donned her pink silk dressing gown and slippers, and walked miserably over to the rocking chair by the single window. A half-cool breeze was springing up—it penetrated even the little smoke-begrimed screen in

the window—and the breeze seemed to refresh her, to bring a semblance of order into her chaos of conflicting thoughts as nothing else. With her chin in her hand she sat and stared out, over the top of the tall iron fence that hemmed in the plant, but which top was now so definitely below her, toward the distant leaping green and orange pencils of flames from the noses of the giant converters far across the plant, vivid tonight even despite the generous moon that was in the sky ; then, drawing her observation in closer, she stared in turn at the oblong of artificial light that shone forth from the long window of the high-tension shanty, a thousand or so feet off from where she sat.

The gleam from an object silhouetted on her own windowsill caught her eye. She stared at it curiously, uncomprehendingly, for a second—for the gleam was oddly distorted and misshapen—and then suddenly remembered what the object was. It was Kel's pair of field glasses which he had brought with him this night that she might see all the details of his long-promised explanation of things technical. And in his own misery he had swung off from the house this night, utterly forgetting to regain them. Leaving them, in fact, right where she herself had previously dropped them—in the pocket of her sea-green house dress. To be found by her only when she later undressed.

She stretched out her hand and transferred them to her lap, almost as she might his hand—if he were here now. She squeezed the field glasses tenderly—they had been Kel's. And in her unhappy frame of mind at that moment, it seemed to her that they possessed a part, a tiny fragment, as it were, of Kel's own queer yet—to her—lovable personality.

And thus more minutes dragged by. And after she had almost persuaded herself for the second time that the clock downstairs had surely ceased striking, that the mill whistles had blown and she had not even heard them, a medley of weird hollow sounds suddenly vibrated through the air from all corners of the plant. And immediately there followed a diminution of a thousand and one vague noises, resulting from the immediate stoppage of motors and machines that did not form parts of continuous-production processes.

Midnight had come at last !

And now, with the loss of those so-familiar noises, she felt suddenly ghastly alone in the world : a weird something she'd never experienced before, when Kel was part of her life, and



she'd known she would see him again. But now—it was hail and farewell!—and as her mind went drearily over those harsh, realistic facts-to-be-met of her own existence—the things that must be done—not the things she wanted to do!—the minutes continued to drag creepingly by. She knew not how many. She could not even have guessed.

Not even, to be sure, when she looked up for an instant, shifted her position slightly, and then dropped her chin disconsolately in her hand once more. Again the gleam of the field glasses now in her lap was sharply reflected into her brown eyes.

And it was then, and then only, oddly, that she suddenly remembered that Kel was to be out in the country at midnight—or at least just after—working on the Slagville high-tension transmission line. But at the very thought of that transmission line she shuddered. Suppose—suppose—something *should* go wrong? Suppose that Kel should be accidentally—But how foolish—how silly!—even to think of such gruesome things. He had explained to her so painstakingly and detailedly how such an accident was impossible so long as the—the relay-motor switch in the high-tension shanty were thrown open, its blades resting on the lower contacts, its handle padlocked to the lower steel ring, the green indicator light burning, and the whole thing guarded by a trustworthy man. So, of course, nothing *could* happen: and yet—

Again she cast her gaze—though more intently this time than before—toward that brightly lighted window of the high-tension shanty. Which, as the moon became suddenly obscured by a cloud—the forerunner, seemingly, of a larger number to the west—seemed even brighter than before. And which window, under her more resolved surveyal—and despite the smoke-encrusted screen wire between herself and it—showed, limned within itself, though quite some distance from its bottom, the unmistakable and nearly square white oblong that represented the marble switchboard panel and—yes!—even the twinkling green light!—like a veritable star-point from here. She raised the glasses themselves halfway to her eyes—and then, because the breeze had fallen away—and because she realized she was going to be sitting here for many, many, many weary hours tonight—she leaned forward instead, unhooked the screen, which was hinged at its left side, and, giving it a gentle push, sent it swinging leisurely about where it banged

very faintly, but hollowly, against the front of the house. Either the operation *did* make for more breeze—else a really new breeze had sprung up. It did not matter. And once more she raised the glasses to her eyes, but all the way this time, and peered forth again in that same direction where she had been gazing a short while back. But here was finer selectivity, by far ! Complicated, moreover, by a new and sudden erasure of all landmarks out where she gazed, due to a new obscuring of the moon. And, because of all this, she had to turn her head ever so gently from side to side, rock it gently upward, downward, too, before what she sought—or at least a portion thereof!—sprang into clear-cut vision. Which it did of a sudden—or what there was of it in the particular field of vision she had succeeded in obtaining—and which she held rigidly, charily, on to!—the upper half of the window—the marble panel lying off from the window's vertical sides, though practically at the bottom of the picture *she* was viewing—at one side of the panel, a part of that queer illusory half-door!—though merely a reflected door, she well knew, showing itself only in an almost invisible narrow mirror attached to that panel, and—but she was looking now, at the panel itself—and not the ridiculous half-door, nor the vague blurred penumbra underlying the whole picture—for on the panel was the very switch she and Kel had been talking about tonight—hanging with black handle straight down!—padlocked, too!—for there hung the very padlock!—the tiny green bulb, bigger and even brighter now, burned just below that, marking the bottom of the entire picture, as it were—at least the picture she was viewing—and all in that picture seeming no more, at most, than twenty to thirty feet distant.

Swinging the glasses micrometrically from side to side, yet without in the least altering their up and down level, she found that she could not, for some odd reason, as earlier tonight, catch the cluster of bright, overhanging electric bulbs which had shown in that cunningly pivoted mirror-within-the-mirror ; but realized almost instantly why this must be so : she was slightly higher up now than when she had been on the porch roof below, and thus was entirely off the angle of that mirror-within-the-mirror ; would therefore, no doubt, from this higher vantage point, be able to see more of the floor of that little cubicle than she had earlier. And because she had an inquiring mind, she lowered the angle of the glasses, again



micrometrically gently. And did indeed see the floor—much of it—but on that floor something which struck her with a strange, tingling sense of dread and bewilderment.

For the lone occupant of the high-tension shanty—at least the supposedly lone occupant it was supposed to have during these operations—was lying on his back on the floor, looking upward, strangely immobile.

She could not see his feet, nor his knees, for he was lying diagonally so that they disappeared, cut off as it were by the low windowsill. She saw only his hips and blueshirted torso, shoulders and head, the latter, so she judged, a couple of feet off from one of the iron legs of the switch panel; she could not even see the hand of the outflung arm closest to her, since that hand was cut off by the window edge. But she saw his face—an elderly face, it was, with folds or—or wattles under its chin—saw his face perfectly—saw it mostly sidewise, to be sure, yet partly from above, too. And he was gazing upward so strangely—so—so——

Was he resting, she wondered vaguely, on the floor, thus—because of nothing to sit on?—Or—or could he have been taken suddenly ill? Or could—could it be possible that—oh surely not, surely not that! And yet—yet he lay so strangely still—in such a sinister position. Almost as though—as though——

Of course—as well she knew!—she should run downstairs—should telephone across this gulf—ask for the—the—the Slagville high-tension shanty—yes, that was its official name—split the silence in that little room by a telephone ring—or—or even ask the mills central if everything could be all right there. *But*—the Cary telephone service—was cut off! And theirs—the only phone on the phone line extension—in this entire neighbourhood. So-o-o—no simple checking up of this curious situation this way. Hardly!

But as she stared on, the glasses encompassing the entire window expanse in their now lowered position, her consternation growing greater and greater all the while, something occurred which broke the tableau completely. The door—the half-door—the illusory half-door which was but a reflection at the panel side!—flew violently open, and a man—or rather a half a man who quickly, as he moved more fully into the mirror, became a nearly full width man!—lurched in. On his face was anger and fury supreme, and even his mouth was

wide open like a man ready to bellow something forth. And she saw in an instant that it was Peter—unmistakably so—Peter McAfee ! But what—what was he doing in the plant—at this time of night ?

Fascinated, not daring to move her body by the slightest degree lest the scene suddenly shift from the field of view, she watched Peter McAfee. She saw him staring, still open-mouthed, from where evidently he stood ; saw him then, as his mouth closed suddenly, open his lips in the utterance of some ejaculation which she could not make out.

And now he vanished sharply from the picture, being, after all, but a reflected thing ; and having obviously moved off the reflecting mirror. Except that, but the fraction of a second later, he appeared back in the picture again, but this time no reflection—for he was standing by the recumbent figure's side, then dropping almost instantly to his knees thereby, and, fortunately for her opportunity to see all that was happening, kneeling just on the other side of the silent body, between it and the switchboard legs. So that she could watch the whole puzzling unfoldment of things. And which she proceeded, fascinatedly, to do.

He seemed, however, not to be contemplating the still figure so much as something—something perhaps in the latter's outflung hand. But which she could not see. She did see him, however, throw back his head and twist his neck so as to gaze up at the switch panel. Why, she could not imagine. But he must have been half satisfied about something, for he passed a hand over his forehead—at least judging from the movements of its elbow, visible to her in his half-turned position, and brought his gaze back to the quiet figure in front of him.

And now he did the obvious thing ! For he leaned over—put his ear to the supine man's chest. Held it there for a number of seconds. Raised up again. Took hold—yes !—of the supine man's hand closest to him—was plainly feeling for a pulse.

But soon he dropped the hand. What did it mean ? That the man—the man was dead ? Or that—but it must be, she realized now, that Peter was not satisfied at all, at all, for now he leaned slightly over, took hold of the supine man's open blue shirt, plainly open slightly at the neck, and ripped it forcibly apart.

Except that, having accomplished this—he appeared a bit



startled at something. What could it be? But whatever it was, it—but now Peter McAfee was trying all over again for a heart sound—yes, he had leaned over again. Was pressing his ear firmly once more against the supine man's chest. Was again listening. Evidently again hearing nothing, or else—at least he now raised his free arm and put his fingertip in his uppermost ear as though to shut out the low rumble of the mills. He kept his low ear where it was, however; then suddenly and finally, removing his fingertip from his uppermost ear, raised up. Still acting bewilderedly, however, for he gave a half shake of his head as he gazed at the figure.

But now some silent, salient something escaped his lips like an ejaculation—like the explosive utterance of a man who had suddenly grasped a hitherto unseen set of facts. Indeed, the silent, salient something looked very much like—like “Jee—!” And Peter McAfee appeared now to be half-nodding, as he continued to gaze at the figure. Nodding like a man who was regarding it under an entirely new light. Like—

Indeed, he seemed to be painfully reconstructing something—something in his own mind. For he kept punctuating it here and there by a half nod. And finally gave a half-philosophic gesture with his two hands indicating that something was completely, entirely clear to him now—even explainable. So much so that—

Indeed, he was rising to his feet. Unsteadily, however. And it suddenly dawned on the watching girl that he was drunk! Yes, that was it, she now concluded. He'd probably sobered a bare bit at first sight of what he'd found—but that had been fleeting. He had come there drunk and fighting angry. Except that the man he'd come to quarrel with was—

And fascinated, she watched Peter McAfee.

His back was to her now. And he was apparently looking downward. She almost knew why! He—he was figuring which of those two phones to use to call the hospital—the power house—the—except that now he raised a knee savagely—thrust it forward—the illusory half-door that seemed to lie within the switchboard panel vanished—and she vaguely comprehended that he must have catapulted that mirror, so fortuitous for her in the beginning of things, around on its pivots out of the way. Why?—but no matter. She watched him, wishing she could hear the illuminating words he was now about to speak into one of the phones.

Except that—he did not pick up a phone ! Either confused or something, he seemed to have raised his head—to be contemplating the switch panel. And then——

She saw him draw out his big silver watch, and apparently gaze at the face of it. Then, apparently gaze at the switch panel again. She felt thoughts going through his head. That was all. She actually felt them ! Felt them even more when he turned about, his face black as a thundercloud, the muscles of it all twisted and tightly drawn and his lips moving in indistinguishable words, and gazed down at the man on the floor. And when suddenly he turned rightward and shook his fist out—out toward Slagville—she knew—absolutely knew !—that a man insane with alcohol, or rage, or both, stood in front of that switchboard, talking to himself—talking——

With something in her heart akin to terror, she watched him standing there—obscuring the greater part of the switchboard panel—that switchboard panel which, she well knew, controlled the life of a man working out on the Slagville transmission line this very moment. And when she noted Peter's lower right arm vanish, obscured perhaps by his upper arm—and the very top edge of the switchboard seemed to sway forward ever so slightly—she knew instinctively that he was pulling fiercely at something on it—and her heart went dead. For what else—what else could it be?—but that switch—that locked switch ? And when his lower leg disappeared—showing he'd raised his knee—and the top edge of the panel seemed to sway even more definitely towards her—she absolutely knew that Peter was pulling at nothing else than that locked switch—and his intentions broke in on her consciousness with startling, paralyzing clarity. Her tense feelings even gave way in a frightened cry :

“Kel—Kell !” she choked. “He's—he's trying to— Oh Kel, can't you——”

She stopped. Something had gone wrong ! That seemingly so-flimsily-locked switch must have been locked indeed. For Peter had stepped off from it. Was stepping across the room—across the body—towards the window. Though she wasn't watching him. She was watching that switchboard panel. The switch, however, was completely unchanged. Still down—still locked !—still was the green light burning. A cry of relief broke from her. Nothing could be done in this place that could injure——



So she swung her eyes back to Peter. He was in the window—low in it—silhouetted more or less—gazing out. Figuring—yes, that *must* be it!—figuring to summon somebody he'd heard—in the vicinity. Yes, that was it! Figuring to hallo to somebody—Figuring—

But the triumph she had felt a moment back—and the relief she'd just felt at her own hypothesis—were both short-lived. For now she was to see that all her theories were wrong—except one. And that one—that Peter McAfee intended to electrocute—to burn alive—the man she loved!

