

# PUBLISHED MONTHLY

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# BEST DETECTIVE

## MAGAZINE

Yearly Subscription, \$2.00

Single Copies, 20 Cents

VOL. VIII

MAY, 1933

No. 1

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Monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1933, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1933, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 28, 1929, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Cuba, Dom. Republic, Haiti, Spain, Central and South American Countries except The Guianas and British Honduras, \$2.25 per year. To all other Foreign Countries, including The Guianas and British Honduras, \$2.70 per year.

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# BEST DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

MAY, 1933

VOL. VIII, No. 1

## THE SMUDGE ON THE DOOR

By JOHN JAY CHICHESTER

### CHAPTER I. AN ULTIMATUM.

**H**AD any one stopped to speculate about the matter, it might have been deemed next to the impossible that tragedy's lethal hand could reach over the high stone walls and their spiked tops which faced all four sides of spacious Roanoke Court, or that even the cleverest of criminals could slip past the well-paid and watchful eye of the guardian who lived in a stone cottage set just within the iron entrance gate, barring the household of David Willard from unwelcome intrusion. No stranger was admitted to the sacred precincts of this luxurious residential preserve until the watchman was first assured that the caller was *persona grata*.

David Willard, president of a five-million-dollar New York trust company, in addition to many other financial activities, had come into the possession of Roanoke Court only two years ago. He had pur-

chased it, at a fraction of its original cost, from J. Dewitt Fordyce, the traction magnate, whose wife had died on the private golf course, struck on the temple by a sliced ball from her husband's brassie, and the owner of many trolley lines had been glad to sell the showy place at a sacrifice. Its memories were too harrowing.

Before Fordyce sold Roanoke Court, a burglarious gentleman of more than usual enterprise had scaled the high stone wall by means of a rope ladder, scorned the wicked-looking spikes and, successfully opening a wall safe in the library, had got clean away with gems worth more than a hundred thousand dollars. Since that time there had been added the precaution of electric wiring, carrying one hundred and ten volts, guaranteed to discourage even the most courageous of larcenous prowlers, in addition to ringing a warning gong within the watchman's cottage.

It seemed that the lives and property of the banker and his family

were more than reasonably safe from the efforts of enemies, cranks, and thieves, at least in so far as outside encroachment upon Roanoke Court was concerned.

The house was a massive affair, but built upon luxuriously simple lines, and it occupied the high point of a wide-sweeping, well-wooded lawn; it was found at the end of a circling driveway of white, always clean, gravel which led up from the entrance gates. Behind, in perfect architectural accord with the house, were the ten-car garage and the stables.

It was a quarter past seven o'clock in the morning, and David Willard sat in the sun porch just off the library, a big, wide man with a rugged face; the chin was that of a fighter, and the eyes were those of a relentless man. One could see that he was accustomed to having his own way; had he not possessed those characteristics he would no doubt have been the poor man that he had been twenty years before.

Perhaps it would seem that a quarter past seven is an early hour for a millionaire banker to be up and about, waiting for his butler to call breakfast. He had always been an early riser; he needed no servant's timid knock at his door to tell him that it was rising time. He was a punctual man, punctual to the precise minute; his life was run on an exactly regulated schedule. Breakfast was set for seven thirty, and Wicks, the butler, knew that it meant seven thirty, and not seven thirty-two.

The banker allowed himself an even thirty minutes for the morning meal. At one minute before eight Wicks would be standing at the door of the breakfast room with Mr. Willard's hat and, if the weather called for it, his coat. Derby, the

chauffeur, had the limousine ready, the motor purring and his foot on the clutch, ready for a swift getaway. At eight to the dot Mr. Willard, his newspaper tucked under his arm, would pause on the top step, just at the entrance, to light his after-breakfast cigar; then he would enter the machine, and the thirty-five-mile motor journey to the city began. At twenty minutes past nine he would be at his desk; his employees set their watches by it.

Thus it was that the well-ordered, clocklike precision of the daily program was carried out—always the same. More often than not he was accompanied by Ruel Sutton, his secretary, who was also a member of the family. Sutton's father had financed David Willard's first business venture many years before; that borrowed five thousand dollars had been the foundation of the banker's fortune.

AS the Westminster chimes of a hall clock at the foot of the stairway within the house musically chimed seven thirty, Wicks, the butler, seventy-three inches of dignity and solemnity, appeared soundlessly at the door of the sun porch.

"Breakfast is served, sir."

David Willard, with meticulous neatness, smoothed back the market page of his paper, folded it carefully, and followed Wicks into the cheerful breakfast room. Muriel Talmadge, his stepdaughter, very charming as always, waited for him at the foot of the table, greeting him with a faint smile.

The other two places were vacant, and the banker frowned in annoyance. He expected Pierce Willard, his nephew, to be tardy, although he did not approve of it, but Sutton—that was different.

"Ruel not down yet?" he demanded.

"Mr. Sutton came down some time ago, sir; a full hour since," answered Wicks. "He's about the grounds, I think. He has been quite an early riser for several mornings; a constitutional, I believe he said."

"He needs it," grunted the banker, slightly mollified. "Nervous as a cat for a week. Bundle of nerves, Ruel; but I don't suppose he can help it. His mother's Spanish blood. Doesn't interfere with his work, I'll say that; best secretary I ever had, Ruel. Confound it, why can't Pierce steady down like him?"

Muriel jabbed absently at the grapefruit with her spoon; her face was thoughtful, perhaps a little wistful, as she looked up.

"You don't understand Pierce at all, do you?" she asked. "It is strange, too, when a man, to be as successful as you are, should know men so well."

The banker frowned; his nephew was an unpleasant subject for discussion.

"Oh, I don't understand him, eh? I understand him well enough, young lady, to know that there's no curbing him. A wild, reckless, worthless cub, that's what he is; an idler, spender, waster."

"You have been quarreling with Pierce again, haven't you, Daddy Willard?" She always called her stepfather that. "I was passing the library after dinner last night and heard you."

The banker's mouth tightened grimly.

"It's my last quarrel with him," he answered. "I'm sick of him—and through. I've served my ultimatum. His jazzing around with people from the movie colony at Midvale is the finishing stroke. I'm pitching him out."

"Daddy Willard! You mean——"

"Exactly what I said—I'm giving him until Monday to get his things together; on Monday out he goes without a nickel of my money. Necessity may drive him to earning his own way."

"You are disinheriting him?"

"Precisely."

Muriel's eyes clouded.

"There's nothing vicious about Pierce, Daddy Willard. It's only that his tremendous vitality is off on a tangent and is headed in the wrong direction. Perhaps, too, it's because he's so insatiably curious about life, people, and everything. Perhaps it's partly your fault, too, if you'll forgive me for saying so. Both of you are so stubborn, and you've always tried to drive him instead of leading. Pierce won't be driven; he's a great deal like you in that respect. If you'd handle him a little differently——"

She paused abruptly, as the butler slid in and placed an envelope beside the banker's plate. It was a strange-looking missive to grace such a luxurious table; the paper was cheap, and it was smudged with dirt. Across the front of it was typewritten, "David Willard. Very personal."

"What is this, Wicks?" demanded the banker.

"I couldn't say, sir. Katie, the maid, found it spiked to the door of the side entrance with a tack, as she went out to sweep off the stoop just a moment ago."

David Willard pushed it aside, but curiosity got the better of him. He opened the soiled envelope and drew forth a single sheet of cheap, ruled paper, ragged at the top, where it had been carelessly torn from its tablet; the message which it contained was likewise typewritten. Willard's face was marked by a

heavy frown and an angry flush. Twice he read it and then without comment thrust it into his pocket. His stepdaughter eyed him with faint curiosity, but asked no questions.

At this moment Ruel Sutton entered the breakfast room. He was a little past thirty, with dark hair, eyes, and skin; he was slim of build and plainly of the neurotic type. His every movement bespoke a highly nervous make-up; he had inherited from his Spanish mother both his coloring and temperament.

"You will forgive me being late," said Ruel; "I walked farther than I intended. However, I will rush through and be ready to go in with you in the car."

"Good idea, these walks before breakfast," said the banker. "Best tonic in the world, fresh air."

"Constitutionals seem to be contagious," laughed Muriel. "You can imagine my amazement when I looked out my window at a little after seven and saw Pierce up and out."

"Eh?" demanded Sutton with an upward jerk of his head. "Pierce up so early? Where was he headed for?"

"Probably just getting home," grunted the banker. "It's more like him getting to bed at seven."

"Oh, no, he wasn't getting home," said Muriel. "He was making off through the trees away from the house; I would say that he was taking a short cut for the road."

"He got home at exactly half past one," grunted Ruel. "I don't mind his hours, that's none of my business, but he might have enough consideration for sleeping people to cut out the muffler of his car. He came roaring up the drive like a fire en-

gine; I couldn't get back to sleep afterward."

"Probably drunk," muttered David Willard.

"He hasn't taken a drink in two months," declared Muriel defensively.

"You mean he says he hasn't," said Ruel Sutton with a thinly veiled sneer.

The girl flushed indignantly.

"At least Pierce isn't a sneak!" she exclaimed. "He wouldn't know how to tell a lie."

"Perhaps so," nodded Ruel hastily. "You say he was making for the road—walking?" He seemed unusually curious about it. "He wouldn't have been going over to the movie colony without his car. It's six miles; still, he might. I hear he's got quite a case on Clara Winter who does the sweet-sixteen stuff. That's probably why he's hanging around the studio so much." He shot a quick glance at Muriel who flushed.

David Willard silenced this trend of conversation with a frown and reached into his pocket for the "very personal" communication which Wicks had handed to him some minutes earlier.

"The maid found this tacked to the door of the side entrance, Ruel," he said, passing it across the table. "See what you make of it."

SUTTON smoothed out the sheet of ruled paper, his quick-moving black eyes darting over the unevenly typewritten lines; what he read was:

Mr. David Willard: This is the last warning. We give you your chance but you passed it up.

It was unsigned. Ruel continued to study it thoughtfully for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders depreciatingly.

"Crank," he said. "Have there been others? You haven't mentioned it."

"This is the first," answered the banker; "if there were others they never reached me."

"I shouldn't worry about it if I were you," said Ruel.