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### NIGHTMARE !

FOR as the scene suddenly sharpened—due, though she knew it not, to complete passage of the moon back of a solid bank of coalesced cloud—Peter McAfee stepped back across the body on the floor, dropped to his knees right where he had knelt before—between switchboard legs and—and dead man—and thrust a hand in that dead man's pocket.

This, she knew, cold with fright, was not the thing he ought to be doing—at a moment like this. No! For—but his hand had emerged. Empty. And now, leaning forward over the body, one hand flat on floor, he was trying the other pocket. And as his hand now emerged, holding a bunch of keys, she knew beyond all doubts, beyond all hesitancies, that she was seeing a dream that was to end exactly like that horrible one which she had witnessed three years ago. And she was absolutely impotent to stop it by one iota in its hideous progress, to divert Peter from his purpose by persuasion, by threats, by rousing the nearest mill hands, or even by throwing herself on him tooth and nail.

He seemed to be just a bit staggered by the thing he'd found. Even thus simply—and no more—a bunch of keys. Why? When—but with her heart now beating a tattoo against her breast, and her breath coming in short, quick gasps, she watched him rise to his feet, turn, and stand in front of the panel, his elbow jerking this way and that. Keys—bunch of keys—he was trying keys out! And when he'd found the correct one— Wildly, she ran over a dozen expedients to cut short

this horrible nightmare. Phoneless, as her home was tonight, she could scream at the top of her voice ; she could run panting to Executives' Gate, several blocks distant ; she could cross Carnegie Road to the tall sheet-iron fence and beat furiously on it with clenched fists ; she could awaken her father sleeping underneath her ; she could—but all this must consume endless, endless time. And the dream was rushing to its conclusion before her very eyes.

And then, like a streak of lightning from a dark sky, came an idea that staggered her in its possibilities. The little room, back of hers, on that upper floor, had been Russ's. It had remained untouched, unopened, during the several years since his death. The high-power repeating rifle which he had used to end all his troubles had been replaced on the wall, just as it had been taken from his poor, dead hands. He had taught her—he had taught her how to—. If it were in her possession now—and if she could only aim truly enough at that anger-crazed, drink-crazed figure in the high-tension shanty—enough to—to—to wound him—even to kill him before he had gone too far, it might yet be possible to—

She wasted no more valuable time in thinking about the possibilities that lay in Russ's repeating rifle. Instead, she hurriedly placed the field glasses on the windowsill and darted from her room, across the tiny hallway, and into the dust-covered room that once had been her brother's. She did not even try, in this so-electricalless house, to make for the coal-oil lamp that used to stand somewhere in here—for even if she found it, and matches nearby, its oil would, she knew, long, long since have been evaporated. And besides—Gropingly, instead, she felt along the wall where that rifle had hung in the old days—still hung today. And after what seemed an interminable time—was, indeed, a full half minute, had she been able to time it—her fingers closed suddenly on the rifle's shiny, varnished stock and its cold barrel.

Back she flew, with it, to her own window. With the rifle held tightly under one arm, she snatched up the field glasses and directed them out across the mill fence. The moon, she had noted, even as she did so, was gone—completely so !—so that her only landmark now was the very thing she was trying to focus on. But with a little gasp of fright, she found that she could not now train the glasses on the proper place. This way, that way, she turned them frantically in every direction



—then suddenly picked up the scene—and discovered, at the same instant, that she had been one hundred-and-one-per cent. right in her theory about Peter's intentions! And yet—not too late. The padlock was gone—the switch had been pulled away from its lower contacts—those contacts which, as Kel had explained to her tonight, lighted up that green bulb—proclaiming—proclaiming a dead transmission line!—yet that switch had not been yet thrown—upward—to those upper contacts—no, it stood, out halfway from the panel in readiness—yes, that was it!—in readiness!—but not yet thrown—to those upper contacts—which would light up a red bulb. For the red bulb was *not* burning. As it would have been, she knew, if——

And as her gaze sought for Peter in this scene, it came clear to her *why* it had not yet been thrown. For he was on his knees again by that body—restoring the keys—clumsily. He intended—yes, that was it!—to get out of there quickly, swiftly—after doing his dastardly work. He intended—she watched him fascinatedly: he pirouetted about on his heels—sat squatting below the level of the switch panel—like a man thinking—thinking—thinking of exactly what he would do once he threw that switch—which gate he would go out—what explanation he would offer concerning this weird “accident,” later—what——

She snatched the glasses quickly from her eyes, and crouched down by the windowsill; once in position there, she relinquished her grasp altogether on them, the glasses tumbling with a slight bump to the floor; now, with an additional hand free, she raised the rifle quickly, and steadied it on the windowsill. Operating by unaided vision only now, she had to train it first on the oblong of light coming from the high-tension shanty window, and then, her eyes becoming accustomed to that, took careful aim at the gleaming white switch panel within it, that now showed up no larger, seemingly, than a sticker of paper.

And as she waited thus, realizing that this dreadful situation had roared on into its final dreadful phase, her heart pounding so forcibly within her that she could feel it in every portion of her body, an appalling thought flashed across her mind—caused her to waver—to release her pressure on the trigger. Should—should anything happen to Peter, the mortgage that was in his possession must revert to his only relative, Dan McAfee.

And in that case—the latter would take over this house with no compunctions whatsoever. And would—but as she floundered hopelessly through the mazes of this second problem that had so suddenly confronted her, a figure, diminutive at the distance, yet nevertheless of the precise shape of the head and shoulders of a man, rose swiftly across the panel from below—from directly below—almost like a jack-in-the-box silhouette—obscured the very panel——

This—this was the moment, she knew! And with a sickening, clutching sensation at her heart—and scarcely realizing what she was doing—she drew her finger tight on that trigger—as tight as she could. A sharp crack sounded instantaneously—a puff of smoke wafted upward.

But she had heard no sound, and saw no smoke, for she had crumpled in a dead faint on the floor.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### NEW DAY !

IN a sunny second-story room looking out on the mills, a man, clad in a grey flannel shirt laced loosely at the neck with a thong, and coarse working trousers, was seated, on a small three-legged stool, by the bedside of a girl with deep brown eyes and dark hair that curled into jet ringlets on her white forehead. The bed, adorned with a large-checked green and maroon coverlet, was an old-time light-hued wooden one; the soft-wood floor of the room was carpeted with but two longish rugs.

In the doorway stood an older man, in a black shirt, with drooping white moustaches, watching the tableau with troubled blue eyes; one of his sleeves hung empty. And he was speaking, but to the girl.

“Now, honey, you *must* be patient about getting up—I know it’s close on to ten in the morning—but you’ve had a shock—” An expert in pure phonetics, listening to the speaker, would have probably been a bit nonplussed by the fact that the one-armed man used words which were homely and spoken in the unmistakable American small-town manner, yet which possessed, many of them, a far-from-lost British accent. “You’ve had a shock,” the one-armed man was



continuing to the girl, "atop the most awful dose of sleeping medicine ever handed out by a—an idiot like me; and the doctor says you most positively aren't to get up till noontime today. And that's—that's why, when I brought you up that basin of warm wash-water a few minutes back, and that big cup of black coffee, and the announcement that this very gentleman visitor that you've got now, was waiting downstairs to see you, that I—I locked the door of your clothes closet—so's you'd have to follow doctor's orders. See?" He seemed to try to smile reassuringly with his tired eyes. "And so now I'm going to leave you with your visitor—who'll maybe assure you of all I haven't been able to."

And, turning abruptly on his heel, he left the doorway, the sound of his feet crunching down a stairway sounding a moment after.

The girl in the bed turned to the man on the stool beside her.

"Kel," she asked fiercely, her eyes seeming to pierce him through and through as though searching for an answer which she knew would not be forthcoming. "I suppose I ought to feel awfully embarrassed—lying here in a nightgown!—like an invalid or—or what—with a man in the room—but strangely, Kel dear, I never could feel like that around you, since—but Kel, is it—is it really and truly true—that I did not—kill Peter?" She regarded him so troubledly. "Father has told me that over and over—as well as some other facts—but he would do that, Kel, just to comfort me in case— Is it—true?"

"Of course it's true," he affirmed. "Though I guess you'll never believe it till you've seen Red in the flesh again. No, he's not dead—and he's in no danger of dying. The bullet, Myrene, caught him under the collar bone, and he's resting quietly in the company hospital at this very moment."

She shuddered perceptibly. Noticing the tremor of her figure, he reached out and squeezed a hand that itself was unconsciously clutching at the edge of the counterpane.

"Why, Myrene," he went on, trying to reassure her further, "you pulled that trigger just in time! The blades of that relay motor switch were within a quarter of an inch of those upper contacts when Red obviously dropped squarely at the foot of the panel." He thought on the matter for a moment, shaking his head. "Who-ho!" his thoughts ran, "what a fatal jolt *that* would have been! A full twenty-two thousand volts—through yours trul-ee!" But he began to smile again

in spite of the seriousness of his own reflections. "But all that part, Myrene, you've heard from your father. Suppose—suppose I tell you the whole thing just as young Sweetboy—that's the kid who was helping me—and I experienced it?"

She nodded vehemently. "Yes. Father has only told me a few of the facts—both before I took that sleep medicine, and after I came awake a few minutes back and was trying not only to wash in the washbasin he brought up, but drink the cup of coffee he brought up with it! But even those facts I can hardly believe, Kel. I feel that you're—you're trying to make things brighter than they really are—just to give me peace of mind."

He laughed a cheery, hearty laugh. "We-e-ell, to tell you the truth—I hain't made 'em even as bright as they actually are!"

"As bright—as they actually are?" she repeated wonderingly. "I—I don't just understand. I——"

"Now don't waste your precious energy trying to talk," he commanded firmly. "They say a nervous shock is—exactly like a short-circuit—of one's own energies. And like a—anyway, you lie right quiet where you are, so that you can recover all the sooner from the shock you *have* had. And let me do the talking. And I'll give you the story—and all one hundred per cent. true!—as it took place with respect to—me."

She was waitingly expectant. So he began.

"Well, after finishing tying that third 'phase' to the last insulator last night, I climbed down off the cross-arm that I was sprawled out on, and came down the pole as far as the telephone lines. I lowered my handline, and the kid helper sent up the portable phone. I hooked the clips on the right pair, gave a good, vigorous twist for the high-tension shanty. But—no answer! I kept on repeating the same ring and listening between each operation of the magneto handle. And just as I came to the conclusion that that particular phone line must be down somewhere between Pole 147 and the Plant, I heard a voice in the receiver that sounded mighty familiar."

"'Tom Cary talking,' said that voice hurriedly!" And Kel added explanatorily: "Your father—as no doubt you now know." And added even furthermore: "How he, of all persons in Tippingdale or out, had ever gotten on the end of that line was too much for me! Maybe even you don't know all about that yourself, yet?" He regarded her



troubledly, and then went on. "But in case you don't, we'll come to the 'how' of it shortly." And now he went on with the exact words that had tumbled into his ear from that phone last night. "'But,' your father said, 'I can't talk to you— whoever you are—or call anybody to the phone for you— because there's been a—a double accident—in the high-tension shanty. And I've got to get hold of the hospital or something—to fetch the night doctor.'" And he hung up," Kel finished grimly, "with a sharp click.

"Well," Kel went on, "you can just wager that the kid and I swung our stuff aboard that waiting handcar, and pumped for dear life. We didn't roll over those rails, Myrene—we just flew through the air, that's all! The gate man, happening to have stepped outside, saw us coming from afar—he slid open the gate for our track—and we shot across the railyards—through the gate—and up the stretch of line that leads to the handcar shanty like—like—well!—write your own metaphors! We piled off and headed for the high-tension shanty. And somewhere off from it bumped into your father, and the night acting doc., whom he'd come out to meet. A young chap named Staymate. Well, all four of us piled up and into the high-tension shanty, and let me tell you it was a shock for Sweetboy and me, at any rate. For Host Joly, the old man who'd been 'covering' for me, lay stretched out on the floor on his back—and Red—well, Red was crumpled up at the foot of the switch panel in a little pool of blood, and——"

"Not—not dead?" the girl breathed.

"For the millionth, trillionth time," he assured her, "not dead! He was only semi-conscious, at most, and in a stuporous way that made it nearer *unconsciousness* than consciousness, and groaning a bit. And—but it was then that the kid spied the switch, and called the attention of all of us to it. Your father, looking at it, too, assured us that for such time as he'd been in the place—and which never had gotten explained yet!—he had never noticed it, or looked at it, much less touched it. And—well good Godfrey!—but I was certainly staggered. A bare eighth of an inch more, I think, and that transmission line to Slagville would have been what you called it last evening—three strands of living death."

He paused a bare moment, and then went immediately on.

"Well, this medico, Staymate, propped Red up against the wall, and enlisted my help in cutting away his shirt and

underclothing. After we had uncovered the clean bullet hole at his collar bone, Staymate staunched the flow of blood, and sent the boy back to the hospital for a pair of men and the stretchers. For that No Man's Land is sure no-o-o place, at night, for any ambulance! And with this taken care of, Staymate turned his attention to Host July.

"But old Host, Myrene, was done for. There wasn't a mark on him—not a wound. But having told me only that evening that he had 'fibrous myocarditis'—which didn't mean much to me—I was able to throw some light on that. For it seems it meant puhlenty much!—to the medics around there! For with a condition like that he could just have dropped dead; again, he could have dropped dead quicker—if that be possible—from bad news. And it seems the company night switchboard girl remembers a call for him around midnight, made by someone who knew the shanty's number was forty-five; she tapped in a bare instant on the conversation—heard something about 'Six-six-six having confessed to some crime'—and took herself out of the circuit for another call. Well, though Red denies he was the caller, we can assume plainly he was—for he would very likely have called up about the job—he plainly was riled as—as all get-out—started ragging old Host the way Red can—probably ladelled him out far, far too much for his old heart—and bang!"

Kel stopped, shaking his head.

"Assuming Red did send him to his death, 'twas still—an accident. For Red knew nothing about the heart disease nor—as Staymate puts it—the 'mechanics of the coronary arteries.' But when Red did what he did, he certainly, at the same time, sent his own Destiny into a cocked hat, didn't he? The old Hindu Law of Karma with a vengeance—yes, no, and yowsah!"

A brief silence fell and it was the girl who broke it.

"But Kel, you are telling me, you know, what happened last night—from your angle of things."

He came sharply back to himself.

"Oh yes, yes, yes, of course. Well," he resumed, "your father, who appeared terribly worried and distraught and all that, made it quite clear that he had no intentions what-so-ever of illumining the strange matter of why he was up there in the shanty, or how he'd even gotten up there and summoned help and all, in any but the presence of a plant official or officials;



and so Staymate and I had to let *that* go by the board—for the more important matters. For one thing, I got into communication, of course, with both the Power House and the Slagville switchboard, via both phones, and then tossed the power back onto the Slagville line. For you know the old saying, gal—the mails must go on!—well, the cement must grind!” He grinned reassuringly. “Or, putting it in short, hard langwidge, I ‘made the line hot.’ Was ready about then, in fact, to help lug Red across No Man’s Land to the hospital, where he got put into bed. And after which, I went straight to the offices.

“And where, of course—or as soon as Hogg and Hiatt got there—Hogg?—oh, he’s the Eastern directorial Big Squeeze who’s been sort of taking over, in this Wilhelmina Kee murder—yes—well anyway, soon as Hogg and Hiatt got there—and which was puhlently fast, in view of a curious angle involved in Red’s—ah—accident at your hands—the matter got fully cleared up—so far, that is, as your father’s involvement was concerned. For he, it seems, had meantime vanished—had come back home here!—by the same curious way he got over there—to check up on some things—chiefly, you!—and had then come back to the mills again. By way, however, of the gate. And this—was your father’s story.”

He gazed at her questioningly, wondering just how much of it she knew, and then decided he might as well cover it, such as it was, in its entirety.

“It seems,” he set forth, “that your father was awakened, on the couch below your room here, by the midnight mill whistles—halfway so, anyway—as he says he always is. And while figuring whether to continue to lie there—or to get up and get into bed—he heard the peculiar sharp crack of a rifle—and a noise from your room here like—like something falling. Well, he did get up fast!—rushed upstairs—called to you, and got no answer—hurriedly lit the lamp yonder—and there you were, lying in a heap by the window. Of course he saw the repeating rifle—the field glasses, too. Not to mention the screenlessness of that window! And he admits he got an awful shock momentarily—before he put two, and two, and two together, and got a six; he thought you’d done something to yourself; but when he examined you, he saw that you had obviously merely fainted. Fainted from something you had evidently been looking at—through those glasses—something—

"He wisely left you as you were," Kel now went on. "By that I mean, of course," he added, hurriedly, as he noted pained puzzlement go over her face, "that since you were already down on the floor, he saw to it that your head remained right there at the level of your shoulders—in short, left you that way. The only thing, as *he* knows, from being around plants, to do with a person—in a faint. And he levelled those field glasses himself out toward the plant. To the only thing place and thing he figured you could have been looking at—the bright window of the high-tension shanty. And when he directed them on that spot, he saw something that showed him that two men—not one, but two!—had met with some kind of catastrophe that maybe had killed both. In his confusion of mind at the moment, he—he doped out, as he later related the affair, that the mills killer had been at work—and that you, through the field glasses, had seen him—had taken a shot at him—had——

"But he didn't try to figure the weird thing out. Just then. He put the field glasses and rifle quickly out of sight, ran downstairs, and rapped on the door of your neighbour, Mrs. Wiewora, next door. She was a trained nurse once in Poland—before she came to America with her man. Well, Mrs. Jadwiga Wiewora was, so it seems, nursing her insomnia—she was at the door at once, in her bathrobe—and when he told her you'd fainted—and also that an accident had happened in the mills—and asked her to take over, she was glad to hop to this little—ah—divertisement! In fact, she was over and into your house even as he was pulling out a long ladder lying in the Wiewora gangway—lugging it across Carnegie Road there—and going up it, atop the fence. After which, straddling the spiles on the fence with the sides of his feet, he sashayed the ladder up edgewise, right through and between a pair of spiles, over, and down—not bad work for a one-armed man, I'll say!—and was down it, on the other side. And soon stumbling across dark No Man's Land across which he'd looked. He skinned his shins plenty, he said; in fact, caught the works! But at last he burst up into the high-tension shanty. And just about that very moment heard my ringing on the phone line. Which he answered. And which—but all after that you already know, Myrene. Enough, I guess, for me just to say that he skinned straight back home—while Red was being taken to the hospital—found you put safely



into bed here—heard your brief story to him, the while Mrs. Wiewora stepped home a few moments, about what happened in here—assured you, or tried to, that Red wasn't dead and wasn't going to die!—and then—well, guess I'll have to take back what I said about him being a good accident man!”—Kel was smiling, however, revealing he was not being so all-out critical as he sounded—“for the one teaspoonful of your mother's sleeping medicine that he poured out to calm you—well, it seems he gave you enough to send you into Sleepland till now—or nearly now. With the result that—you just don't know nothin' about an'thing, do you? Such as—f'r instance—certain confabbing—and confabulating—that's been going on all night—atwixt Hogg and Hiatt and self and——”

“Are—are they—Mr. Hogg—and Mr. Hiatt—going to prosecute me?” asked the girl fearfully, raising herself slightly up in bed on one elbow. “Prosecute me—for injuring one of their foremen?”

“Prosecute you?” Lauriston laughed. “Well, hardly, considering the position of that switch—a quarter of an inch from those upper contacts. And as to injuring one of the plant's foremen, I'm afraid poor Red will never hold a foremanship there again.”

He was fumbling, as he spoke, in the deep pocket of his grey flannel shirt, and even drawing forth a folded oblong of salmon-coloured paper. Which, unfolding, he tossed lightly on the checkered coverlet of the bed, watching the girl's face curiously all the while.

She picked it up. Was staring at it. Then she looked at him in amazed bewilderment.

“Why Kel—a cheque—for 1203.61 dollars? Payable to you? I don't under—”

“Turn it over,” he suggested gravely.

She did. Becoming thus able to read what had been written on the end of the reverse side, and which ran:

Pay to the order of Myrene Cary  
Kel Lauriston

“Payable—to me?” she echoed helplessly. “But I—I don't understand, Kel. I just——”

“Well, it just all means,” he said slowly, “that what you did last night solved—as sure as God made little fishes—one

of the meanest industrial problems this great mills ever had. For you definitely and conclusively uncovered, last night, no less—than The Nipper. And in so doing——”

“The—Nipper?” she exclaimed aghast. “Oh, dear Kel, Kel—don’t tell me that Peter—a man who was a friend to me—was the saboteur—and murderer of——”

“No,” he said firmly. “Red was the saboteur—who has been helping to cause these mills to lose a many-million-dollars contract to Japan. *The Nipper*, yes—as he and Turnbo were accustomed to call the party—and as the *Evening Bugle* themselves last night referred to him—which is doubtlessly why you speak of him thus. But Red is not the killer of Wilhelmina Kee, any more than—well—than he’s a certain ‘“*Mr.*” Nipper’—and who, I regrets to say, is m’self! And to get m’self quickly and immejitly outa this Nipper miasmy, I’ll explanation my words by saying merely that, some couple of months ago, I sent to McCentry Gord’s, the big mail-order house up at Chicago, an inquiry about a certain breast-drill made in Germany only, but gave ’em only the name ‘*Mr. A. B. Nipper, General Delivery,*’ this burg. Yeah, I’d had an epistolary arg’mnt with ’em some months before about a defective tool they sent me—didn’t want ’em to know this troublemaker was inquiring now. And—anyway, I destroyed their letter—but not their envelope. And which later came in handy, one noon, to make a scorching caricature of Red on the back of—only I had to go and lose the envelope in the toolroom—he had to find it—and has had it on his desk ever since under a paperweight, and has been, it seems, seething to find who in the gang was ‘*Mr.*’ Nipper—who drew his phiz puhlenty uncomplimentary-like. And——

“But Red, Myrene,” Kel broke off suddenly, “was *The Nipper*—yes!—the person who’s been the saboteur. And never in the least worried, either, as it now appears, that when Turnbo would lose his job because of the efficiency drop around here, Red would naturally lose his foremanship, under a new construction supe. For Red, it seems, has had a standing offer for some many months, from his own brother, to do the legwork around town on the salary and wages loans—you know?—put the fear o’ God into the borrower’s heart and all that?—and so Red’s had nothing to lose—everything to gain, in helping these mills here lose this big contract to Japan.

“And which,” Kel continued, “he’s been helping to happen



ever since shortly after the date when that puppet royal 'dictator' of China, Hung Lu Fong, died—you remember that, I'm sure?—Hung died, remember, during early March this year?—yes!—well, at Hung's death only, Myrene, there came to light, then and then only, the existence of a contract which would throw the virtual steel rebuilding of China to this Company. But only providing this company's so-called output efficiency were thus and so. Or was, in brief, a certain magic rating of  $A + .37$ . And Red—well, Red has been operating as a paid saboteur to prevent that figure being reached. But, on the other hand, Myrene, he's *not* the killer—in this case. The killer being, of course, the man who employed him."

She was gazing helplessly again—but helplessly—at the check.

"But I—I don't understand—I don't——"

"Well it's just," Kel said gravely, "that Hogg, late yesterday, in a highly legalistic effort to keep the mills completely out of any reward offerings, called in our estimable town bankers, Mr. Schmidt and Mr. Carheinkle, and put into trust—as a reward officially commencing at midnight last night—\$1200. Rather—\$1203.61, as you can easily deduce. And which represents a refund he'd received months ago from Uncle Sam on his—yes, Hogg's—income-tax payment for last March. And which—Uncle Sam's refund cheque, I mean—has been lying amongst his desk trash in New York for months, the while he figured what to do with it. For 'twas velvet, see? Nice stuff, velvet! 'Specially in the upper hundreds. What really matters is the way that contract-trust reward agreement got worded. For 'twas made payable to such person as uncovered the evidence which would lead to the killer. And what you did last night—well, when you uncovered Red as The Nipper, you uncovered a cryptic something that——"

He stopped downright embarrassedly.

"Kel, Kel," she chided him, "you—you hate to tell me something—because it reflects a little credit on *you*. But you know—I'll find out all about it. Now tell me—or——"

He was red all over.

"Well," he said reluctantly, "the bank maintains that 'twas really I who have qualified for the reward because—well—because some moronic brainwork I allegedly did in the case!—brainwork not really worthy of a half-witted louse—pinned Red's work conclusively to his superior. So much so that Red,

who up to then had been standing stubbornly against revealing his superior's identity, even though Red had told practically all his own connections with things—standing on a most weird and specious story—but so dawgoned stubbornly, Myrene, that he wouldn't come clean even when he'd been promised a complete clearance for himself in this mess, providing only that he include his superior's identity in his 'squawk'; and—however, in the face of what I—er—what got upturned towards morning, Red just *had* to give, then—tell all—lay ever'thing on the line. Oh," Kel now explained as patiently as he could, "the man back of it hasn't been arrested yet—no—for the reason that—however, Red's complete and signed confession—and *this* certain piece of evidence—writes *finis* so completely to the career of the man who's been employing Red, that all's over but the—however," Kel broke off, "these darnfool bankers, though they admitted to Hogg that the reward had been 'copped,' yet said they dared not pay off wrongly. I say—and so would anybody who had even a handful of dried peas rattling about in his skull in place of a thinktank—that you are indisputably and beyond any doubts the cause of writing *finis* to this case—when you dropped Red in his tracks, so that we found—bah," he broke off, angry even with himself, "to—to end the darnfool argument, I just made 'em pay *me* the fool cheque—but endorsed it over to you. For I wouldn't cash it—or accept even a five-smacker bill out of it—if 'twas the last thing I ever did. So it's endorsed over to you. And in that way, the bank is happy—I am—you satisfied, I hope?—and—well, what the heck?"

He grinned painfully at her, still red.

"Then, Kel, you have—you have—" She could not finish. "I know you well enough, Kel, to know that you've washed your hands of this cheque, and that—" She stopped again. "Well, we can go back to it later." She slid it, at least for the time being, as appeared, under the wide turned-over hem of the checkered coverlet. And looked at him fearfully now. And spoke, fearfully. "But do you really, *really* mean, Kel, that Peter—is not the killer—of Wilhelmina Kee?"

"That's right," he nodded. "And I imagine you'll be exceedingly surprised—when I tell you who is destined to stand, on the State gallows, for the murder of that little creature!"