"Oh, I'm not worried, Ruel; only puzzled. The amazing thing about it is, how it got inside the grounds. Who pinned it to the door? I'd bank my life that the watchman wouldn't let a stranger through the gates, and he'd have given the alarm if he'd caught any one trying to get over the wall."

"And no one could get over the wall with the electric current on," added Sutton. "I went out the side entrance, but I didn't notice the thing on the door then. However, I might have overlooked it. Yes, I see the point you make; unless the watchman let some one slip past him, this note was an inside job—one of the servants."

"Exactly," declared the banker.

"And if that's the case," added Ruel, "there might be real danger. I hadn't thought of that. Perhaps we'd better have a detective look into the matter."

"Just what I was going to suggest," agreed David Willard. "When we get down to the office, call up the Hinton Agency. They handle all of the bank's work." He turned to Wicks. "No word of this about the house," he said. "Be sure to caution Katie at once."

"I never gossip, sir," he answered with dignity. It was true; Wicks was unquestionably discreet.

Sutton knitted his brows thoughtfully, his slim, nervous fingers tapping on the tablecloth.

"I can't think of any one to suspect," he murmured. "This threat is evidently the work of a crank,

and, as I recall, the servants all look sane enough. Yet it doesn't seem possible, does it, that the watchman would let any one in? Tubbs takes his job very seriously; one would think, judging from his caution, that he was guarding the subtreasury."

"What's all this mysterious talk about threats?" asked Muriel. "What was in that threatening letter, Daddy Willard?"

"Don't let it bother you," answered the banker; "it's nothing to be concerned about. Get through your breakfast, Ruel; it's almost eight." This was a hint that not even a threatening letter, with the lurking promise of harm, was to delay the daily Willard schedule. Ruel gave a guilty start and made a vigorous attack on his grapefruit, but that ended his breakfast.

"Your exercise hasn't put much edge on your appetite evidently," observed Mr. Willard. "Not going to touch your eggs?"

"Not this morning, I'm afraid," answered Ruel. "Yes, I seem to be badly off my feed. Perhaps I'd better drop in and see Doctor Curtis in town after lunch."

"Two or three weeks at Lake Placid," said the banker; "that's the prescription for you. I'll arrange it."

"Thanks," answered Ruel and glanced at his watch. The hands showed five minutes of eight. His fingers resumed their soundless drumming on the tablecloth. David Willard drank his remaining half cup of coffee and leaned back in his chair. Wicks, the butler, appeared in the doorway, bearing the banker's straw hat and Malacca stick. Willard arose, smiled partingly at his stepdaughter, and turned to Ruel.

"The car is waiting, sir," said Wicks, just as he had said every morning; he might have been a me-

chanical device, set to chant that sentence at one minute to eight.

"Coming, Ruel?" asked the banker.

"Right with you," answered Sutton, standing up so suddenly that the chair tilted, and his half-finished coffee was splashed. He moved swiftly to the hall for his own hat and beat the banker to the door at the side entrance which opened upon the driveway. There he stood, waiting. Willard proceeded with less haste. The car, Derby at the wheel and the engine humming quietly, waited below.

"Glorious morning," said Ruel.

"It is that," declared Mr. Willard; his hand went to the breast of his coat for the inevitable after-breakfast Perfecto. He clipped off the end with the gold cutter which hung ornamentally from his watch chain—a Christmas present from the boys at the bank—moistened the end with his lips and got out a match.

MELODIOUSLY the Westminster chimes of the hall clock within began the unhurried announcement of eight, the softly musical overture which preceded the striking of the hour. The banker exhaled a rich blue cloud of smoke and stirred forward.

"Look!" exclaimed Ruel. "What the devil does that mean?"

Mr. Willard glanced up, following the direction of Sutton's pointing finger with his eyes. What he saw was a motion-picture camera, set on its tripod down the slope of the lawn, pointing toward the east side of the house, as the cameraman revolved the crank industriously.

"That's what I say," he grunted. "How did he get in here? Who gave him permission?"

"Probably some of Pierce's movie friends," guessed Ruel. "Probably he let them in."

"I won't have it!" snapped the banker. "This is a private estate, not a movie studio. Wicks! Order that fellow——"

*Crack!* The clear, close shot of a rifle sounded across the lawn. The sentence died upon the banker's lip; the words were lost in a gasp, as he staggered back within the entrance, his hands clutching at his chest. For a moment he swayed and sagged helplessly into the arms of the butler who, having heard his name called, had come swiftly from down the hall.

"I—I am dying," whispered David Willard.

One hand over his mouth, as if to block a scream, the other clenched tight against his body, Ruel Sutton averted his face with a sickened shudder.

"He's shot!" he cried hoarsely. "Wicks, it was a rifle, and the bullet came from across the lawn. Quick, Wicks! Use the private telephone—get the watchman—tell him to close the gates and let no one out. This is murder, and the slayer is within the grounds. He must not escape!"

---

## CHAPTER II.

### THE FIRST SUSPECT.

THE motor-cycle policeman, Joe Brucker, earnest pursuer of speeding automobilists, reached the summit of the road's sharp rise, suddenly shut off his throttle, and eased down the foot brake, as he stared perplexedly through his goggles along the straight sweep of now level highway. Direct as the course of an arrow, without interrupting curve or crossroad, it ran for a full three miles, and yet the high-powered blue touring car had utterly disappeared.

At the dip of the last hill he had been only a few hundred yards behind and expected to overtake the machine in short order.

"Now, that's queer," he grunted, unconsciously removing his goggles. "Vanished into thin air, and I've been laying for that car a week!" His face showed disappointment; autos from the Midvale movie colony had been flagrantly violating the speed laws for weeks. There had been considerable complaint.

Just before his motor cycle drifted to a stop, Brucker fed the gas again, proceeding slowly, as his alert eyes followed the fresh tracks of the wide cord tires. They twisted suddenly toward the entrance gates of Roanoke Court, where they were lost in the snow-white gravel of the driveway which led within the Willard grounds. This surprised Brucker almost as much as had the disappearance of the pursued car.

"What business could that bunch of screen actors have in here?" he wondered. As the sound of the police cycle ceased, Horatio Tubbs, conscientious watchman for the Roanoke Court portals, lounged off the porch of his stone cottage, walking toward the policeman. Tubbs was a short, but powerfully built, man of past fifty, with a cast in his left eye. He wore a sweeping gray mustache which flowed down to his chin, and which he was in the constant habit of stroking with his fingers.

"Howdy, Joe Brucker!" he said. "Seems like you're out on th' road sort of early this mornin'."

"On the trail of a blue touring car that belongs to Hanford, a movie director at Midvale. He's been using these roads for a speedway, and I'm going to hand him a summons. These tracks tell me that the car turned in here. Am I right?"

"Yep, right you are," nodded Tubbs. "Drove in not more'n a couple of minutes ago; they're goin' to shoot the house, I think they said."

"It's a wonder to me that Willard let 'em," observed the speed cop.

"Oh, it wasn't Mr. Willard," explained Tubbs, "but Pierce, the young un—the nephew, you know."

"I'll have to be handing him a summons, too, some of these days," grunted Brucker; and then he added: "If he doesn't break his reckless neck first."

"But a likable boy, Brucker; he's all open an' aboveboard with his wildness. He's goin' to take a lot after his uncle, when he settles down; take my word for it."

"Let me have a drink of water, if you don't mind, Tubbs. My throat is all clogged up with dust. Haven't got this road oiled yet."

"I'll bring you a glass right out," offered the watchman accommodatingly; he liked the young road policeman, and Brucker frequently stopped at the entrance of Roanoke Court for a chat.

"And a pitcher," added Brucker laughingly.

Tubbs went into his stone cottage and a moment later returned with pitcher and glass. Brucker was wetting his throat with a grateful smack of the lips, when the sharp report of exploded powder reached the ears of both men.

"What was that?" exclaimed the watchman, startled.

"Some one fired a gun—over there," said Brucker, pointing in the direction of the house, partially visible in patches through the trees.

"That's strange," murmured Tubbs.

"Perhaps it's the movie folks—ah—shooting the house," chuckled the policeman with quick humor. "Isn't that what they told you they were going to do?"

"I don't think Mr. Willard will approve of it," said Tubbs doubtfully. "Like as not, I should have consulted him before taking Mr. Pierce's word that it was all right to let them in. But the young un was so positive about it. He came down to the gate personally to meet them. I am sure that Mr. Willard will not like the use of firearms within the grounds. He is quite fond of the birds and the squirrels; he would not want them frightened away."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about it, Tubbs; so long as you had orders from the nephew——"

The intercommunicating telephone within the cottage began to ring with frantic insistence. Tubbs put the pitcher down hastily and lumbered inside at a swift trot. There seemed to him something portentous about the summons; perhaps, he thought, David Willard was calling him to reprove him for the admission of the movie squad.

"Hello," he said nervously as he took down the receiver.

"Mr. Tubbs?" It was the voice of Wicks, the butler, jarred from its usually calm and sedate suavity. "Tubbs!" Wicks was actually shouting, screaming! "Tubbs, close the gates—let no one out of the grounds—no one! Mr. Willard has been shot. He seems to be dead—murdered!"

FOR a paralyzed, speechless moment the watchman stood there, the receiver trembling in his hand, gazing at the telephone. There was no use to ask questions; the line was dead, for Wicks had hung up at the other end. In a bewildered and horror-stricken daze, Tubbs let the receiver drop from his hand to dangle forgotten at the length of its cord.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed.

"What have I done?" There was no logical reason for this self-accusation, but his mind seemed to associate the news of the appalling tragedy with the admission of the strangers. He rushed almost stumblingly outside, flying to the big, well-oiled double gates, clanging them noisily shut and snapping the bulky padlock.

Policeman Brucker stared curiously at the man's panic and his terrified eyes.

"What's happened?" he demanded quickly.

Tubbs leaned weakly against one of the stone posts, clutching at his mustache with trembling fingers.

"That shot!" he cried hoarsely. "It—it killed Mr. Willard. He is dead—murdered!"

Brucker dropped the drinking glass and seized the handlebars of his motor cycle; he was a man of prompt action.

"You mean the telephone——"

"It was Wicks, the butler," gulped the watchman; "he ordered me to close the gates—to let no one out. He said—murder."