## CHAPTER XXX

CONCERNING A CERTAIN MYSTERIOUS  
MR. "VAN SUTCLIFFE PETWYNE"

"You see," Lauriston went on, after but the briefest of pauses, "when we cut away Red's shirt and underclothing last night, we came across a small bloodstained chamois-skin bag that was strung about his neck. The doctor naturally ran a couple of fingers inside of it—kind of a curious secret-like repository, don't you know?—and drew forth, Myrene, something that proved to be a cheque—a private cheque, incidentally—privately printed, you know?—with the drawer's name and business and all printed along its top, and all that?—well, it was for \$1500, drawn on the New York City Day-Night Mail Bank, and to Peter McAfee, by the man who'd had the cheque printed—the man whose name and business was at the top on it: one, van Sutcliffe Petwyne. The business being set down, incidentally, as Technological Production Control."

"Technolog—Production—Control?" the girl exclaimed. "Meaning—" She stopped.

"The dawgonedest fanciest word I've ever heard," said Kel, shaking his head, "to cover the hard word sabotage! And printed right in on that cheque—and others—so that anybody cashing one would place himself additionally right behind the 8-ball."

"Van Sutcliffe—Petwyne?" the girl said helplessly. "It—it sounds like the name of an actor!"

"Doesn't it?" was Kel's quiet response. "And I wouldn't be at all surprised, from what I know about the set-up of this case, that van Sutcliffe Petwyne can do a mighty fine Hamlet. Since—but about this cheque. It was also marked, at its bottom, in such a way that cashed, or deposited, it incriminated its payee definitely: for it said, 'For professional stoppage work current month, and, being dated yesterday, it was obviously for this month now closing—and obviously a kick-in while things were a bit hot around here. It——'"

"But how, Kel," the girl asked impulsively, "could Peter—have cashed such a thing without incriminating himself?"

"Oh," said Kel, "he didn't care that he was incriminated. That's part of any criminal game. All he had to worry about

was that he shouldn't be incriminated here, in Tippingdale, in the State, in the—well, to make matters brief, Myrene, he'd endorsed that cheque on the back, for deposit only, and by mail, to an account of his which he evidently had in Montreal, Canada. I remember he once said he worked up there for half a year—and so, you see, when he got these items, he just mailed 'em in—to a point far, far away. From where, according to his subsequent confession, he later on drew the monies out in various ways."

"But where," the girl asked, "does this man van Sutcliffe Petwyne, who has the account in New York, live at present? Or—or weren't you allowed in on such matters by Mr. Hiatt and Mr. Hogg—being only an employee?"

"Heck, gal," Kel smiled wryly, "they just had to take me in on ever'thing—all the way—because I, you see, happen to be completely in as to *why* this sabotage has been going on. A letter I received from a fellow who'd been in post-war Japan and—but being in also on the very finding of this cheque—well, I was in, then, from A to Izzard. Perhaps," Kel now added, ironically, "that was the simplest way to keep me from going out and phoning the entire yarn to some newspaper—before things were properly worked out. Of course," he added, again wryly, "since 'twas my halfwits that cracked Red, I suppose they're glad they kept me in, heh?"

The girl's only answer was a faint but understanding smile. So Kel answered her last question concerning the man with the printed name Petwyne.

"But where, you asked, does this man van Sutcliffe Petwyne live? Well, the New York bank being a day-night bank—and Hogg being, on top of that, a sort of silent and honorary and never-there di-rect-or of it!—all this was something that was easily elicitable by long-distance phone. And it's a mail bank as well as a day-night bank. And what they had to tell their di-rect-or was that the account in question was opened by mail some years back—by a supposed then-invalid, living in Newark—who gave two references, both of whom proved later to be dead—and who satisfied the simple requirements by mail. No checking against it had ever been done, they said, till recent months, in which the few earlier cheques were their own regular bank cheques, and which then got superseded by this specially-printed cheque which, obviously, Myrene,



got printed up because the drawer didn't want to write for more blanks and perhaps identify his present whereabouts, or because, which is far, far more likely, wanted to definitely put Red behind that old 8-ball! But regardless of which of the two is the case, a build-up, the bank said, of nearly \$25,000 had been created in the account in recent months, though this had been gradually diminished. The build-up deposit, however, came from an 'exporter' in Tokyo, Japan!"

"Good heavens!" the girl responded. "It's all too—too awfully evident, isn't it?"

"'Tis," admitted Kel, "when you pull down the house of cards on the head of a man who *can* clear it up. That being Red. The trouble was, though, that when Hiatt and Hogg showed Red how they could easily send him to the pen, on the basis of his mere possession of that cheque, specially since it couldn't be explained nor justified, and offered him a waiver of prosecution on all this stuff if he'd tell all, he jumped at it. Except that—as he na-eevy-ly explanationed!—he wasn't able to tell the identity nor whereabouts of the man back of him. The man, Myrene, who has been paying him to do these nippings about the plant."

"But how on earth, Kel, does he—or rather did he, at first, before you somehow forced the truth from him—how did he explain how he reported his sabotage work—how he got his money—how the original arrangements were made—how—" She stopped.

"Why," said Kel, shaking his head, "he claimed that the work stoppages he created were carefully watched and recorded inside the plant—by person or persons unknown to him—that he received his checks by mail—and as for his original arrangements, to do this sabotage, they were made with him, he blithely said, by a 'blue-eyed man with gold spectacles and a short grey beard' who contacted him in a saloon in State City and, before the night was over, fixed ever'thing."

"The funny thing," commented Kel, making a grimace, "is that Hogg and Hiatt believed that fakealoo! I didn't believe a tootin' word of it. Though I couldn't figure why Red was covering his superior—since he'd laid just about everything on the line, and all. Later—when I cracked him—that came forth."

The girl was silent. Then spoke.

"Somehow, Kel, I feel I dare not ask you which man of your

linegang—he was. For he plainly was of your gang—to have been able to remain inside the plant at night—and do those awful killings—and all. But I will ask you this much. How on earth did Mr. Hogg and Mr. Hiatt, who must be bitter at the loss of this huge contract, ever consent to let Peter go unprosecuted—on either of his stories—the first false one, or the—the later true one?"

Kel gave a booming laugh. "Why—because they haven't lost the contract! And, as is now apparent, had scarcely any chance of doing so. For you see, Myrene, it seems that under the rulings of the International Steel Industrial Methods of accounting, by which the so-called production-ratings of a plant are calculated, two plants that are electrically connected to each other—from the standpoint, that is, of power—and *under the same ownership*—are considered one and the same plant. And it seems, moreover, that some seven months ago three old gents named Threebrothers—Ackroyd, Fothergill and Rathbun Threebrothers!—living respectively in New York, Florida and Specialtown—and all of whom owned the Special Steels Company at Specialtown—owned it, by gosh, lock, stock and barrel!—sold it to the Tippingdale Steel Company. Sold it, Myrene, because it was owned by them in joint-tenancy—they were getting old, and commencing to distrust the complicated papers they had drawn up to protect the families of any one of them whose title would get knocked out if or when he died!—they wanted to split the company up—only—you just can't split a steelmills, y' know! So they sold it to the Tippingdale Steel Company for treasury stock—and split up the stock. Oh, 'twas all done secretly—for reasons connected with stock juggling, obviously—kept beautifully secret—the small board of directors of Tippingdale operating through a stock-holders' motion passed years and years ago, authorizing them to take up a certain purchase option on the Specialtown plant, which then expected, if at any time in their discretion it became—but the point is," Kel finished, "that the old motion was sufficient for the purchase—the directors secretly negotiated it—and, with the Special Steels Company running, as it has been, full blast for months—and connected all the time to this plant electrically—and owned by this—its seven months of common ownership goes into the equation that covers Tippingdale Steel, with the result that the Tippingdale Steel Company's rating lies well above the  $A + .37$  required to qualify under



that contract. So the contract, Myrene, is in the bag—even if Tippingdale shut down tomorrow and didn't cast another ingot." He paused. "And that," he finished, "is why Hogg and Hiatt were interested only in clearing up this case as a murder case, rather than sending Red to the pen for twenty-five years for sabotage—since Red, and Nippon, just never had a chance to seriously hurt Tippingdale Steel Company's prospects."

"I am glad of that, anyway," the girl said wearily. "For I would hate, horribly, to think I had caused Peter to have to serve years and years in a penitentiary." She was silent. "But I am glad I was the cause—one cause, anyway—you seem to be the other!—that eventually compelled him to tell everything. Everything."

She was silent. Deeply, gravely thoughtful. Then spoke.

"I shan't ask you, of course, Kel, what you're almost certain not at liberty to reveal yet—the name of the killer. But when—when is he to be arrested?"

Kel was about to reply, when the metallic ting of the clock downstairs announced it was about to strike. It did so, and slowly the "tings" were repeated until eleven altogether were sounded off.

"Your clock," he said slowly, "seems to be trying to answer for me. Or roughly so! For he's to be arrested, by agents of the United States Bureau of Investigation who flew here from South City this morning, in about twenty or thirty minutes from now—at a place where we now know, from Red anyway, the killer's going to be. And where," Kel explained further, as best he could at this juncture, "the minimum number of people will be around. For this killer, Myrene, goes armed in a peculiar—but most deadly way. He's—but what I'm trying to say," he broke off, "is that the killer is getting out of town this morning—things have, you know, been getting a bit warm around town!—he's going out on the 11.30 train—and he's told Red that he's going to stop off, on his way to the train, and get his—his becootyful silk shirts and pyjammies an' things—from no less than the establishment of our friend Jim Kee's. And so—" He made a gesture with his hands which said quite plainly to the girl: "And you know the rest."

"And the arrest is to be made there?" the girl nodded. "Heavens, Kel, isn't there danger of Jim suspecting that an

arrest—of this magnitude—is connected with the mills sabotage, and the killing—of his daughter? And that—I know Jim well,” the girl broke off, “he’s an emotional man. Why if,” she went on impulsively, “he does know who they are arresting—and why—he’ll—he’ll go crazy—he’ll go berserk—at the very knowledge that he’s in the presence of somebody deeply involved in his daughter’s killing.”

“We know that,” admitted Kel. “And that a berserk Chinaman, with maybe a butcher’s knife in his hand, trying to get just one stab at his daughter’s murderer, can be one problem added to any others that may be at hand at any one instant. But there’s no need that Jim need be in his laundry at the arrest moment. In fact, the fewer there are around, at that time, the better. For the whole arrest, as I implied, is fraught with danger. You yourself have set forth one slant—but there’s that more serious slant yet. The way the killer is armed. For he carries with him night and day, so Red assures us, a small but compact powerful bomb that can be set off instantly by nothing but insertion of a finger in a hole in it—a bomb powerful enough to blow the killer to bits. And anything that will blow a killer to bits, is going to blow to bits everybody about him. No, he mustn’t be able to suspect at all that he’s to be arrested—till he’s grabbed in talons of steel, and denuded of his sting. And so that the laundry may be one hundred per cent. free of its proprietor at the zero hour—and the F.B.I. men have gotten a duplicate key to it from the landlord—is why your father and I have conspired with them to draw Jim entirely away from there—and keep him away—till the ‘grab’ is all over. A matter in which Red, as his last contribution to going scot clear of all criminal charges, is to help.”

“I’m afraid,” the girl said, “that I don’t—understand.”

“Well, it’s merely,” Kel explained, smilingly, “that with some help from Red, in hospital, *you* are to be official delayer—with respect to return to his shop—of one Chinaman!”

## CHAPTER XXXI

### MAN IN BED

RED McAFEE, lying weakly back in the narrow white-enamelled iron bed occupying the small but heavily iron-grill-windowed



upper room of the company hospital which was reserved solely for patients who were out of their heads, but which was being used now for one patient who had confessed himself to be a saboteur, regarded himself wearily in the small hand-mirror which he had been permitted for a moment to use, by the silent, impassive F.B.I. man who sat by his bedside.

Red might have seen—had he been an utter stranger looking over his own shoulder!—a brown-eyed and even too-narrow-eyed individual, with somewhat flat face, containing amongst other things, a nose the nostrils of which flared far too much for masculine handsomeness, and a too narrow forehead over which fell a tangle of brilliant red hair contrasting vividly and chromatically with the slight jaundice-like tinge of the skin beneath it. Red saw, this morning, only an unshaved, nerve-weary, subdued, and crushed individual who had saved himself from twenty-five years in the penitentiary, and worse—by “layin’ ever’thing on the line!” His own desires and feelings therein regardless. Of further than this, he could not think; hadn’t tried to—

But the silent man sitting next him, with black felt hat far back on head, and silvered badge peeping from his vest, now spoke, glancing at his wrist watch.

“All right, McAfee,” he said. “It’s time now, I think, to get the laundry cleared of that Chinaman. In preparation for our little job—over there—which had best be done with him off the premises.”

Red sighed. “Okay,” was all he said. “Gi’ me th’ phone, an’ I’ll—but wait. Now ’bout that there chamois-skin bag o’ mine—what was aroun’ my neck las’ night—is that on the level—or ain’t it—about it gettin’ burned up durin’ th’ night in the bandage incin’rator?”

“Certainly is, McAfee,” retorted the Federal man, now handing the portable phone to him. And Red, a little weakly, for he had lost a good bit of blood last night, called for the number of Jim Kee’s shop.

After quite a number of rings, the unmistakable voice of the Chinese proprietor of that shop came on. It was weary, sad, broken.

“Zim Kee talkin’,” he said, tonelessly and monotonously.