Policeman Brucker put his foot on the pedal to start the engine; on second thought he paused.

"Tubbs, any strangers inside the grounds except the people that you just let pass?"

"No. You think—you think——"

"I'm trying to," Brucker cut in grimly. "These gates are the only way in and out?"

"There was a rear entrance, but it has been concreted up."

"Is that electric device on the top of the wall working?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Don't think, Tubbs; know! Isn't there some way that it can be tested?"

"Certainly; a switch by the gong."

"Try it!" snapped Brucker au-

thoritatively. Tubbs obeyed, hurrying within the cottage. Hardly had he disappeared than the electric gong set up a loud racket.

"The wires are intact," he called from the porch. "The alarm is working."

"Well, that's something," grunted the policeman. "We've got the satisfaction of knowing—if it is murder—that the slayer can't get out." He kicked the starting pedal and the motor roared into life; he straddled the seat, pushed over the clutch, and shot forward along the white driveway toward the house.

As he swept around the serpentine curves of the gravel ribbon, he saw a man bolting across the lawn from the direction of the mansion. Instantly Brucker swerved his cycle to the grass; steering with one hand, he reached to his armpit for his regulation police revolver.

**H**ALT!" His voice had that unmistakable ring of authority, and the running man, who had already slackened his pace at the sound of the sharp, rapid explosion from the policeman's popping motor, brought up short. For a moment he stared at the uniform and the star which glistened from the breast of the blue coat.

"How the devil——" He did not complete the sentence. "Confound you, don't be pointing that gun at me!"

"Explain yourself," Brucker ordered tersely. "Who are you, and why are you running away from the house?"

"Evidently you've heard," said the other. "Mr. Willard has been shot—killed. The bullet came from this direction. I am going to make a search; the fiend must still be within the grounds. I ordered the gates closed before he could escape. I am

Ruel Sutton, Mr. Willard's secretary and a friend of the family. I live here."

It did not escape the cycle policeman that almost every sentence began with the personal pronoun; he was a keen observer, Brucker; a quick-eyed, quick-thinking young man.

"You'd better come back to the house with me, Mr. Sutton," he said. "We'll leave the searching for a little later, and, besides, you'd better not run the chance of destroying any possible clues. I just came from the entrance; Tubbs has locked the gates, and the alarm is working. The slayer hasn't the ghost of a show to get away from us. I understand your anxiety to see the guilty man caught, but you'd best leave the police work to the police."

Sutton looked momentarily rebellious, but shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly you are right," he agreed.

"I am right," declared Brucker; "the place to begin is the house. There we'll be able to account for the presence of those who belong here. It might save some confusion afterward."

"Yes," nodded Ruel, "I see what you mean. If it was—say one of the servants—you would be able to find him missing from the house; it's certain that no one has had any chance to sneak back in yet. If all the servants are accounted for, it means an outsider."

"That was my reasoning about it," affirmed Brucker. "Let's be moving. I'll walk and push the machine. We'll talk as we go along. Tell me what you know about it. Suspect anybody?"

"No; but Mr. Willard received a threatening letter this morning. The maid found it pinned to the side entrance. It's in Mr. Willard's pocket;

I am sure of it. Crank letter; you can see for yourself.

"Mr. Willard motors to New York every morning, or nearly every morning. Usually I accompany him—his secretary, as I said. At eight o'clock we finished breakfast; Mr. Willard and I were standing in the doorway of the east entrance, and the car was waiting in the driveway below. He lighted a cigar, when I called his attention to a cameraman taking some movies of the house. And then it happened. The shot rang out—a rifle, I judge—and Mr. Willard fell back with a cry." Ruel shuddered. "It was terrible. He gasped his last in the arms of the butler."

"You were standing directly beside him?" asked the policeman.

"Almost shoulder to shoulder," said Sutton, "on the top step of the entrance."

"A close call for you, I would say," observed Brucker; "the range must have been fairly close for the marksman to have identified Mr. Willard between the two of you—and he must have been a crack shot."

Again Ruel shuddered.

"It does make a fellow nervous to think of a bullet coming that close," he said. "Judging from the report the gun was fired some distance off, a rifle of large caliber."

"You are an expert on firearms, Mr. Sutton?"

"Not more than the average man, but it was a large wound."

"A rifle bullet generally cuts a very clean hole," observed Brucker.

"He—was bleeding terribly," said Ruel. "This outrage must not go unpunished, officer. And unless the thing is solved immediately, I shall telephone for the services of a private detective agency—an agency that has handled investigations for Mr. Willard's bank."

"Don't be hasty," advised Brucker. "True, we are outside the help of the metropolitan police, but there are a couple of good detectives connected with the State Troopers' headquarters—thorough and reliable. I shall put in a call for them. I'm only a speed cop, you know."

"So I presumed."

THEY had drawn close to the house. The blue touring car, belonging to Willis Hanford, a director from the Midvale movie studio, stood outside the driveway, perhaps seventy yards from the Willard mansion. In the tonneau sat a young woman whom Brucker at once recognized as Clara Winter, the screen actress who was just beginning to have visions of stardom. She was sobbing, and Hanford was trying to check the outburst.

"Quit it, Clara," he was saying. "You'll have your eyes all red, and that'll spoil the close-ups in the scenes this afternoon. It isn't your uncle that was killed, you know."

"I—I thought it was a joke," she wailed; "I thought it was a joke that Pierce Willard was playing on us. I—I laughed because I—I didn't know it was real."

Policeman Brucker balanced his motor cycle on an upright position and came forward. His uniform was the only introduction he needed. His eyes went from the director, who seemed more distressed over the temporary disfigurement to Miss Winter's "movie face" than by the tragedy, to the cameraman who stood near by.

"It happened to be at the entrance talking to the watchman," he explained. "I'm taking charge of the case until the detectives arrive. Mr. Hanford, what can you tell me about the fatal shot?"

"Nothing," answered the director;

"I heard it, of course, and that is all. I was sitting here in the car looking over a scenario script. For Heaven's sake, Clara, save those tears for the studio!"

Brucker stared at him disapprovingly. "What were you doing here?" he demanded of the director.

"Taking a picture of the house," answered Hanford shortly. "It was just what we wanted for a picture we're making. Pierce Willard gave us permission; he met us at the gate and let us through."

"You, Miss Winter?" questioned the policeman.

"I was looking toward the house, when Mr. Willard came out," she murmured. "Lansey, the cameraman, was taking the picture; I was waiting for a scene over there by the fountain. Mr. Willard was lighting a cigar; he and another man—a slimmer one—were standing at the door. Then there was the shot, and—and Mr. Willard staggered back. I thought it was one of Pierce's jokes, and I laughed. I didn't know, until the cameraman told me, what had happened."

Brucker turned toward Lansey, a tall, slouching fellow in a shepherd-plaid suit, considerably in need of pressing, with a nose noticeably out of size with his wide face and anvil chin.

"What did you see?" demanded the policeman.

"Seein' that I had the eyes glued to the east side of the house, watchin' the scene, y'understand, I got it all," Lansey answered. "Like Miss Winter says, the big guy—Willard, I reckon—come out with him." He paused and pointed toward Ruel Sutton. "I dunno what I kept on grindin' the crank for; we didn't want nobody in the scene. The big guy lights a cigar, an' the other un—this feller here—was lookin' at me. Then

there was the shot, an' Willard falls back. I could see it was real stuff—an' then I quit."

Brucker made a mental note for future reference.

"The shot came from behind this spot?" he asked. It was a general question, and all three of the interrogated persons nodded.

"You see," spoke up Hanford, "we can't give you any help at all. Sorry, officer." He looked up at the sky. "First day of good, strong sunlight we've had in a fortnight. Got enough of the house for a flash, Lansey? Good! We'll be getting on back. Let the fountain scene go."

"Oh, no, you won't, not for a while at any rate," retorted Brucker, amazed at the man's cold disregard of what had happened. So far as the man's emotions were stirred, the death of David Willard might have been merely one of his staged tragedies for the screen. "You'll stay right here, Hanford."

"Nonsense!" snapped the director. "What good can any of us do? We can't help you any, and if you want to reach us you'll always find us at the studio."

"Not a person within these grounds can leave until a thorough investigation has been made," answered Brucker positively.

"But, damn it all, I want to get this picture finished Saturday."

"What you want, Hanford, is of absolutely no concern to me," retorted Brucker coldly. "No one can leave Roanoke Court now—probably not until the detectives arrive." He gave a start and glanced around quickly.

"By the way, you said that Pierce Willard met you at the gate and let you into the grounds. What became of him? Where did he go, and where was he when the shot was fired?"

"He cut across the grounds after we got through the gate," answered the director. "I haven't seen him since."

"He said he had dropped his gold cigarette case and went to look for it," offered Clara Winter.

"Great heavens!" gasped Ruel Sutton who up to this time had stood by silently. "You mean that Pierce is somewhere over there by the road? That means he could—but, of course, that's ridiculous. I—I'm ashamed even to think of such a thing."

"What you mean," said Brucker, wheeling quickly, "is that if Pierce Willard was over there beyond those trees, when the shot was fired, he would have had a chance to kill his uncle."

"Consider it unsaid," said Ruel hastily.

"Yes, if that is so," added the policeman, "he would have had an opportunity. Can you tell me whether or not he had a motive?"

Ruel fidgeted nervously, raised his eyes to Brucker, and quickly averted them.

"Please!" he murmured. "I'd much prefer not to answer that question. It—it is very embarrassing. It's ridiculous to think that Pierce could have done such a dastardly thing."

"Then he did have a motive?" pressed Brucker.

"They quarreled—yes," Sutton admitted. "However, it— Look! There comes Pierce now!"

Pierce Willard, sandy of hair, clad in tweed knickers, wearing a cap at a slightly jaunty angle, came briskly up the inclining lawn, emerging from the lines of trees. There was a smile on his face.

"Humph!" said Brucker under his breath. "He's coming straight from the direction in which the bullet was fired. If he were guilty he surely

wouldn't do a thing like that unless he were an utter fool, and certainly he doesn't look like a fool."

Still, he knew, the doers of desperate deeds often acted upon puzzlingly curious lines of reasoning. Sometimes, indeed, they did not seem to credit other people with ordinary intelligence.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### HANFORD IS ANNOYED.

THE young man's eyes lost their smile. In utter bewilderment, or by a marvelous bit of acting in registering surprise, Pierce Willard glanced quickly from face to face, saw Clara Winter's tears, Ruel Sutton's embarrassedly averted gaze, and last the grim face of Policeman Brucker.

"What's up?" he demanded. "It—it looks like a pinch. Is it?"

Clara Winter broke into fresh sobbing. Pierce strode to the side of the car and attempted to take her hand.

"What's gone wrong, Clara?" he asked her. "It can't be as serious as it looks." The actress only wept the harder.

Brucker put a hand on Pierce's arm.

"Did you hear a shot fired some seven to ten minutes ago?" he asked. Young Willard turned about quickly.

"A shot? I heard an explosion, yes. Was it a shot? I didn't think about that; thought it was probably automobile back fire—in fact I didn't think about it at all. But I do remember hearing a motor cycle popping like the very devil shortly afterward. What does it all mean? Confound it, why are you all staring at me like this? Why is Miss Winter crying?"

Ruel took it upon himself to answer.

"Your uncle has been killed, Pierce—shot to death by a bullet from across the lawn."

"Uncle David—killed!" exclaimed Pierce. "A—a shot across the lawn? How did it happen? Who would be firing a gun within the grounds?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," answered Brucker grimly.

"You—you can't mean—that he was—murdered?"

"There is every indication of it," replied the policeman. I would like to ask you a question, Mr. Willard. At what identical spot were you when you heard the shot—the shot which you say seemed to be the back fire of an automobile?"

Pierce's eyes narrowed, and his hands clenched.

"I don't like that district-attorney tone," he said roughly. "Why should you put such a question to me in this inquisitorial manner? I don't like it. It would give the impression that you think—" His voice trailed off, his eyes traveling slowly from face to face; then he flamed. "So that's what you think," he said slowly, bitterly. "All of you think that!" He looked pleadingly toward Clara Winter. "Do you, too, Clara?"

"I—I don't think anything!"

**W**ILLIS HANFORD, the movie director, more calm than any of them, not even excepting Joe Brucker, deliberately lighted a cigarette.

"Nonsense!" he said shortly. "Of course she doesn't think you fired the shot. Neither do I. Do you?" He looked toward Ruel Sutton.

"Certainly not," said Ruel, but his tone lacked the positiveness of his words. Hanford ignored the paradox of language and inflection.

"The only one then who seems to believe it is the motor-cycle policeman who is trying to elevate himself to the dignity of a detective," he added.

Brucker shot an angry glance at the icy-faced director.

"I deny your right to state what I may or not believe," he retorted hotly. "I am a policeman; I am doing my duty. I am the first officer on the scene, and I'm doing what I can to gather facts. I don't say that Willard fired the shot any more than I would say that you did it."

"Don't be so ridiculous!" murmured Hanford. "That's childish."

Brucker turned toward young Willard.

"Let me make my position clear," he said. "Try and take the reasonable view of my questions, and remember that an innocent man has no need to evade and cover up. Your uncle was starting for the office; he and Sutton were standing over there on the steps by the east entrance, when a shot came from the direction of these trees behind us. The man who fired it must have been concealed by the trees and the hedge. So far as we know now, Mr. Willard, you were the only man about the grounds. Mr. Sutton tells me that your uncle received a threatening note this morning. I haven't seen it yet, but he says it sounds like a crank."

"It said, 'This is your last warning,' but Mr. Willard told me that it was the first he had received," broke in Ruel.

"The point I am making," went on Brucker, "is just this: If this murder is the work of some crazy crank, he is still within the grounds. If it is, we know that there has been no opportunity of him returning to the house. We'll check up the servants presently. I have tried to make

my position clear, Mr. Willard. Now, if you don't mind answering, will you tell us the spot where you were when the shot was fired?"

Pierce Willard nodded slowly.

"I did lose my temper," he answered, "but you're right. I think I'd better explain. I walked down to the gate to meet Miss Winter and Hanford; I knew that Tubbs wouldn't let them in without a little persuasion—that Tubbs would be wanting to telephone to the house first. If he telephoned, Wicks would answer and ask my uncle about it, and I didn't think Uncle David would care much about it. Miss Winter had asked me for permission to stage a scene on the grounds—her new picture, you know."

The screen actress shot him a quick glance.

"You didn't tell me your uncle would object," she said accusingly. "You said——"

"Perhaps I did give you the impression that my word went at Roanoke Court," said Pierce; "if—if I misled you, I'm sorry."

"Anyhow, I got up early to meet them; Hanford wanted a sunrise picture of the house. I cut across the grounds through the trees. Somewhere along the way I lost my gold cigarette case; I prized it very highly. It was one that Miss Winter had given me. After getting the car past Tubbs, I cut back across the lawn to look for the case. If a gardener should happen to find it, I wasn't so sure that I might get it back. It is quite valuable—my monogram in diamonds; too much of a temptation, I was afraid, for the fellow who might run across it."

"At the time I heard what now seems to have been the shot, I was halfway between here and the stone wall—the one along the State road,

you know. It took me longer than I had expected. This—this is the case." He exhibited it, as if in support of the account of his movements. Ruel Sutton's lips lifted into a faintly skeptical sneer; Brucker, who had been watching Willard intently, made no comment to indicate with what degree of credulity he had been listening.

"Now I'll be getting to the house for a check-up of the servants," said the policeman, "and to telephone to headquarters. By the way, Sutton, I forgot to ask you if a doctor had been called."

"Probably Wicks attended to that."

"What?" murmured Joe Brucker. "You didn't telephone for a doctor?"

"Mr. Willard was past a doctor's help; my whole thought was getting out to the grounds to see if I could find the fiend who fired the shot. I had no idea that——" He broke off with a meaning glance toward Pierce who failed to notice it.

"The gates are closed," went on the policeman, "and the watchman has instructions to allow no one to leave the estate. I shall have to ask all of you to accompany me to the house until the detectives arrive; there may be two of them."

"Am I to understand that we are under arrest?" demanded Hanford sarcastically.

"You are certainly detained," answered Brucker flatly; he found it hard to keep his temper with the movie director. He turned to Lansey, the cameraman.

"I'll take possession of that," he said, gesturing to the camera. Lansey growled protestingly.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "Whereya get that stuff? Watcha want with this box, I wanna know?"

"You're going much too far with your silly show of authority, of-

ficer!" snapped Hanford. "That camera belongs to my company; it has several hundred feet of valuable exposed film——"

Brucker, his face a shade more grim, stepped forward and circled his arm about the tripod, pushing Lansley out of the way with ungentle force.

"So I am quite aware, Mr. Hanford," he retorted; "that happens to be the reason that I want it."

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#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A COLLECTION OF ALIBIS.

CERTAINLY this is a high-handed piece of business!" Willis Hanford muttered indignantly, as Policeman Brucker herded the five of them—the director, Ruel Sutton, Clara Winter, and Pierce Willard—into the library of the house. "You'll hear from this later; I can promise you that. A day of good sunshine wasted."

The policeman gave him an indignant stare; this selfish fool could rant about sunshine, when the black cloud of tragedy pressed in so darkeningly about the beautiful estate! He found himself wondering how much of it was cold indifference, and how much of it might be a mask to conceal a sinister something which lay deep beneath the surface. Why was Clara Winter so overwrought? Certainly it was not grief. There was no question but that Pierce Willard was in love with the actress, but her attitude toward him did not bespeak reciprocity of that emotion. In fact, Brucker had formed the opinion that she was a shallow, vain woman, whose soul was servant only to ambition. Certainly her tears were not because sorrow had come to the man she loved, but emotional hysteria.

He began to feel cross currents of thought tugging at his judgment, a judgment which told him that Pierce Willard was the logical man to suspect. He had heard the current stories of the young fellow's recklessness, drinking parties, gambling for high stakes, the prodigal spending of money—his uncle's money, to be sure. On the surface it would seem that Pierce Willard sat directly in line with the pointing finger of suspicion, and yet there was something about the man that made it hard to believe he would shoot another from ambush. The motive? That was the thing; perhaps it would prove strong enough to account for this apparent inconsistency in character.

Wicks, the butler, appeared; a still sedate, but much stunned and saddened, servant. He gazed at Brucker's police uniform, as if contemplating the desecration of a common murder inquiry within this stately and luxurious mansion.

"I'll want a few words with you in a moment," said the policeman. "Just now the telephone—where will I find it?"

"There are several in the house, sir; the nearest is the extension at the stairs."

BRUCKER went quickly to the telephone, feeling somewhat guilty that he had not called the headquarters of the State Troopers earlier; perhaps, he told himself, he had taken too much authority for a motor-cycle officer whose chief business was the apprehension of speeders. Still he was a policeman, and he had yielded to the impulse of trying his hand with detective work. It had been for some time his ambition to get a transfer to the detective branch of the State police service.

Tersely he reported the tragedy, adding that he had discovered several incidents which might be of value to the detective sent out on the case. Naturally enough the murder of David Willard, millionaire banker, created quite a stir at headquarters, and he was instantly switched to the commanding officer to whom he repeated his report.

"I'll send Bill Pitt," replied the chief. "You stay there so long as Pitt thinks you can help him. Better let the speeders speed for the rest of the day, so far as you're concerned, Brucker."

That was all; no ceiling-hitting explosion. The chief was that way; he knew his men. Brucker was glad that Pitt was coming, for Pitt, slow-moving, languid-eyed, with the face of a stout comedian, but having a brain as nimble as his body was ponderous, generally quit a case only when it was solved.

And moreover Pitt wasn't jealous about sharing a little credit at headquarters.

Leaving the telephone Brucker returned to Wicks.

"Doctor not here yet?" he asked.

"Not yet, sir; I telephoned to Doctor Rathbone, and he is on his way; but of course you understand, sir, that——"

"Yes, I understand, Wicks; Mr. Willard is dead."

"He breathed his last in these arms of mine, sir." There was the suspicion of moisture in the butler's eyes; the human automaton did have emotions after all.