“Jim,” Red explained, fiercely jerking up his exceedingly low energies, “this is Red McAfee. I’m talkin’ from th’ comp’ny hospital—where I’m flat on my—my back—in bed

an' ever'thing. Not that I'm helpless," Red hastened to explain, though quite maliciously and for the benefit of the man at his bedside, "f'r I got the ugliest-lookin', sourest-pussed male nurse in seven continyents settin' here by me and lookin' out for ev'ry comfort. But——"

"You sick, Mista Led?" inquired the Chinaman, with all the courtesy of that race.

"Yes and no, Jim," was Red's more than truthful answer. "I had a little accident last night, that's all. And——"

"A—a ax'den, Mista Led? I—I am vellee solly to heal. But is selious? How you catch that ax'd——"

"Oh, it's nothin'—nothin' at all, Jim. A fool 'lectrical accident, sort of—near a switchboard. I'll—I'll be out this afternoon. And—but Jim, I want you t' do somethin' f'r me. Will you do it?"

"Vellee glad to, Mista Led. What I can do?"

"Well, Jim, the Careys—Tom Carey, that is—on Carnegie Road—have a pick-up for you—in line with that scheme in town for everybody to give you one piece of laundry as—but you know 'bout it, I guess—an' so I wonder, Jim, if you'd make that pickup right away, so's you can also pick up a paper I lef' there last night, and leave the paper off at the hospital as you bring the pick-up back. Can you do it?"

"I vellee glad, Mista Led, to do w'at can I do to my flien'. Axcep' they—they is a man w'at is to come in heah, in 'bout—yes—fi'teen minutes, fo' laundly; mebbe I can wait fo' you' job till he——"

"No, Jim. No! This paper is—is important as hell. To a comp'ny conf'rence, goin' on right now. Everything's waitin' on it. Or will be. Let the man go to——"

"I let him go," said Jim fiercely. And added harshly: "W'at lite he got to boddle me wi' silly shilts—w'en I have los' my lil gal—and got jobs do fo' my fliends? He won' die if he no can get in w'en he knock. I—I let him come back again. An' go on you' job. Bettel is than sit heal in dalk an' tlink 'bout my poo' lil——"

"Come, Jim, buck up. You may think you got trouble—an' I guess you have—but I got trouble, too. Layin' here—after an electrical jolt that'd dam' near ha' killed a mule, except that——" Red sighed, for his weakness was growing on him. "But willya do that, right now?"

"Of colse I do it. I say I do. An' will. Fo' got notling



else to do"—and now Jim was returning again to that subject which appeared to be an obsession with him—"but tink 'bout my lil gal, an' wonda who kill huh, an'—well all I wan' do now, Mista Led, is to kill whoeval do these tlings, dam' sonabitch he is, whoeval he is; and if no I can kill *him*, I wan' then kill jus' one man who has take also dilty money to do sabytogy in plant—but okay—I hop lite in Fold cal—w'at stand ou' in flont now, an' be at th' Calley's house in fo'—fi' minute. Mebbe when I bling papel—or mebbe have to repolt Calleys no got—fo' mebbe they have tlow away—I can com' up and see you, in hospital?"

"Well, ya c'n try," Red offered, with a grimace. "I don't 'spose they'd ever figger you to be an accident claims agent. Nor—but thanks f'r takin' care o' this for me. And I'll wait."

"An' I go lite now," said Jim. And affirmed his intentions by a "goo'bye" and a click. So Red too hung up. And turned to the F.B.I. man.

"Well, I guess you heard ever'thing. Your laundry'll be cleared inside an' outside in a couple o' minutes. So-o-o-o—have I earned my—my complete clearance out o' this damned mess fully? Or haven't I?"

"I guess you have, McAfee," said the other looking at his watch. "Provding, that is, that in the next fifteen minutes or so a whole city block and two of our best operatives aren't blown into kingdom come."

## CHAPTER XXXII

### SOME FACTS CONCERNING A MIDNIGHT MURDER

KEL LAURISTON, returning to Myrene Cary's upstairs room after having gone downstairs, immediately he had told her of the plan for holding Jim Kee away from his laundry during the vital moments of a certain impending arrest, and having held downstairs some discussion with her father—but discussion which had strung itself out ten full minutes—had hardly settled down again on his stool by the side of her bed, to tell her of the circumstances involved in the murder of Wilhelmina Kee, than the methodical creak, creak, creak of Tom Carey's footsteps themselves sounded up the stairway. And a moment later he stood in the doorway.

"Well, Honey," he said, in his daughter's direction, "you look plenty relieved! And I'm glad. Guess you and I just never anticipated, did we, years ago, when that lawyer, Mike O'Duffy, sent us that Tippingdale booklet, all the strange events it was to mean for us someday? And—but now, Honey—Has Kel told you all you need to know 'bout us helping to keep Jim Kee well away from his premises whilst——"

"Oh, yes, Father—yes! And I'll be glad, so glad—if for Jim's own sake only. How shall——"

"Well, he's downstairs now, in the kitchen." He turned towards Kel. "He rang the bell, Kel, just as you were going back on upstairs. He knows, it seems, 'bout how the folks about town are figuring—since he won't take any money from anybody—for ever'body to give him one piece of laundry—with no deadline attached to it for its return. And seems plenty grateful, too, for the thought back of it." He gazed toward the girl. And his next question showed how uncannily well a father could read his daughter's very thoughts. "No, no, honey, he won't be offended at your, or our, sending for him on business, when his little girl is lying in the morgue, for he wrote out last night on his own sign 'Business as Usual,' and showed us all white people how—how a Chinaman can take it." He turned back to Kel. "And so I suggest you folks give him that front rug there. Which'll take him time to pull up, and roll up, and lug back. No."—this in response to Kel's unspoken query—"I haven't told him yet that I've got no paper—just told him I'd have to look amongst our trash for it. And that maybe 'twas burned with the trash."

"We'll do all you suggest, Father," the girl said. "Just send him up."

Tom Carey left. And but a fraction of a minute later the steps of a tired old man could be heard wearily ascending the stairway.

And now the author of those dejected footsteps stood apologetically in the doorway, looking even more haggard and disconsolate than Kel Lauriston had expected him to look, a woebegone and pitiful figure in the rubber Chinaman's coat, and flopping, brown straw hat.

"You pliz axcooz, Missee," he said, painedly, towards Myrene, "that I com' in bedloom. Me vellee ol' man, you know, an'——"

"Oh, Jim," the girl assured him, "that's all right. Quite



all right. I'm not very ill, you know ; and, besides, have one visitor already—you know him, maybe ? ”

“ Mist' Kel,” acknowledged the old Chinaman gravely and sadly, “ is one my customals.”

“ Then,” pronounced the girl, “ we're all friends ! So don't apologize any further, Jim. I'm really glad you've come. For I do so want to tell you, Jim, how awfully, awfully sorry I've been—about—about Wilhelmina—and——”

“ Pliz ! ” begged Jim, raising one yellow hand. “ Is fo' me now to do like Englize tommy-man in Glead Wal do—cally on. Wilhelmina she is no' gone folevvah fo' Jim—she is wi' ancestols—like Jim too soon will be. Only do Jim hope—how he hope !—that befo' he go they catch man who have kill Jim's lil gal.”

“ They will, Jim,” Kel assured the other. “ I'm certain they will. But—but when they do, you see that you let the Law take its course.”

The Chinaman got Kel's meaning.

“ White men,” he said bitterly, “ alway le' lascals go flee. White men——”

“ Not always, Jim. You put your faith in them, Jim, in this case, and you'll see justice done for once. And—well, Jim, Miss Carey and her father sort of thought they'd like to start the ball rolling, here in Tippingdale, in the matter of—but did Mr. Carey tell you the—the idea going about town ? About everybody—giving you one piece of laundry ? ”

Jim's face had markedly mellowed.

“ Peoples leally like Jim ? ” he inquired, almost unbelievably.

“ Of course they do. And they admire your pride—and fortitude. And they want to—however, this house's contribution, Jim, is this small front rag rug here. Can you take it ? ”

“ I vellee happy to—so long as you have no to have back in hully. My goo'ness—if evv'body in town gi' me one piecee laundly—I have wolk fo' tlee mont'.” Jim had pulled out a soiled sheaf of his standard tickets, held together by a battered paper clip, and was extracting from it the topmost one. Putting the sheaf away, and extracting a short stub of black grease pencil from somewhere, he proceeded to mark, atop the square ticket and underneath the crudely red-ink-stamped Jim Kee, a single large Oriental hieroglyphic. This done, he tore the ticket jaggedly down the middle, and putting

half away in a pocket with his pencil stub, advanced to the girl's bedside and courteously lay the other half on her counterpane.

"I gi' to you, Missee. Is leceipt fo' one lug."

"Thank you, Jim," she smiled at him. "Though I'd have trusted you, you know."

"Is law," declared Jim gravely. "An' now I catch goods an' go."

"Now wait, Jim," the girl begged. "That won't be quite so easy as it sounds. Did Father tell you—but of course he didn't—that that rug lies over a sap-joint in the wood flooring near the wall, and always glues down tight in the hot weather? Pulling won't—Kell, you help out on this, will you?"

"Gladly." Kel rose from his footstool, and surveyed both bed and rug.

"Well now, Jim," he pondered, "let's see how best we'll handle this. Think you could stand off the foot of the bed here—which'd just take your feet off the fool rug—and lift up bed—with gal right in it!—while I get under on my tummy, and free that glued rug end from the—but heavens, Jim, I don't believe you could hold up the end of a bed without a girl or anything else in it—here,"—he advanced around to the wooden piece he spoke of, and standing on the flooring at the very edge of the rug in question, took firm hold of the wooden bed end—"I'll hold her well up, and we can both be sure she'll stay that way!—and you wobble the rug out as best you can."

"Okay," was Jim's laconic response.

And as Kel, with a reassuring smile at the girl, whose level was about to be temporarily though only slightly altered, raised easily up on the bedfoot so that it stood clear of the floor by a good fifteen inches, Jim, already on his knees, pulled ineffectually at the rug. But "sap-glued" it plainly was, indeed, at that other end. So that he had to flatten out, and crawl forward a bit, under the very raised bedrail, the better to reach further forward and free that glued end. And right there Kel did a most peculiar thing. For, protruding from the old man's back pocket, fully exposed, thanks to the so-short rubber jacket he wore, was a worn electric pocket torch. And which Kel, holding the bed-end now with but one powerful hand, and bending his knees sufficiently to reach for it, drew swiftly out of the old man's pocket, and let the bed sharply



down. The lowering side rail forcing the old man on the floor to flatten out even more. And now Kel was standing off from everything. Gingerly holding the torch out with his left hand, yes, but with a shiny revolver now suddenly in his freed right hand.

"Come out, Yasuki!" he ordered. "Backward on your stomach—and with both hands flat on the floor. One wrong move, you—you damned old Chinese Quisling!—and I'll drill you through the intestines." And aloud he shouted, towards the open doorway, though actually toward that room off and back of this room: "I've got it, Inspector; I've got it!"

In a trice, even as the old man on the floor slithered painfully out backward, keeping his hands, however, flat on the floor, then waiting thus, two men with black wide-brimmed felt hats and silver badges on their vests appeared in the doorway, each one holding a gun. One was smoothfaced; the other wore a short-cropped grey moustache. It was plain that both men must have been there in that rear adjoining room since early this morning.

"To your feet, Yasuki!" the grey-moustached one ordered. "But without bringing either hand near your body. And drop your act! For McAfee's under arrest, and has shot the whole works. And two men are right now going over that laundry of yours for further evidence. Not that they'll probably find any, since—to your feet, now!—but with those hands of yours held well off from you. Careful now—careful!"

The yellow man rose to his knees, to his feet, without ever drawing a wrinkled hand close. And stood at last, both hands upraised. But turned to Kel. And spoke. But in the most perfect of English.

"We-ell," he said, sneeringly, "it would seem that I am caught! Through the artful manœuvrings of no less than an ignorant and even peripatetic lineman! A lout as ignorant and—and uncouth as that poor red-headed fool who has been doing all I've wanted done in this town. Caught, yes—and without my accomplishing what I've always hoped to do in such contingency—did it ever arise!—and which was to send all involved in it—including myself—straight to our ancestors. But—no matter! I am an old man—and not in the least afraid to die on your gallows—particularly when I have done what I have done—for Nippon." And turning slightly toward

the East, the old, yet indisputably full-blooded Chinese made a curious symbolic sign with his upraised right hand towards that direction. Then turned back towards the Federal officers covering him in the doorway. "Very well, gentlemen—let's go!"

"I'm awfully sorry, my dear girl," Kel was saying, five minutes later, as the sound of the car which but a few minutes back had been unobtrusively parked up the street, but which was now carrying the two Federal men and their valuable prisoner out of the neighbourhood, reverberated through the open window, "that this thing had to be done in here—of all places—with your nerves so shaky as they were. But"—He had been standing as he spoke, but now he dropped down on the side of her bed, and tried to smile reassuringly—"but 'twas my own idea. The only way, so I figured. For he just couldn't be arrested till that torch was gotten completely off of his person—rather, I should say, that phony torch; for you must have seen the round hole in it, I think, when I handed it eventually to the moustached Federal man?"

"That hole," Kel continued, "is in exact line with the end of a springed depressor lever, though the latter's quite some distance back in, but if it's depressed ever so slightly by a finger, it will explode the contents of the torch—which are enough tri-nitro-toluene, Myrene, that everybody in a radius of scores of feet would be killed. Oh," he hastened to reassure her, "the fool dewdad is as safe as a baby's milk bottle, for the most part; its contents are cushioned, and springed that it can be tossed about, handled, anything; but if a yaller finger could have gotten back into that hole—we-e-ell!—but there you have it. So the only way, as I could see, was to get him on his hands and knees somewhere close to *me*—and just—just snake it out. After which the scorpion, as did Shakespeare never say, would be reft of his sting! Your father gamely suggested this glued-down rug up here. Showed he had confidence in yours truly, didn't it? And so we took Yasuki—up here. But will you forgive—the stress and strain thereof—to your already shocked system?"