"I was at the entrance talking to Tubbs, when you telephoned the instructions about closing the gates," explained Brucker. "For that reason, Wicks, I realize that you understand just about what the situation is—that the slayer has had no opportunity to escape. There can

be no doubt of it being murder; the theory of it being an accidental shot, a stray bullet, won't hold. No hunting is allowed within miles of here. The shot must have been fired very close to the edge of those trees which face the east side of the house; it could not have been a great distance back, for the trees would have cut off all vision of the doorway. The house is on a higher level than the lawn, where the trees are located; which means that a man at a great distance back could not have possibly seen his mark."

"I understand," said Wicks respectfully.

"Now it seems improbable that a stranger could have gained entrance to the grounds without Tubbs's knowing it. A very conscientious watchman, Tubbs."

"That has been my opinion of him."

"The alarm is working, and that precludes any reasonable doubt that any one could have scaled the wall. The slayer is still inside the grounds; if it is a stranger a search will quickly find him. If we do not find a stranger—you know what that means, Wicks."

Again the butler nodded.

"It means, sir, that the shot must have been fired by some one attached to the household."

"That is exactly it. What I want you to help me with before the detective from headquarters arrives, is a list of every one who lives in Roanoke Court, including the members of the family."

An incredulous expression broke through the masklike immobility of the butler's face.

"The members of the family, sir?" Surely, you don't think——" He hesitated at the sacrilege of voicing the protesting words.

"We must be entirely thorough,

Wicks. I mean no unfair reflection. We'll get to the servants first."

FOR some minutes they busied themselves with the list, Brucker carefully writing down each name, with a notation of their whereabouts at the time the shot was fired. Wicks had already been checking up on the servants.

"Mr. Willard was a widower, I believe," said Brucker.

"Quite so, sir; his wife died some years before I entered Mr. Willard's service."

"Then there are no women members of the family?"

"There is Miss Muriel."

"Relationship?"

"A daughter of Mrs. Willard by a former marriage. She's a most charming girl, sir, and as much attached to Mr. Willard as though he had been her own flesh and blood. He was very kind to her. She is quite overcome by the tragedy. She has taken to her room with prostration. When she heard the shot and Mr. Sutton's cry she rushed out of the breakfast room and saw her stepfather. A very horrifying sight for a young woman, sir."

"So Miss Talmadge was in the breakfast room when the shot was fired," said Brucker, making a penciled note.

"Mr. Willard and Mr. Sutton had left her but a moment before; they all had breakfast together."

"Then comes Sutton; first name Ruel, I believe. Mr. Willard's secretary, I understand."

"More like a member of the family. His father and Mr. Willard had been great friends, but Mr. Ruel's father, so I am told, died poor, and Mr. Willard took charge of Mr. Ruel, sending him through college and later taking him into the bank with him."

"Humph!" murmured Brucker; the dark face of Sutton with his restless eyes, his nervous movements, came before him. "The relations between Mr. Willard and Sutton were pleasant, I suppose."

"Absolutely, sir. I could not honestly say that there was any affection between them, but there was no friction. Mr. Willard was easy enough to get along with, if one bowed to his will; he was accustomed to having his own way. Mr. Ruel was always conciliatory; never opposed him, sir."

"Where was Sutton when the shot was fired?"

"In the doorway, standing beside Mr. Willard. I was but a few paces behind, in the hallway, having just handed Mr. Willard his hat and stick. I heard the shot, saw Willard stagger back, and caught him as he fell. He whispered that he was dying; he passed away very quickly, his—his hand gripping over mine." Again there was the hint of moisture in Wicks's eyes.

Brucker hesitated for a moment; he had now reached what he felt might be a delicate subject of inquiry—the nephew.

"That leaves Pierce Willard," he said. "What can you say about his whereabouts when the shot was fired?" He asked the question, although he could answer it better than could the butler.

"Nothing at all, sir," replied Wicks. "At the breakfast table I heard Miss Muriel say that she had seen him leaving the house a few minutes after six. He was not at breakfast."

"Young Willard himself admits he was back of the east line of trees looking for a lost cigarette case, he says."

The butler was quick to catch the vague inference, and his spine stiff-

ened. Wicks was very loyal to the household, and it was plain to be seen that he resented it.

"I trust, sir," he protested with dignity, "that you are harboring no suspicion that Mr. Pierce is in any way responsible!"

NOT wishing to arouse the butler's antagonism and possibly making him chary about answering further questions, Brucker deserted this line of questioning for the time.

"Mr. Sutton said something about a threatening note which, I believe, a maid found on the outside of a door," he suggested.

"Pinned with a tack to the very door where Mr. Willard was shot," replied Wicks. "Katie, the maid, brought it to me while the family were at breakfast. I removed it from Mr. Willard's pocket after his death, and I have it here."

Brucker took the proffered envelope, noting its cheapness and soiled condition. He spread out the note and read:

Mr. David Willard: This is the last warning. We give you your chance but you passed it up.

"Hm-m-m! Typewritten," he murmured. And the thought passed through his mind: "Strange that a man using a typewriter should resort to the use of such cheap paper—coarse, lined paper, meant solely for the use of lead-pencil writing."

Brucker thrust the threatening missive into his pocket to hand it over to Bill Pitt, when the detective should arrive.

"Any of the servants have any ill feeling toward Mr. Willard?"

"Not that I have observed, sir."

"Any of them act—well, queer."

"You mean a bit off, sir? Not that I can recall."

The policeman returned to the nephew.

"I understand that Pierce and his uncle quarreled on occasions," he said. "Is that true?"

Wicks compressed his lips, hesitating.

"Frankness is the best, Wicks. Nothing is to be gained by evasions; your first loyalty is to your dead employer. I can understand your hesitation; you never carry family tales, but necessity unseals your lips, Wicks."

"Their quarrels were nothing serious," the butler said earnestly. "Both Mr. Willard and Mr. Pierce were very headstrong, sir. They were always pulling against each other. Mr. Pierce was a bit—a bit unsettled; his uncle was eager to get him into business. That was the reason for their quarrels. True, Mr. Pierce was a bit reckless, sir, but there's no harm in the boy. Underneath it all they were much attached to each other."

"I can't say that Pierce shows evidence of being greatly grieved," murmured Brucker.

"He wouldn't show it openly, sir; he would do his grieving within, and not for public exhibition. You may take my word for it that it is a hard blow for Mr. Pierce."

The policeman knew that any further intimations of Pierce's guilt would only arouse Wick's resentment, perhaps plunge him into a stubborn, loyal silence. The best interests were to be served by pressing these questions no further.

Outside there was the sound of a motor. Brucker stepped to the window, followed by Wicks.

"That is Doctor Rathbone," said the butler.

"Evidently Tubbs used his own judgment about admitting him," observed Brucker. "It is proper, of

course. Take the doctor directly to the body, Wicks; I am anxious to hear his medical report."

Doctor Rathbone, a carefully groomed man, came in, obviously shocked by the news of what had happened. Directly the butler took him into the room where the body of the slain banker lay on a couch.

**W**HILE waiting for the doctor's findings, Brucker stared thoughtfully down at his notebook which contained the careful list which he had prepared from the butler's information; it contained the name of each member of the Willard household. It read:

Muriel Talmadge, stepdaughter. In breakfast room when shot was fired. Alibi.

Ruel Sutton, secretary, standing in doorway beside Mr. Willard. Alibi.

Pierce Willard, nephew. About the grounds. ? ? ?

Wicks, butler, in hall behind Willard and Sutton. Alibi.

Katie Mahoney, maid. Cleaning in the house when shot was fired. Alibi.

Jules Faubert, cook. In kitchen. Alibi.

Mrs. Dutton, managing housekeeper, in kitchen talking to Jules when shot was fired. Alibi.

Nora Faber, maid. Cleaning on second floor. Helped Mrs. Dutton get Miss Talmadge upstairs when latter fainted at sight of her stepfather's body. Alibi.

Derby, chauffeur, sitting at wheel of car in driveway. Alibi.

Peter Rosetti, head gardener, and Tony, assistant, working in the rear in plain view of the house. Alibis.

That, except for Tubbs, the watchman, completed the list of those who had any known and rightful presence within the high-walled, electrically protected spaces of Roanoke Court. Brucker himself could furnish Tubbs's alibi. There were a dozen names; so far as now known, they included, with the exception of Willis Hanford, the movie director,

Clara Winter, the screen actress, and Lansey, the cameraman, every person within the grounds when the fatal shot was fired.

Certainly Hanford's behavior was peculiar, but how would it have been possible for him to have fired the shot, and what motive? The same applied to Lansey. The puzzle might be simply solved by the discovery of some sinister presence—perhaps the skulking crank who had crept out of the shrubbery to pin the warning message to the door, a man who in some way had slipped into Roanoke Court past the watchful Tubbs. Only a search could settle that.

Thoughtfully Brucker's eyes returned to his notebook; his gaze rested fixedly upon the name of Pierce Willard, followed by the yet unanswered question marks.

Pierce Willard was the only person in the list who had no alibi.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE CHALK MARK ON THE DOOR.

**W**ICKS had tiptoed from the death chamber, and Joe Brucker beckoned to him.

"I'm going to search the grounds while waiting for Doctor Rathbone to make his examination," he said. "I'll need some help with it. Get the chauffeur and the gardeners; I'll want you to stay here. I think those five people in the library had better stay right where they are. Please see that they do, Wicks."

A few minutes later the search was on. Brucker, without regard to the damage done the lawn, used his motor cycle. He could cover more ground that way. First he circled the wall to make certain that no tunnel had been dug through under the foundation. This possibility had

just occurred to him, but he quickly assured himself that nothing of the sort had occurred. Following this precaution he placed the two gardeners and the chauffeur at vantage points, as he shot his motor cycle back and forth, stopping to search the shrubbery where it was thick. It took some time because the search was thorough; then came the buildings, every nook and cranny of them.

At the end of a little more than an hour Brucker was willing to stake his life on just one thing: The slayer of David Willard was one of fifteen people, eleven of whom had complete alibis, and three of whom, the three from the movie colony, had not the slightest known motive for the deed.

"I would say," grunted Brucker, "that the net is closing in mighty tight about Pierce Willard—the only one of the outfit that wasn't either in plain sight, or who hasn't an alibi."

As the officer returned to the house, Doctor Rathbone was waiting for him just outside the entrance; the physician's face was grim.

"A most atrocious crime, officer," he declared. "The man who did this terrible thing didn't give poor Willard even a sportsman's chance. Look!" He opened his hand, disclosing in the palm a battered fragment of lead.

"That can't be a bullet!" exclaimed Brucker.

"But it is," declared Doctor Rathbone. "It is what is sometimes called a dumdummy. Don't you understand? The end of the bullet was notched before it was fired; the result was that, as it penetrated, it spread, flattened out, tearing a horribly devastating path through Mr. Willard's right lung. From the surface wound there was no sign of

this fiendish, inhuman thing; it was only when I started probing that I discovered the condition. A clean bullet wound, especially through the right lung, would not have been necessarily fatal, but in this case poor Willard didn't have a chance. The heat of the average bullet often congeals the blood flow, but with this dumdummy the man would have bled to death internally before a surgeon would have got his operating kit open. I tell you, sir, the man who did this dastardly thing was a fiend—a fiend that would shame the devil himself!"

"It was a horrible way to kill a man, wasn't it?" Brucker asked.

At this moment the house telephone rang; Wicks answered and called the policeman.

"It's for you, sir; Tubbs at the cottage calling."

Brucker hurried to the instrument, thinking that perhaps the watchman had discovered something of importance—that possibly the wall alarm had been set off.

"Tubbs, Mr. Brucker; there's a man at the gate who says he's from your headquarters. He says his name is Pitt."

"Of course, Tubbs; I was expecting him. Why didn't you let him in?"

"It was his appearance; he says he's a detective, but he don't look like no detective to me."

"Then it's Bill Pitt," answered Brucker. "He looks less like a detective than any detective who ever lived. Let him through. Didn't he show you his star?"

"He did that, but his appearance—I jest naterally couldn't think he was what he claimed."

"By the way, Tubbs, don't forget to keep your eyes open and give me a quick ring if you notice anything out of the way."

"You can depend on me to keep my eyes peeled. You ain't found the ones who did it yet?"

"Not yet, Tubbs, but there's one thing reasonably certain: no one got past you unawares."

Brucker replaced the receiver.

"Mr. Pitt, the detective on the case, will be here in a few minutes, Doctor Rathbone. I trust you will stay until he's had a chance to talk with you. I want a few words with him first. Don't suppose it will be possible to identify the caliber of the gun by that battered bullet?"

"I would say," responded the doctor, "that it was a .30-30, high velocity, fired from a short range. Although the bullet was retarded by its expansion, it passed entirely through the body. I removed it from the back, just beneath the skin. If the bullet had not been notched, there would have been enough force remaining to have killed a man standing directly behind Mr. Willard.

"Certainly I shall be glad to remain so long as I am needed. I hope that I may be able to offer some assistance. I was very fond of Mr. Willard; I shall count it a deplorable miscarriage of justice if the slayer is permitted to escape."

THE sound of a motor sounded down the drive, and Brucker stepped outside to meet Bill Pitt—Big Bill Pitt, he was quite rightfully called. The detective was driving his own flivver, a two-seater, and his two hundred and thirty pounds were ludicrously wedged in behind the steering wheel. Puffingly he accomplished the task of squeezing out of the cramped space; with a sigh of relief he removed his soiled straw hat and mopped at his shining dome with his handkerchief. Bill Pitt was a living caricature; he

seldom smiled himself—he often gruntingly explained that it was a serious business, carrying around so much flesh—but one look at him was enough to make others smile.

"Hello, Brucker," he said. "What have we got here?"

"A murder," answered Brucker grimly, still affected by Doctor Rathbone's account of the diabolical means employed to insure the deadly impact of the bullet. "Willard, the banker; the chief told you that, I suppose. Since I telephoned, the doctor has found the bullet—a dum-dum. Willard bled to death internally, almost instantly."

"A dum-dum, eh?" puffed Big Bill Pitt. "Discover anything?"

"Several things, and it's got me puzzled, mighty puzzled. Just got through searching the grounds; no strangers in hiding. All of the fifteen people who were in the grounds when the shot was fired are still here; we've got the satisfaction of knowing that the slayer is still where we can get hands on him." He explained the one entrance gate with Tubbs on guard and the system of electric wiring.

"I know," nodded Pitt. "I handled the robbery case when the Fordyce jewels were stolen. Fordyce had the wires put up after that; enough current in those wires to knock a man galley-west if he tried to get over the wall. Sure no one could have got in or out the gate?"

"You've had a taste of Tubbs's caution," retorted Brucker dryly.

"Humph!" puffed the detective. "Some people have a way of putting padlocks on the barn after the mare is gone."

"But I happened to be at the gate talking to Tubbs when both of us heard the shot; he shut the gates then and only opened them to let the doctor in—later you."

"That sounds more positive," declared Pitt. "Let's get at the facts; facts first, theories later."

"Facts, Pitt, are limited. There are, counting Tubbs, an even dozen servants. All of them have what seem to be perfect alibis."

"Your qualification is wise," grunted Pitt; "'seemingly perfect alibis.' Go on."

"In my opinion all of the servants can be stricken from the list of suspects," went on Brucker. "There are three surviving members of the family, to speak broadly. Ruel Sutton, Willard's secretary, is virtually that. He was standing beside Mr. Willard in the doorway when the shot was fired. There is Miss Muriel Talmadge, stepdaughter; she was in the breakfast room. Then"—Brucker took a longer breath—"then there is Pierce Willard, a nephew; only blood relative, evidently—and he was out on the lawn, somewhere back of those trees. He's the only one that hasn't got an alibi."

"He's a wild, reckless fellow; bad case on Clara Winter, the movie actress. He went down to the gate to let in a movie party of three—Hanford, director, Miss Winter, and a cameraman named Lansey. Cut across the lawn after that; says he went to look for a gold cigarette case he'd dropped. Wasn't seen again until I was questioning the movie people. He came across the lawn with a grin on his face. I don't see how a man could smile like that after killing a man, Pitt. A likable chap, too. It looks bad for him on the face of it, but I find it hard to believe the obvious—especially after what the doctor told me about the dum dum bullet. That's cruel, Pitt—fiendish!"

Bill Pitt mopped his perspiring forehead again.

"Likable, eh?" he grunted. "Huh!

One of the most charming fellows I ever met killed his own father—with a razor. Crazy streak hidden under the surface. Alienist could have spotted it, of course, but it didn't keep him from being charming. Don't go too much on appearances, my boy; what's in a man's heart often shows in his face, but not always. Exceptions to all rules."

"As I said, the nephew is wild. He and his uncle quarreled, so Sutton tells me. I think Sutton'll tell more about that when he's questioned closely. Don't think there's any doubt in Sutton's mind that the nephew did it."

"This morning one of the maids found this note speared to the door with a tack—this very door where Willard was shot a few minutes later. The note tells its own story." He produced the threatening missive. "It occurs to me, Pitt, as being a bit queer that a man using a typewriter would use such a cheap pencil-tablet paper."

"What strikes you as being queer about it?" The detective's question took on a tone of mild interest.

"Because the man who would naturally buy and use that kind of paper, wouldn't have had or known how to use a typewriter. He'd have printed out the words with a lead pencil. The paper and the envelope are smeared with dirt; the thing looks too palpably a disguise."

"Very sound reasoning, my boy," nodded Big Bill Pitt. "You've got a head on your shoulders that can be used for something else than chasing speeders. But there's something you've missed, because you haven't made a study of typewriting. The typing on this paper is even in pressure, the letters in perfect alignment, and that's reasonable proof that no amateur with the typewriter did it. If the person who wrote the

note is the person who fired the shot, we'll get a clew by finding out which of them uses a typewriter."

"The note was pinned to the door before the movie people got here," said Brucker.

"We'll probably find," went on Pitt, "that this note was typewritten because the writer of it didn't want to risk having his handwriting identified."

"A typewriter expert, eh?" mused Brucker thoughtfully, and then a single word slipped past his lips. "Sutton!"

"I know what made you say that," nodded Pitt; "because Sutton has been Willard's secretary."

"I suppose so," nodded Brucker; "just association of ideas. Young Willard might know typing, too, for all I know. It's ridiculous to think of Sutton, of course. Of all the alibis, his is the most perfect—absolutely flawless—standing in the doorway beside Willard when the shot was fired."

"Yes, that looks like a perfect alibi," admitted Bill Pitt. His eyes wandered across the lawn, measuring the distance between the house and the trees, noted the thickness of the foliage and, by much peering, was able to sight the stone wall a good hundred and fifty yards distant. The lawn dipped down and rose again to a higher level in such a grade that the wall loomed high.

"The shot didn't come from over the wall," said Brucker; "that would have been impossible."

"That's right," nodded the other. "A bullet fired from the other side of the wall would have had to pass over the top of the house. The shot was fired within the grounds. You say your search was thorough; you are certain that only fifteen people were in the grounds, and most of them free from suspicion."

"All have alibis except Pierce Willard—and the movie people."

Bill Pitt swung around slowly.

"Just what do you mean by that—the movie people?"

Brucker shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I admit I'm groping at straws, but there's something so infernally strange about the attitude of Hanford, the director, and Miss Winter. He seemed to be in a great hurry to get out, and Miss Winter seemed unreasonably cut up about it."

"My dear boy, don't you know that hysteria is one of the privileges of actresses? Temperament, my boy—temperament."

Brucker shook his head.

"Something queer about it," he insisted. "Hanford is going to raise a big row about my detaining them, but I want you to question him, and hold 'em until this thing is cleared up."

"Set your mind at rest about that; I will."

Pitt turned to the door where David Willard had met death; it was now closed. His languid gaze rested upon the oaken panels for a moment, and then his hand went out, the tip of his finger touching the white smear which appeared there.

"I hadn't noticed that," said Brucker. "What is it?"

"Looks like white chalk—as if some one had made a mark and erased it. Some of the grains stuck to the wood. Children?"

"I don't think so; the butler didn't mention any. Nothing important about it, is there?"

"Hm-m-m!" grunted Big Bill Pitt noncommittally. "A bit strange, wouldn't you say, to find a chalk smudge on the door of a millionaire's residence like this?"

"Then it does mean something? What?"

"I dunno, my boy, but it's a little something to wonder about, eh?"

Brucker thought it was; not perhaps the chalk mark so much as why Pitt should have placed any importance upon such a trifling detail.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### EAVESDROPPING.