"Oh, Kel, that's all right. When I learned this morning that I hadn't killed Peter, my nervous shock just disappeared like—like mist in the sun."

"Aye!" he said sepulchraly. "And that was why your



father locked your closet door—and made you stay put. We had to use that nervous shock later ! ”

“ But,” she said, “ I *will* have a shock—if you don’t hurry up and relieve my curiosity—why, I’m dying of it.”

“ Don’t die,” he laughed. “ ’Tisn’t worth it. And you could guess most of the facts yourself now, if you tried hard. Except maybe that ”—he regarded her queringly and troubledly, then decided to tell her all—“ that,” he went on, “ Wilhelmina Kee wasn’t a little Chinese girl, Myrene—she was a Chinese woman, about thirty-five years of age—a dwarf or midget, depending on what you’d call a person just between and betwixt those conditions—lacking, it seems, some of the characteristics of the fully-grown woman—like breasts and—but not lacking, by gosh, the amatory powers, no ! For—

“ Yes,” he interpolated in his own discussion, reading the unspoken question in her surprised eyes, “ she was Japanese born and Japanese named—exactly as was the other ; her name was Kaisha Kurishima ; she and Yasuki were just two of those thousands of Chinese who get born in Japan of Chinese parents staying there—but who get orphaned also not long after—and then get taken over by Japanese people to rear. And become more Japanese in mind and point of view and attitude than even the Japs themselves. Particularly was it so in each of their cases, for in the case of each, the foster-parents died—and the ward got taken over by the Japanese government who saw it as a highly valuable individual to train for the Nipponese secret agent system. In her own case, her Japanese foster-parents had been a pair who happened to be jugglers, tumblers and acrobats, and who trained her to be part of their act ; and so, when Nippon got her to train—but as a secret agent—Nippon incidentally got a young tumbler, acrobat, and juggler, as well as a dwarf.

“ In fact,” Kel went on, “ it seems that, according to that moustached man you saw here—and whose name, by the way, happens to be Inspector Jaffray—the F.B.I. has known for two years, due to some old secret dispatch that got into its hands and got decoded, that there was a ‘ Yasuki ’ in this country who was one of Nippon’s craftiest agents—had been, moreover, all during World War II—and that there was a woman working with him. But none ever even really dreamed, Jaffray says, that both could have been Chinese. Much less than one could be an old Chinese laundryman armed—as was found out early

today by code wire from Washington—with just about as nice a set of ‘parents-died-in-San-Francisco-fire’ nativity—and therefore citizenship—papers as ever have been given out to a kindly Chink by a beneficent Uncle Sammy. Rather, as it really should be put, none in the F.B.I. department, there at Washington, ever dreamed that this ‘Yasuki’ and ‘Jap woman’ with him were an old Chinese laundryman and his small ‘son’! Hardly!”

“But Kel,” the girl interposed eagerly, “with so remarkably an unpierceable disguise as—as this pair had—working together thus——”

“Including,” pointed out Kel saliently, “one Chinese moon guitar on which, so I understand, Yasuki can’t play any more than *I* can play on a grand pinanny!—except that *his* standard excuse is that it makes him think of his dead wife, and breaks his heart!—and a remarkable memory on said Yasuki’s part which makes it possible to write any fool hieroglyphic-like concoction—except a Jap one!—on those laundry tickets, and—but forgive me—I interrupted you, didn’t I?”

“That’s all right, Kel. I was only about to ask how does it happen that with so remarkably an unpierceable disguise as this pair *did* have, working together thus, how, oh how, did they ever come to take a white man—like Peter—into their confidence—at least so fully as they’ve evidently taken him? Oh, yes, I know they had to have somebody capable of doing this sabotage; but still, Kel, I can’t fathom how—but Kel!—another thing!—this pair, as I well know, came to Tippingdale ‘way last January, the day after New Year’s—so how on earth could they have known so far in advance of this—this Puppet Chinese royal dictator’s death, way up in March—and that contract you speak of as coming to light only then—and that sabotage would be needed here then—and——”

“Whoa, Tilley!” said Kel. “One question at a time! Well, that pair of Japanese operatives didn’t know any more about their eventual real utility, here in Tippingdale, than did Japan herself. And ’twas only because their eventual utility, when it did arise, definitely required an outside helper—in this case, Red, of course—that those incriminating cheques, putting Red behind the 8-ball, got printed up by Yasuki. On no less, as now appears, than a small handpress given by some customer in Brooklyn, to ‘dear little Willie,’ and brought by ‘Willie’ for stage purposes, to Tippingdale. And destroyed



afterward, of course. No, those two were sent to Tippingdale—and around the first of the year, as you say—for quite different reasons. Two. One being that Yasuki was old—and couldn't do much actual washing—and steeltowns, you know, just *don't* have much available. The other was to try and get the names and histories and lowdowns of some certain workers here who were directly engaged in mixing and casting some new steel so allegedly hard, when rolled out—at least according to some newspapers!—that it would repel shells hitting it. But the process, alack and alas, as even you must know, and which worked out all right in miniature under testing machines, blew up entirely in hard armament testing tests in the East; for when these so-hardened plates were hit by actual *revolving* shells they—they were just the—the little plates that weren't there! And so Nippon, no longer interested, was about to take this pair off the job, when the other matter you just spoke of broke, with Hung's death—and so Nippon—kept its pair of agents right on. On the job now, of seeing that this plant's production fell below  $A + .37$ ." Kel paused. "A thing, however, which Kaisha, riding about the plant on her bicycle, was no more capable of doing than the man in the moon. For——"

"And that," put in the girl, "is why they had to have an expert on wires and circuits and—and electrical machinery? Like Peter," she added. And then: "But Kel—this doesn't answer the question at all of—of why was she killed. And how? And how did this pair of virtual Japanese ever come to take Peter so much into their confidence that they told him everything about themself—" She looked hopelessly helpless now, indeed.

He dodged her first question, though knew, with troubled heart, he could not dodge it much longer. And directed himself instead, blandly, to her later query.

"Very simple," was his response. "Red knew their identities—knew them conclusively to be Japanese spies. For while he was in Montreal a couple of years ago—on that quarter-year he took out of Tippingdale—he went, so he tells us off the record, to see the Japanese consul there, or some duck functioning as such, regardless of what he was then called. For Red wanted to find out whether it was true or not that the great Mitshugi plant, in Japan, needed a few American linegang foremen to install American methods in the construction end.

Another wireman was with Red, interested in the same problem. A chap who spoke Japanese fluently, from having worked in Kobe. The Japanese consul, or whatchamaycall him, was just then closeted with some people; he came out, took a pike at Red and his friend, and then evidently decided they were nothing to be worried about. For he went back in, and went on with his consultees. But spoke in Japanese, and all of which percolated over the thin partition. But during the confab, the lineman with Red leaned over to him and told him that Mr. Consul and consultees were chewing the fat about nothing else than a job they were aiming to try to do in a British-Canadian experimental explosives and munitions plant. A case of—information getting! But—when the pair came out!—well, 'twas this pair that's been here in Tippingdale, the woman in skirts. The fellow with Red died that night, however, of an embolism. So Red, who hated Britain ever so devoutly, just kept his strange secret to himself. Hoping, no doubt, that Britain would get good and plenty drained of any valuable experimental data before she was done. He kept his secret to himself till——”

“Till,” the girl nodded, grasping it all fully, “who should come here to Tippingdale, last January, and settle down, then these two undoubted Japanese spies. And—but did they recognize Red—or he them?”

“He them. He went to them. Told them about the Montreal incident, and how he could put them in the hands of the law, if he acted. But he suggested that he play in with them. For unlike his several-years-younger and successful brother Dan, he wasn't so well heeled that some fat Nipponese money wouldn't feel nice. Well, they strung him along—as I can see—with a tale that they were just sort of laying up here for a while, and lo—last March—with the death of Hung in China—the big job did suddenly break where, for them, Red was the most valuable man in the world. The deal was made; and—oh, *why* did they take Red so fully into their confidence? Why not—he had all the goods on them. And there isn't a doubt in the world, Myrene, that when this whole thing was over, Red was to have been killed by Yasuki. You just saved Red's fool life, last night—no less!”

“That's something,” she said, downright relieved. “But you haven't told me why this creature—Kaisha—was murdered instead?”



Kel was thoughtfully silent. Then spoke, reluctantly. "Well, I dislike, Myrene, to have to tell you this now, but Kaisha was—well—was Red's mistress. Don't ask me why a full-sized man like him would have even a passing desire for an undersized Mongolian creature like her—who even had to wear a woman's wig when seeing Red in her own matchboard boudoir set off from the quarters of that old spider superior of hers, but—well, things of the nature of—of this, are known, you know, amongst men. In fact, it was her being Red's mistress that forms the real explanation of Red's continuous interest in, and use of, and rent of, that television machine which Hiatt gave the laundryman; Red wasn't really interested at all in viewing prize-fights, and all, on that fool ground-glass screen; he was just visiting—his mistress. Or, now and again, catching a private, illicit chat with Yasuki when such became necessary. And—oh Red had a passion for *you*, all right—he—why, Myrene, he has even told Hiatt that when he started to really fall for you—and which was early last March, as you yourself have recalled—he actually took over that presumably bum mortgage, on your folks' place, in a deal with his younger brother Dan, just in order to get an inside leverage on you folks—in short, to—to put the squeeze on *you*—to get you to marry him. And——"

"My goodness," the girl exclaimed weakly, "I don't know whether to be complimented or insulted that a man—takes a bad mortgage—in order to get *me*, as a wife, with it. And—but go ahead, Kel. He also had—so you tell me—a powerful desire for this—this creature?"

"We-ell," said Kel helplessly, "he had had, it seems—till his desire flopped over to you—bag and baggage—but he still held relations with her, and——"

He stopped, arrested by the pained look on the girl's face.

"Try to understand," he urged lamely. "There are strange hungers sometimes—in people. Hungers that—well try to understand, that's all."

"Yes," was all she said, tight-lippedly. But plainly, she just could not. So he went on.

"At any rate," he said, "this—this particular weird yen of Red's lasted only till—well—till a certain girl of quite perfect physical form commenced to take on a pronounced importance in Red's scheme of things. That being one, Myrene Cary! And that's what was at the bottom of this murder of Kaisha,

Myrene. For this dwarf woman believed that Red was going to marry her eventually. Believed it profoundly. She was madly jealous of you—but Red assured her it was all business—between your people and him. But when, around half-past eleven or so that night she died, she heard Cass and George Rylander, in the Structural Mill, talking about how Red's younger brother Dan had told them definitely he was going to marry you—and even the very date—why—she went clean plumb nuts! Kind of—of loco—if you ask me. Particularly since, all of a sudden, she perceived that something she'd just done that very night for Red was subsequently to—to get a rival out of the way. Hell hath no fury, you know, like a woman——

"What's that, Myrene?" he broke off quizzically. "What had she just done? Oh, 'twas just that Red had owned, for some months, an old-fashioned chased silver tobacco-plug box, that he'd bought at a re-sale shop in State City. A thing capable of holding just about a quarter of a plug, lined with cork to keep the quarter-plug moist and sweet and all—one of those things out of our grandfather's day. He'd had his name engraved on it, and kept it on his desk as a paperweight, and to hold a reserve 'chaw' in. It was always, thus, you see, where anybody could easily have snatched it. But he'd slipped it to her, a few days back, and asked her to plant it—on the first night she worked nights—under a certain slab in the slab-yard—intending to announce later it was missing, and then to send *me* out there the day after he did so, to estimate materials on some lights-stringing—and then to go over there with a couple of wiremen as witnesses, and sort of—ah—find the 'chaw-box.' Unrusted quite, as per its being silver, and right where *I'd* been! And thus be able to fire me sky-high as a blamed penny-ante thief. *If, as, and maybe*, of course!—depending on what sort of a spiel I might have made to Turnbo himself.

"However," Kel went on, "Red forgot to get word to this Kaisha, after he succeeded in wangling a certain pink discharge slip for me, not to stash the 'chaw-box'—and so she did, that first night she worked nights. But when, an hour or so after planting it, she heard the lowdown on Red and you in the Structural Mill, she went loco. As to how to injure Red. For first she drove back lickety-split to get the 'chaw-box'—she wasn't going to help him oust a rival, nowsah!



But when she got to the slabyard, and parked her bike not far from where she'd hidden the 'chaw-box,' and recovered it, she glimpsed that old switchtower over at the further corner, and realised that, unused though it was today, she could nevertheless get an outside phone connection on the phone in it. And so decided to tell Red off a-plenty, then and there—and trotted over to the switchtower and called Yasuki, at the laundry, to get Red *if* Red were there——

"Oh, yes," he nodded, "that was the call, Myrene, made definitely from inside the plant to the outside laundry—and brought out at the inquest yesterday afternoon through the testimony of that Miss Gillie Cuddeback—which put Kaisha inside the mills in perfect line with her murder shortly after 'within those mills.' And——"

Kel paused, shaking his head in wonderment at the strange working out of many incidents that night.

"But as to her call," he resumed, "she found that Red had been there, in the laundry. And for a considerable length of time. Going over certain vital matters with Yasuki. And—but Red was gone now. Though was expected back in the laundry again—at least for a minute or so—around midnight. And concerning which departure and impending return I'll explain in a minute or so—when I get done with Kaisha! Well, that's a-a-a-all she wanted to know. That Red *would* be back. She could confront him, and tell him off, th' doity dawg! And throw his 'chaw-box' right in his deceitful face. Even—well, big things, evidently, were boiling in her small mind, now. Namely, to put Mr. Red into the penitentiary for twenty-five long years, the faithless rat! Hell hath no fury, I told you, Myrene, like a woman—well, she was a lightweight, don't forget—being a near-midget—and trained, as you'll remember I also told you, as a tumbler and acrobat and juggler?—and it seems she used to carry a knotted silk rope with a light hook on it, which she could toss atop the mill fence whenever she wanted of nights—probably at one of those many convenient points where the sharp spiles are rusted away for a foot or two—and then, after a shinning-up, and a stowing away of the silk rope, and a neat pussy-cat-like hand-drop from the fence, which was no feat at all for her, go home to Papa for a while!—sure, she's the party who really had a perpetual escape over that fence! So she just proceeded to toss her faithful hooked cord, this fateful night, atop the fence

somewhere nearby—at some convenient point, no doubt, where she regained the fence right after she left the switch-tower, though in all probability not anywhere near where she'd left her bike parked ; and went up, over, and down into Ghosts' Walk—hurried, like an avenging angel, out of it into Bessemer Road, and——”

“ But, Kel ! Why—why, if she ran angrily home that night, afoot, why did nobody ever report seeing her outside the mills ? For late as it was, somebody would surely have—and you know, those weird coloured silk jockey shirts she used to wear——”

“ Yes,” he put in hurriedly, to stem this more or less futile speculation. “ But what did she find, drawn up close to the mouth of Ghosts' Walk—rather, to be exact, the screen of bushes and trees thereat—but Targ Holliday's hauling truck, empty and open at the rear end—a Targ Holliday who, it seems, was coming back late from moving a family to Specialtown. Targ, you know, lives in the same block where the Chinese laundry is ; he even parks his truck in his garage on the identically same alley. Oh, Targ wasn't in his truck at the moment she peeped out ; he was gassing with somebody across the street, and up a few houses—a cousin, so now appears—so she just hoisted herself up inside that truck ; and, sure enough, exactly as she figured, Targ came back in a few seconds, swung onto his driving seat, and without even dreaming he had a passenger, and in less time than you can tell it, she was rolling down her own alley—where she dropped quickly off, in fact, at the rear of the laundry, and barged in. Barged in, Myrene, like that avenging angel I spoke of, on home and fireside where Red had been, all right, all right, a little while before ; but had gone. On a certain pee-cooliar errand of considerable interest to all of 'em ! ” Kel paused the barest second, then went on. “ And inside the back of the laundry there, this midget-woman popped off to Yasuki—accused him even of fomenting this romance between Red and you—of working, with Red, against her—told him off a-plenty—told him what she was going to do—was going to go, she screamed, to the mills officials within an hour—to the State's attorney—and put Red in prison, and—went loco, in short, Myrene.

“ And Yasuki ? ” Kel now queried categorically. “ Well, what could he do with a madwoman—threatening to wreck all of Nippon's plans ? Why—those revelations—if she made them



—well, they'd hardly demolish the peace treaties, no—since the treaties were signed, and out of the way, and all that—but her revelations would likely wreck the new commercial relations between Japan and America, like nobody's business! Might even—But what could anyone do? I mean—with a madwoman like that? Yasuki might, to be sure, have tried to stall her along—till Red should return—for Red, as I guess it's now time to explain, had only gone up the street a mile or so to size up a house where some suspicious new inhabitant had moved in that day, and whom they thought just mi-i-ight be a Federal agent or what-have-you! And Red was to come back later, as I've stated—and report. But Yasuki shrewdly knew that *this* was a situation that white blood would only make worse—either by dealing too softly with it, or by telling this little jealousy-crazed critter to go to—to hell. What he really did was—a lot of thinking. As he subsequently recounted to Red—and which is why we know all that took place. As he told Red later—had to, under the later circumstances—he'd been ironing when she came in, and now, as she sat on the ironing-board edge, almost screaming, he walked up and down, up and down, behind her, trying to expostulate. But finally, with a sigh, as it appears—and motivated as much as anything, probably by the fact that he knew how secretly she'd gotten out of the mills that night—and how secretly she'd gotten home—he just reached into a half-open drawer, took out a powerful hammer and, as he passed her again, swung it with all his might and main—against the back of her head. You heard how caved-in her skull was?—well, that was the blow that really did it. She fell forward, never to breathe again. And then Yasuki calmly awaited Red's return.

“For the fat was in the fire now! Unless Red helped. And unless—but what *of* Red, in the meantime? For that, Myrene, is where this affair fits together so astoundingly.

“For Red, you see, on the way back, had seen two cats rolling in a patch of green just inside a picket fence along a front yard. That, he knew, meant—catnip! And this little she-demon of a Kaisha had been trying to get hold of some. Oh, not to feed cats, no!—but to entice 'em to her back yard so that she could shoot 'em—the—the—the bloodthirsty little wretch!—for anybody who'll shoot cats, sez I, deserves the wor—, now where am I, anyway?—oh yes!—well, Red reached through the pickets and yanked out a handful of the

stuff, and continued on to the laundry, and arrived back there right after midnight, as he'd estimated he would.

"And"—Kel paused, though but a second—"when Red, after tapping at the front door, and being silently let in, came in all the way—and saw!—we-ell, he too knew that the fat was in the fire. And how! Indeed, it was right then that the phone rang—they were afraid not to answer it—he did, and with his wind up a-plenty as the British say—and it was Turnbo, trying to get hold of him—well, it wasn't grumpiness that had Red at that moment—no, sir!—he was in a state, at that second, of having been knocked into the middle of two cocked hats, that's all. He got rid of Turnbo, as best he could. Not even yet realizing what he was to realize later—that that very call had created for him a perfect alibi for an in-mills murder—though none at all for the murder that really had taken place.

"And now," Kel amplified, "came confab. Grim explanation—and confab. And the upshot of the ensuing discussion was, of course, that the only thing that could be done with the body of Kaisha was to get it into the mills—where there were more possible suspects than—than calibrations on a cylindrical slide-rule for calculating the tensile strength of a piece of steel in a steel-pulling machine. Or for—but as for the possibility of the whole linegang being let out—and making it impossible to carry on the sabotage without suspicion flying to himself—well, Red was certain that some wisenheimer would be sure to point out that letting all the linegang go was the wrong move entirely. And the said wisenheimer subsequently showed up—did—and was *me!*" Kel gave a facetious grimace, went on.

"So," he continued, "they removed Kaisha's knotted silken climbing cord from her person—also that silver 'chaw-box' of Red's which, darned fortunately for him, she'd retrieved—they jammed a bit of the catnip Red had fetched into her already rapidly contracting paw—you see," Kel now explained, "Red, on his way out of the plant earlier that night, and consumed with curiosity about a certain message he'd relayed to me, had beaten it over to Plate Mill No. II to find out what secret business a certain red-undershirted, black-bearded 'hunky' dared to have with one of his linega——"

"Spurzya?" nodded the girl. "I get it! Spurzya told Peter you'd told him that catnip grew there; and so Peter knew that the slabyard——"



"—was a 'natural,'" Kel nodded, "for the presumed site for this murder. Her bicycle, since she'd come out from there, was there—catnip grew there—evidence would mature that she'd been informed it did—a sprig in her hand, see?—a perfect 'natural,' no less. So they lugged her little body out into the dark back yard, put her under the back seat of that old, old Ford of Yasuki's with a blanket hanging down and draping her—and drove swiftly around through town, through the deserted streets, till they got into—well that by-pass road—if you know it?—which cuts through Durkins' Woods into Ghosts' Walk?—it's the only way a vehicle can get in there because of that poplar-tree-and-bush screen we've talked so much about—well, they got into it, all right, and rumbled along that tall fence till Red, standing atop the top of the back seat, was able to spot where Kaisha's bicycle was parked inside; then they drove along the fence till they were approximately even with where it was, and——"

"You—you don't mean," the girl put in, shocked, "that they—they tossed her over?"

"Why not?" commented Kel, as cheerfully as he could.

"Dead people don't bruise, you know! Or suffer bone breaks, for the simple reason that they don't resist. And tossing doesn't hurt 'em in the least." But he nodded his head. "Yes, Red tossed his ex-mistress right over, yowsah! And after her, a rusty, broken coupling pin he saw lying in Ghosts' Walk in the moonlight—something that obviously must have been previously tossed out of the slabyard by some slab-selector—oh, Red handled it only with a pair of dirty, discarded canvas gloves he found also lying there—just trash likewise probably thrown over the fence by some clean-up flunkey anywhere up to a year ago, and—however, he then tossed over the gloves as well. Thus completing a hundred per cent. perfect set-up for murder—but in the slabyard!"

Kel gave a gesture now with the palms of his two hands that showed plainer than words themselves that he was at the end of his story.

"And off they drove," he finished, "back around through Durkins' Woods, and out, and back into civilization again, where Red, hopping out at some point not far from Jaworski's saloon, popped in there pronto and commenced establishing a new alibi to continue without interruption the two-hour one which Yasuki would be giving him next day. And now,

s' help me," Kel finished suddenly, "you've got the full story of Murder in the Mills!"

"All but," the girl said, "how a certain lineman forced Red to—to give all these details—instead of concealing his superior, as he first tried to do?"

"Oh now," expostulated Kel, with a grimace. "There—there was nothing to it. It's not worth even mentio—" He threw up his hands. "I 'spose you'll never rest till—and anyway, Hogg and Hiatt will tell you—if I don't." He sighed. "Well, the mere typography of that specially printed pay-off check that was found on Red didn't contain the slightest clue as to where in America it had been printed, much less by whom. It was just sort of crude enough to indicate that it had probably been run off by a Mr. 'van Sutcliffe Petwyne' himself, in one of a million or so basements or attics of our U.S.A. But the pay-off cheque had a watermarked H in one corner of it—or most of a watermarked H, anyway—and when Red wouldn't talk—talk fully, that is—it was suggested by someone that the H might serve as a long-drawn-out clue by which to chase down the paper from mills, to dealer, to buyer—but lo!—and I told you Hogg was Pandory's box in this affair!—Hogg's brother, in New York City, is a gr-r-r-reat watermark specialist—expert 'n all in the law courts, and whatnot—and he—when he was called up, by long-distance—declared that there were only three H's used in America, in watermarking: one used by the Hippername Paper Company for its Hippername Bond, one by the Hemphill Company, for its entire Hemphill line, and one used by the Holworth Paper Company for its Holworth Bond. And quite none of their H's, moreover, tallying exactly, in millimetre breadth, with the particular H that Hogg was enquiring about. But—alacky and alassy!—as he also informed Hogg—so far as inquiring into that discrepancy, or any other angles of the question, today, the Hippername Company and the Holworth Company have been out of existence for quite some years, and the Hemphill Company makes so darned much paper that—" Kel grimaced again. "I *have* to tell it, don't I?" He paused. "We-ell, it occurred to this poor non-water-mark specialist that an H needn't necessarily be an H!—it could be part of a freak letter such as—well to show 'em exactly what I meant, I sent for 'Jim Kee's' laundry ticket which was on the wall of my room—he had told me



incidentally, that he'd obtained the paper for it, in Brooklyn, in the form of an experimentally watermarked lot of sheets, all of which got tossed out by an apoplectic paper company president, and all of which were donated, lock, stock and barrel, to Mr. 'Jim'—at least, Myrene, *that* had been 'Jim's' story to me; I believed it when I first heard it, and I even believe it yet, in view of the crazy Greenwich Village-like letters involved in the watermark, and the ultra-conservatism of the old paper-house involved, and—but lo!—I was able not only to show Hogg and Hiatt exactly what I meant—but that the queerly-shaped H watermarked in Red's check exactly match—but here, le' me show you!"

He picked up the laundry ticket still lying on the girl's bed near her pillow, and, turning, squinted at it against the bright morning light from the window. "Yowsah—this'll do," he declared, and stepped to her dressing table, where he'd noted, earlier, a small nail-scissors. And, standing there, carefully cut the ticket, holding it all the time against the light, into two distinct sections. Which now he brought back to her, but with them yet in his hand, spoke.

"You see," he said quietly, "Yasuki, being, after all, a true Chinaman—and not a true Jap at all—had to turn out to be the real Chinaman at heart!—just wasn't able to waste the proverbial 'mustard seed'! In short, he had to go and fetch along to Tippingdale the uncut balance of that discarded free bond paper he got there in Brooklyn, and then had to go and use it, b'gosh, to print up these specially-printed checks of his from, and thus—eventually—get tripped up—and all because he was a true Chinaman! Since——"

And now, squatting suddenly down by her bed, but facing the window, he held the two sections of irregularly cut-apart laundry ticket to the light, and looked with her. Seeing, with her, what he held up:

HITTLEBORO BOND

With an embarrassed laugh, now that she had seen the so-simple thing he had tried to show her, he tossed the pieces away, turned, and sat down again on her bed, facing her. But she, meanwhile, had drawn out, from under the turned-over edge of the coverlid where she had earlier slipped it for the time being, the reward check.

"And are you still insistent, Kel," she asked, almost wonderingly, "that I accept all of this rewa—, all right, Kel, I understand—and will, then." She paused. Was regarding the cheque reflectively. "Then it seems that my horrible problem concerning that—that \$1100—which I thought to solve by marrying a man who at least loved me, even if I didn't love him, has—well, the problem is solved. But, Kel, are you off of me, just because—" She did not finish.