A MAN much less astute than Pierce Willard must have sensed the finger of suspicion pointing fixedly toward him. It seemed to sober his reckless spirit as nothing else had ever quite succeeded in doing; the smile which was constantly tugging at the corners of his mouth and crinkling the corners of his steady blue eyes had vanished. It gave his face an unaccustomed maturity, and in this sobriety of expression he greatly resembled the uncle who lay in the stillness of death in the room on the other side of the hall.

Pierce sat in a chair, leaning a little forward, elbows on his legs, twisting his clenched right fist within the curving fingers of his left hand. His mouth was set, and now and then he glanced up to cast a quick, half-questioning, half-accusing glance toward Clara Winter. Somehow, with her face washed by a torrent of tears, her beauty didn't seem quite so genuine. He decided that she must be a little older than he had thought, and still he had been very much in love with her; perhaps he still was.

Presently he got up from the chair by the window and neared the divan, where she sat beside Willis Hanford. She shivered a little and drew her summer fur of sable about her shoulders, as if she were cold. He touched his fingers to the fluffy silk covering of her softly rounded arm.

"Don't!" she whispered, and the look of repulsion which she gave him left no illusions; the love flame, which he had thought burned for him in her heart, was as fictitious as a movie set of ancient Babylon.

"I understand," Pierce said bitterly, "you—you think that I did it. You couldn't have cared much, not to have more faith in me than this."

Willis Hanford leaned his mouth close to Pierce's ear.

"She's a bit upset," he whispered. "Don't press her now; she'll be all right again when she gets her nerves back."

Whether acting upon this advice, or moved by some other impulse, Pierce got swiftly to his feet and strode to the window, staring down upon the lawn. Ruel Sutton, his black, quick-darting eyes following, lighted a cigarette, smoking in nervous puffs as was his wont. Almost his every move revealed that high-strung temperament which is more correctly termed neurotic. His gaze shot back to the doorway, as Bill Pitt lumbered into the room, the motor-cycle policeman behind him.

Pitt stood motionless, his languid gaze traveling from face to face.

"This is Mr. Pitt, the detective in charge," announced Brucker, feeling that something ought to be said. Willis Hanford leaped to his feet.

"About time that some one with authority and sense got here," he said. "This motor-cycle cop has taken it upon himself to detain us; I demand that we be permitted to leave forthwith."

"Sit down, sir," commanded Pitt quietly. "Too hot a day to get all worked up that way."

"Confound you——"

"You'll have plenty of chance to talk later, Mr. Hanford." He paused, making his added remarks

general. "The butler has assigned me a room across the hall. Brucker will call you in as I want you."

He made his ponderous path back to the room where he had established what might be called his headquarters. He had already talked with the doctor.

"What do you make of them?" Brucker demanded eagerly.

"Too soon to answer that, my boy. Something tells me that this is going to be a very interesting case. Let's start off by having Sutton in."

Brucker called him, and Ruel entered. Pitt motioned them both to be seated.

"A very sad business, Mr. Sutton," observed the detective by way of beginning. "I might add, too, a very bad business. You are Mr. Willard's secretary?"

"Was," nodded Ruel, using the correcting verb.

"Hm-m-m! Quite so," puffed Bill Pitt. "What can you tell us?"

"Very little," answered Ruel. "As you doubtless know already, I was standing beside Mr. Willard when he was shot down. I was, as it happened, looking across the lawn, calling Mr. Willard's attention to the cameraman. Then there was the shot, and I heard Mr. Willard's gasp."

"Notice anything peculiar in the actions of the cameraman?"

"I can't say that I did; he was turning the crank as they all do when they are taking a picture."

"From where you were in the doorway, could you see Hanford and Miss Winter?"

"They were not directly in my line of vision, but I did see them shortly after the shot was fired. Hanford was sitting behind the wheel, Miss Winter in the tonneau."

"Mr. Willard have any enemies?"

"All rich men have enemies," an-

swered Ruel; "I can't recall any specific case of enmity—nothing that would explain what happened this morning."

"What can you tell us about the threatening note?"

"Nothing except that the butler brought it in during breakfast, and that Mr. Willard showed it to me. He said that it was the first of the kind he'd ever got."

"Written on a Forest typewriter," murmured Bill Pitt, examining the warning message, but over the top of it his innocent gaze rested upon Ruel's face. The man turned not a hair.

"No, since I examine it more closely," added Pitt, "I'll take that back. It was written on a Hamming-ton."

"You are just guessing, aren't you?" asked Sutton.

"What sort of a typewriter do you use, Mr. Sutton?"

"Always a Kingsley," answered Ruel promptly.

"There's one thing certain," murmured Pitt; "this was not written on a Kingsley."

"I hope you weren't trying to accuse me of writing the threatening letter?" Again Ruel smiled faintly.

"Does young Willard type?"

"Not that I ever heard of; I'm afraid that Pierce has never learned any of the useful arts."

Bill Pitt took out his handkerchief and sopped his forehead and neck.

"You've made up your mind, haven't you, Sutton, that it was Pierce Willard who killed his uncle?"

"Do I have to answer that?"

"No, you don't have to answer it. I won't press you; consider it unasked."

But Ruel would not have it that way.

"I don't want to do Pierce an injustice," he said virtuously, "but at the same time I can't very well——" He paused doubtfully.

"What makes you think the nephew is guilty?"

"Don't you think the same thing?" exclaimed Ruel. "Isn't he the only man that can't give an account of himself at the time the shot was fired? What is a sensible man to think——"

"And you told me that Pierce frequently quarreled with Mr. Willard," broke in Brucker.

"That's true; they did frequently. Pierce refused to settle down and go to work in the bank. But I didn't dream that it could possibly come to this."

Bill Pitt moved his weight in his chair.

"Since you are—or were, to get the tense right—Mr. Willard's private secretary, perhaps you know something of his business affairs. Who was his heir?"

"Pierce and Muriel. She's his stepdaughter, you know, but he was quite fond of her. But I think—I hope that I am not doing Pierce an injustice—I think that Mr. Willard was contemplating changing his will."

"You mean, then," translated Pitt quietly, "that he was planning to cut his nephew off in a new will—and that this may have been the motive. Why not call a spade a spade, Sutton?"

"Y-yes, that is what I meant."

"You own a rifle, Sutton?"

"No; I never owned a weapon in my life."

"How about young Willard?"

"I couldn't say; perhaps he does."

Bill Pitt nodded with a gesture of finality.

"That'll be all, Sutton," he said; "you may go."

WHEN he had gone, the detective looked up at the ceiling for a moment and then toward Brucker.

"Well, young un," he asked, "what do you make of it?"

"I don't like him," Brucker said; "he's a cool proposition, if you ask me. If there were as much against him as there is against Pierce Willard, it wouldn't take me long to make up my mind who the guilty man is, I'll tell you that. But of course it's out of the question; his alibi is perfect—absolutely perfect."

"He's not averse to helping it look black for young Willard," grunted Bill Pitt. "I imagine there's no love lost between the two, but, as you say, it's out of the question. His alibi is perfect. Begins to look as if we'd found a motive for Pierce Willard doing it. Eh?"

"That's the way it looks," nodded Brucker. He sat up suddenly with a start.

"I've forgotten to tell you something!" he exclaimed. "I took the camera away from Lansey; he was taking a picture of the house when the shot was fired and kept on turning the crank. Know what that means, Pitt? It means that inside that camera is a record of David Willard's death!"

Big Bill Pitt looked up mildly.

"That might prove interesting—and of some value," he said slowly. "We'd better have that film developed right away. Of course it won't show us who fired the shot, but still it'll be interesting—mighty interesting."

"I'll hop on the motor cycle and take it right down to one of the movie studios for development," offered Brucker.

Bill Pitt shook his head slowly.

"Not just yet, but presently," he murmured. "There's something else

I want you to do for me first. There's something I'm curious about. Hm-m-m!" His slow gaze wandered about the room and settled upon a rich mahogany secretary that reared a good eight feet toward the ceiling.

"I wonder if we could edge that thing a little more toward the corner," he said; "it'll look better there, don't you think, Brucker?"

The other man frowned, frankly puzzled.

"If we put it at angles with the corner," went on Pitt, "a man might find standing room behind it. Sometimes people talk more freely when they think they're alone. I'm wondering, somehow, just what that fellow Hanford and his actress would say to each other in private."

"You mean——"

"I mean that I'm going to put you behind that secretary—the drawers come down to the floor—to see what comes of it. Come, let's get it moved." Brucker complied, and a minute or so later it shielded him completely from view.

"And don't sneeze," grunted Pitt. He waddled out of the room and across the hall.

"I'll talk with Hanford and Miss Winter now," he said. The actress somewhat nervously, and Hanford haughtily, answered the request.

"I hope when you're through with us, you'll let us get away from this place," Hanford said.

"We'll see—we'll see," grunted Pitt. "These things take time." He ushered them into the room and sat down ponderously.

"You first, Miss Winter; tell us what you know and saw."

"All I saw," she answered faintly, "was the—man when he fell back into the doorway when the shot was fired. I was sitting in the car with Mr. Hanford. He was on the front seat, reading a script, while the cam-

eraman took a still of the house. That's all."

"And you, Hanford?"

"I don't even know that much. I was busy reading a script. I trusted Lansey to take the still without direction. That's all either of us know. What's the sense in detaining us with these questions?"

Pitt looked at his watch, gave a jellylike start and lumbered to his feet.

"You'll excuse me a minute," he said; "I've got to phone headquarters. You wait right here. Just a few more questions a little later." He left the room, closing the door behind him; they could hear his heavy tread receding down the hall.

SOMETHING like half a minute passed, and Brucker, listening behind the secretary, waited.

"That clown thinks he's a detective," sneered Hanford. Clara Winter made no reply.

"Look here, Clara," exclaimed the director, "you've no business going all to pieces this way. What's a millionaire more or less?"

"He—he killed him!" she shuddered.

"We don't know any such thing," retorted Hanford. "But what we do know is that, if Pierce Willard keeps a stiff upper lip and bluffs it through, he's going to come into a pile of money—that's what interests us. Oh, I know, we made the mistake of playing him for a rich one, but he's going to be rolling in it. You can't afford to hand him the mitten just now—not until we see how this thing comes out.