"Off a girl?" he said, in surprise, "who was unselfish enough to think of somebody else in the world—and not herself? Why—such people are one in a million. So why—" He did not finish.

And her face was puzzled at his calm, dispassionate appraisal of her motives.

"But—but that's not what I'm driving at, Kel. What I'm driving at is—well, the other night—and last night, too—you told me you were only a—a boomer lineman—destined to cut across the face of the world all your days; but that you loved me—and wanted me. Is—is—that is—do you still want me—a girl who was going to actually pass you up—to sell herself for eleven hundred paltry dollars? Or—or is it too late?"

He regarded her quizzically.

"Do you remember telling me once," he asked, "how you and your folks happened to come here from Ithaca, New York? You said that—and this'll show you what a dawgoned uncanny memory I have for details that aren't so fresh as all those things that happened last night—you said that actually you'd all been sort of half thinking of going to live in Port Jervis, New York, your mother's birthtown—maybe live in the house she was born in—fambly name of 'Maydwell,' an' all, chiselled even yet in the carriage stone cut in front?—but that some lawyer your father had been corresponding with, to the East of you there in Ithaca, about the possibility of your fambly—or rather, as you put it, the one branch thereof which the lawyer, thanks to having closed some small estate connected thereto, was



familiar with—could be related to some well-to-do dance, who had died in that lawyer's city, and who was named—now what in heaven's name was it?—maybe I *am* slipping!—oh, yes, Fay Tanjoy—yes—except that it turned out that said dancer had been a foundling, and had yanked her 'Tanjoy,' a name properly and legitimately belonging to you folks' background, right out of a directory, and so the whole thing turned out to be 'no dice'—now *do* I, or don't I, remember moth-eaten details like nobody's business?—well anyway, do you remember also telling me how this lawyer sent your father a Tippingdale booklet that he—the lawyer, yes—had received from some other client—and so you folks, sort of—of intrigued by this active yet homey little industrial town, just came on here. In fact, your father, just a few minutes back, called the lawyer Mike O'Duffy. And so, to answer your question, I want you so durned badly that"—he leaned down and drew her—or what there was of her above the counterpane edge!—tightly up to him—"that not only am I no longer a boomer—no fooling!—for here I'm staying, and intend to stay always, in this smoky little town of Tippingdale—but ever and always, so long as I live, will I be grateful to—"

"To High Hevving?" she bantered, but happily, one slender white arm about his neck.

"No," he said. "To Mike O'Duffy—whoever *be* may be!" And kissed her, on her warm red lips.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE GREATER MYSTERY!

"AND now," said Kel, smoothing out a typewritten letter which, folded many times upon itself, he had taken from one hip pocket, and containing, at its top, a richly-embossed heading despite its being on gauzelike trans-Atlantic Clipper stationery, "before I hie m'self out o' here—and let you get your clothes—and get dressed—have I completely and wholly cleared up for you the mystery involving one murdered 'child' found in our Tippin'dale Mills?"

"No, Kel," the girl returned gravely. The while he gazed at her in utter astonishment. "For the *real* mystery in this case," she went on, "hasn't even—even been touched upon!

Much less cleared up. And—" She stopped flounderingly.

"Oh, yass!" he returned, jokingly, for he realized that the girl was deeply, profoundly serious—perhaps too dangerously so—"The real mystery," he bantered, "is how a gal is a-goin' to dress herself when she can't even get to her clothes! Well, the answer is easy: and is that the key to her clothes closet jest happens to be roostin' under yon scarf on yon dressing table. Satisfied now?"

"Well, that's somep'n!" she returned, smilingly. But grew exceedingly grave again. "No, Kel," she repeated firmly, "the *real* mystery in this case hasn't been touched upon. Much less cleared up. And probably never will be. Oh, I know, Kel," she went on impulsively, "that you've completely—and beautifully—set forth for me the ingenious mechanical linkings-up by which sabotage and murder became fused together in the mills here; but that just isn't the—the real mystery of *this* case. Indeed, the solution you just set forth for me, Kel, is the—the sort of thing that is found in every mystery novel. Namely: an explanation of *how* somebody or some persons died—and *who* did it! But in this affair, Kel, is something else. A great and huge mystery, quite unsolved by that single unhappy shot I fired last night, like the murder mystery *you* just cleared up. Like, for instance——"

She paused uncertainly for a moment, as he smoothed out, the balance of the way, this gauzelike letter which late this morning Kel, inside the seclusion of the high-tension shanty, had found nestling deep within the bloodied chamois-skin bag which Red last night had worn about his neck, and which bag the medical man Staymate, likewise last night, after hastily withdrawing therefrom that incriminating pay-off cheque had tossed off to one side. To remain where it was till late this morning when Kel, despatched by Hogg over to the tower to retrieve it and, if quite devoid of anything further of interest as Staymate had declared it to be, to burn it—. Kel, despatched by Hogg to find and retrieve the bag, had politely examined it first—and all by himself. Finding that Dr. Staymate's fingers were not as yet by any means surgeon's fingers!—for, nestling within the bag, had been this thin, folded oblong of gauze-paper comprising, as was to eventuate, a typewritten letter, and which letter, withdrawing, Kel had politely read—and with great interest, moreover, since it had referred to himself!—and which, having read, had just retained, on general



principles! Delivering the bag itself back to Hogg, who, after a fearful examination of the thing from a safe distance, had ordered Kel to put the "damn thing, Lauriston, into the bandage incinerator where it belongs!"

"Yes, Kel," the girl suddenly resumed, "the real mystery of this case—is Peter's inner motives. His—his soul and 'psyche,' as that old Yogi I heard talk here, long ago, called it. As, for instance, Kel, why Peter tried so awfully hard—before, that is, you broke him with those watermarks!—to protect and cover that awful—that awful Yasuki. And why Peter could ever, ever have possessed even a passing desire for that—that awful Mongolian creature associated with Yasuki. Those things, Kel—in short, Peter's soul!—is the *real* mystery of this case."

Kel was thoughtfully considering all her questions, though not attempting to answer them. For he was, as a matter of fact, concentrating on the letter which, by now, he had smoothed out, and was re-reading, though to himself only. And "concentrate" was a thing he indeed had to do, with this particular communication, for not only were its exceedingly close-lying single-spaced lines unnaturally wide because of the large size of the sheet, but it had been typed, moreover, in the smallest of typewriter type—"miniscule" type, at very least, he judged it to be—though, whether or no, a typewriter type never, so far as Kel knew, used in America. Though this was all natural enough. For the letter, as appeared from its embossed heading as well as certain things which it contained, had come to Red from a long distance: no less, in fact, than London, and it read:

"SIR MICHAEL O'DUFFY, K.C.,  
Estates Barrister,  
40 Chancery Lane,  
London.

"Mr. Peter McAfee,  
321 Vanadium Street,  
Tippingdale, U.S.A.

"Dear Sir:

"While it may be regrettable that I could not see my way clear to giving you further information, when you first wrote me, some six years ago, on the occasion of finding my name amongst

the papers of Mr. Rufus McAfee, deceased, of your town, and, at the same time, so kindly sent me that illustrated booklet appertaining to your so-interesting American town (and which booklet I subsequently took the liberty of sending to an American correspondent of mine in the Eastern part of the United States ! ) you must keep in mind that I felt I had no right to disseminate information of the nature you then requested, on the basis of scarcely no more than the mere finding of my name amongst a dead man's papers.

" But——

" The riddle in *my* life," said Kel suddenly, looking up quizzically from his letter, " isn't Red's soul—and psyche !—as 'tis to you. It's whoever in Tippin'dale, years ago, had occasion to send to—to Mister Mike O'Duffy—that booklet which later got sent to you folks, and catapulted you hither ? "

" Oh, we never did know that," the girl responded, naïvely. " Just someone, I 'spose."

Kel clucked with all the sympathy he could muster. And went on with the letter.

" But while I am on the subject of your booklet, however, let me say that it was of particular interest to me in the matter of the picture it contained, of your town's oldest inhabitant, this Grandma Robinson. And how young she looked with respect to the actual age set forth underneath it, in the caption."

" How old," ruefully asked Kel, looking up again, " was Grandma Robinson—when she died ? For I was down in South City when she both died and was buried ? "

" Ninety-four, Kel," was the girl's answer. " Why ? "

" Wurra wurra ! " was all Kel would say. " Just that I—I happened to meet her here once—and kind of fell, I fear, for some—some senile romancing of hers, and—hrmph." And went disgruntledly back to his letter.

" Reverting, however, to your recent request for information, based upon the quite additional facts you have come upon in Rufus McAfee's old papers, I see no reason now why not to give you *all* the facts in the case. Though you must keep in mind——"

" What *on* earth, Kel," asked the girl, " *are* you reading ? Your face is so—so rueful—yes, that's the word ! "



"I'm readin', darlin'," he told her—and quite truthfully—glancing off the paper a second, "about myself. A fact!" And without attempting to explain it further, bent his attention once more to this paper.

"Though you must keep in mind, however, Mr. McAfee, that all I know concerning the facts you want, I know merely through having been the barrister in the matter of a huge estate here which, for a while, appeared to be in danger of possible contest by an American relative of the decedent, except that unfortunately he failed quite to have the legal qualifications! And it is in connection with this estate—rather, with my old confirmations of the important will involved in it as being one hundred per cent. valid and unattackable, that I had occasion, quite naturally, to fully investigate the life and history of a certain man who was a witness to it, a man by the name of Enoch Peddiford, and——"

Kel looked up. "Pardon my apparent abstraction, darlin', but you say the real heart of this mystery is Red's soul, and why, f'r instance, he tried so hard to cover Yasuki? And——"

"Yes, and why he could have had even a passing desire for that awful Mongolian dwarf-woman creature." But she stopped, as she saw he was fascinatedly reading again, as indeed he was:

"and the life and history of a woman who was a witness to it, by name Ellen Chesrow, of—or rather, born at—Stowmarket, Suffolk County, England. And who, if you are not in possession of *that* particular fact, was your mother.

"And so, as for your Mongolian father, who took—I regret to say—sad and deplorable advantage of your white mother in what was practically a criminal manner—I can only tell you, at best, that he was a Chinese, allegedly a Korean, but who, however——"

Kel, looking up, was fixing his attention sadly on the girl.

"Yes," he admitted, unsmilingly, "that attachment of Red's—for that Mongolian critter is—is hard to understand, isn't it? Yes, by gosh, it sure is!"

And, shaking his head, Kel resumed his reading:

"was a Chinese, allegedly a Korean, but who, however, according to one far-eastern visitor to the home of the decedent, and with

whom I talked on the telephone no later than day before yesterday—spoke Japanese fluently : and that this Chinese, or Korean, had at least once been addressed, by some sinister-looking Oriental visitor he had, as “Yoziki” or “Yajuki” or something like that. Your father was then about thirty years of age, or thereabouts. Whether his presence in that house had any connection with the fact that its master was, at that time, a retired commissioner of the British Navy, and had frequent official Naval visitors, I would hesitate to say. My belief is that your father was probably just a houseman, as he purported to be.”

“Oh—yeah?” ejaculated Kel out loud. And added, with a friendly grimace towards the girl: “Excooz it, please!” And drove on with this all-illuminating letter.

“I doubt very much, however, that the events which transpired here subsequently to your being taken by the American grocer, Rufus McAfee—whose wife was not so sterile as he then believed if, as you say, she later had this boy, Dan, you speak of—could throw any further light on your inquiries. Any more indeed than could Mr. Rufus McAfee himself when, about fifteen or sixteen years ago, I had some correspondence with him in the course of checking that will, and through which correspondence, as is now evident, you subsequently found my name and some facts amongst his papers. No, I am confident that you could not learn anything further about your father from the subsequent events which took place here. From, in short, those who became connected with your mother. Specifically your mother’s one subsequent child by the Englishman she subsequently married. And which child, as I happen to know, was named directly after an uncle of your mother’s—and, therefore, a great-uncle of yours. For when your mother died and, moreover, when the child was but one year of age—this Englishman, left with so young a child on his hands, married an American widow in London who herself had been left with a small son of four years of age, and all four went to America. Where, should you desire to communicate with the gentleman—and he is, incidentally, the man to whom I sent your illustrated booklet!—his name is :

Thomas Carey,

77 Broad Street,

Ithaca, New York,



and since the child by him and your mother was, as I say, named directly after his great-uncle of yours who was himself christened Myles Reneus Tanjoy, your sister, or half-sister's name is, therefore, My-Rene—or more simply, Myrene—Cary.

Very truly yours,

P. O'Duffy, K.C.,

“March the First.”

Kel, finishing the letter, tore it into fine pieces. Stowing them carefully away in the pocket of his flannel shirt. And now, rising, he answered the girl, but gravely.

“It's quite true, darlin', that the real mystery of this case is Red's inner self, and that it hasn't been solved. And never can be—so far as you, and I, and everybody else in the world is concerned. Because Red's inner self belongs—to Red! And so the only thing to do is to forget it all, just as in due course you'll forget him, utterly. Since he was, after all, just a—a—a sort of meteor that has—has flashed across your life; and is due now to flash out of it—the same way. So-o-o—why not commence forgetting it all—poor Red included—right now? Agreed?”

“Agreed!” she said, happily. “And if, by any chance, a certain Kel Lauriston aims to help me forget it—in, say, a little househunting this afternoon, and maybe some marriage-licence procuring!—let him wait for me—downstairs!”

THE END