"Don't throw away our chances. I'm busted flat unless an angel happens along—and that angel is young Willard. He's crazy about you; string him along like you were doing before, and, when he comes into

Willard's estate, we'll get all the money we want. I'll make you a real star, and——"

"I believe you would have almost killed him yourself!" declared Clara Winter. Her shoulders shook with a sob. "I—I'd almost rather never be a star," she wailed. "I—I can't go on pretending I like him when I know that he killed him to get hold of the money to finance the new picture. I can't bear to let him touch me. It—it's all your fault, Willis; you led him on. I know you did."

"Pierce didn't kill his uncle," urged Hanford. "You'll see that he'll get out of it. Don't spoil the game; that's why I was trying to get you away, so that you wouldn't queer yourself with young Willard. Stop, Clara, treating him as if he were a leper. We've got to see this thing through; it's our only chance to put over the big picture that's going to make both of us."

Brucker, amazed by the cold deliberateness of it, wondered if Hanford had been entirely frank with Clara Winter; he began to debate the possibility that the director might have taken a desperate course to place Pierce Willard in the way of coming into money. He wondered whether or not Willard had, by fortuitous circumstances, complicated the situation by managing to get himself suspected. He thought of Lansey the cameraman—little better than a yegg, that fellow. His imagination began to race toward the camera and mechanical possibilities.

There was no more conversation between the two; the minutes dragged past before Bill Pitt returned. He came in, puffing noisily, and dropped his bulk into a chair.

"Now, lemme see," he grunted. "I was asking you—— Hm-m-m, well, I'll finish with you later. That'll be all for the present."

"We can return to the studio?" demanded Hanford.

"Most certainly not," retorted Pitt; "you're going to stay right here. I'll let you know when I'm through with you, but you can go on back to the other room."

**P**ROTESTING and indignant, Hanford went out and Clara Winter followed him. When the door closed, Pitt got up and waddled over to the secretary.

"Built like a furniture heaver," he grunted, "but it's all fat and no muscle. Give the thing a shove, Brucker, and we'll free thee from thine prison. Did they talk freely?"

"Did they? I'll say they did!" exclaimed Brucker. "The most astounding piece of business I ever heard in my life, but, before I'm going to tell you, I want to know what gave you the notion they'd talk."

"Dead easy," puffed Pitt. "Saw Hanford was nervous as a cat, tried to cover it up with bluster. Mighty anxious to get away from Roanoke Court; something on his mind—just had to take a chance that he might spill something."

"Well, he spilled it," said Brucker and plunged into an account of his eavesdropping. Pitt listened with his expressionless face and, looking up, fixed the other man with a mild eye.

"You've made up your mind that Hanford did the job, haven't you?" he grunted. It was more of statement than question.

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to say it, my boy; you think Hanford is the man who killed David Willard."

"Not actually—but I think he had it done," shot out Brucker. "You want my theory? All right, here it is. Lansey, the cameraman, fired that shot while pretending to take

a picture of the house. Take a good look at him; 'yegg' is written all over him. I wouldn't be surprised to find he had done time."

"Neither would I," nodded Bill Pitt. "Go on."

"A man with Lansey's mug would do anything for money. Hanford is one of those cold, hard, calculating fellows without a conscience—unmoral, I guess, would be the right word for it. He's only a director now, trying to break into the producing game on his own hook. Clara Winter is beginning to have some popularity as an actress. Hanford plans to star her. My notion is that she's in love with Hanford, as much as she could be with anybody."

"Both of 'em thought that Pierce Willard had money of his own. Probably a natural conclusion—nephew of Willard, the millionaire, scads of money to spend, and probably Pierce didn't disillusion her. Hanford, rotten cad that he is, was using Clara Winter to play the siren stuff on the 'rich young man' to jar him loose from enough money to finance Hanford as a producer."

"It's my notion that Hanford didn't come to Roanoke Court to take any pictures at all. He'd found out that Pierce didn't have any money of his own, but that he would have it if his uncle happened to die. Hanford knew that David Willard left the house every morning at eight, so he arranged a sunrise-picture excuse. Lansey set up his camera and started turning the crank; under cover of taking the picture he fired the shot."

"With what, young un? A rifle, is a mighty conspicuous object."

"He might have had some device rigged up inside the camera," suggested Brucker quickly, giving voice to the theory that he had been mulling over in his mind.

"A pretty-sounding deduction," grunted Big Bill Pitt, "but there's one little thing you've overlooked. The threatening note was pinned to the door before Hanford's automobile was admitted to the grounds."

"I'd forgotten about the note," Brucker ruefully admitted.

Pitt reached into his pocket.

"I managed to keep busy while giving you a chance to play dictograph," he grunted. "I found this on the lawn." His fingers opened, exhibiting a short length of white chalk. Brucker remembered the white smudge on the door and wondered anew.

"I found something else, too," added Pitt, sighing heavily. "Made a search of Pierce Willard's room. Found a leather rifle case, but the rifle is missing."

Brucker felt his fine theories collapsing utterly; suspect Hanford as he might, there seemed no reasonable way to explain how the director could have taken the rifle from Willard's room. He wouldn't have done that anyhow. It was to his interest to see that Pierce came clear of the crime. What a vague, bewildering tangle.

"Let's have a talk with young Willard," said Big Bill Pitt.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE HUNCH THAT FAILED.

AS Brucker stepped into the hall, on his way to summon Pierce Willard, he had his first glimpse of Muriel Talmadge. She came slowly down the stairs alone. Evidently she had recovered from the first shock of the tragedy, although her face showed with pitiful eloquence the evidence of her grief; the sorrow was a poignant one which had struck deep. He passed on into

the library, before she reached the foot of the stairs.

Pierce Willard was not in the room. He turned questioningly toward Ruel Sutton.

"Mr. Pitt wants to have a talk with young Willard," he said. "Where has he gone?"

Ruel lifted his shoulders.

"How should I know? I didn't know there were any restrictions on his movements. I don't think you'll find he's run away, although I might be tempted to—under the circumstances."

"You probably wouldn't get the chance—if it were you," retorted Brucker; for the life of him he couldn't hold that back. He found his dislike about evenly divided between Sutton and the movie director. He turned back into the hall again and saw Wicks, the butler.

"Wicks, you don't happen to know where young Willard has disappeared to, do you?"

Slowly Wicks inclined his head.

"Mr. Pitt wants to have a talk with him," said Brucker.

"I trust, sir, that it is not necessary to disturb him at this moment," murmured Wicks. "He—he has gone into the room—there." He pointed to where, down the hallway, reposed the body of David Willard.

Brucker gave a start of surprise.

"I wonder," he thought, "if he's doing that for effect." Certainly it would require an iron nerve for a man to go into the sleeping presence of one whose life he has taken.

Manufacturing an excuse to get Wicks to another part of the house, Brucker slipped silently toward the closed door of the room which contained the house's dead master. He remembered from previous observation that a pair of portières hung across the opening on the other side. Gently he moved the knob and

swung open the panel a bare inch or so; pushing back the edge of the portière with his finger he peered within. The shades were drawn, and through the shadows the watching man saw Pierce Willard standing by the couch upon which rested the tragic burden. The nephew's profile stood out sharply, revealing that his lips were trembling.

FOR a moment he stood with bowed head, and then slowly, a gesture seemingly reverent, he touched the white sheet, drawing it back so that the face of David Willard was bared to his gaze.

"It's taken this," murmured Pierce Willard, his voice hardly more than a whisper, "to make me know what a rotter I've been." To the listening Brucker the words were barely audible. Pierce Willard lifted the sheet back into place and turned; at this moment the door of a connecting room opened softly, and Muriel Talmadge entered the darkened chamber of death.

"Oh!" she whispered. "Pierce, I didn't know that you were here. I've been out to the garden; I came—" The flowers in her hand told the story of her presence. "He loved the roses, Pierce; I wonder if any one but me and mother knew how much poetry there was in his nature underneath his practical exterior. The flowers, the birds, he loved them, Pierce; and he loved you, too."

Pierce Willard brushed a hand across his eyes.

"I—I have just found out that—that I loved him," he said huskily. "You don't know what—what this has done to me—inside, Muriel. It seems to have turned me all around, somehow. I was just trying to tell him, Muriel, that I know what a rotter I've been. Do—do you think he'll know?"

She smiled through her tears and put an impulsive hand on his arm.

"I know he'll understand," she nodded; "it will make him happy, Pierce. It makes me happy, too; I knew, Pierce—I knew that you would come through. You've just been a big, willful boy, Pierce; and now you've suddenly grown up. Why, your—your face is different; you look so much like him now."

His fingers closed over hers in a quick pressure of gratitude.

"You had faith in me, Muriel?"

"Always, Pierce; you were just looking at life through distorted glasses. You've your right vision now. Life is something serious."

His hands clenched.

"For me it's very serious. Muriel, they—they think that I did this fiendish thing. They—every one—thinks that I killed Uncle David."

"Pierce! What are you saying?"

"There's no use denying it. Ruel, Miss Winter, the detectives—they all think that I did it—all but you and loyal old Wicks."

"Why should they think such a terrible thing?"

"It's the price I've got to pay for my wild oats. Because I've been reckless, irresponsible, because I've defied Uncle David and quarreled with him. We had another battle after dinner last night. Besides I was out on the grounds, the only one of us who can't account for himself. Perhaps they won't be able to prove it, but I'd rather go to the chair than have the suspicion of it clinging to me through life. So help me Heaven, Muriel, unless I'm cleared of this thing, I won't touch a penny of Uncle David's money!"

Brucker gently closed the door and slipped across the hall to the room where Bill Pitt waited. He was still under the dramatic spell of a soul bared.

"So far as I'm concerned, Pitt," he said, "scratch Pierce Willard off the list of suspects. He didn't do it."

"Has my theorizing young friend found the guilty man?" asked Pitt mildly.

Brucker repeated what he had heard.

"Pitt," he declared warmly, "no man with murder in his heart could do that. Pierce Willard didn't fire the shot."

"Don't you think we'd better be guided by the facts instead of our emotions?" asked Pitt. "A successful detective, my boy, can't allow himself to get sentimental. You mustn't forget that there's the matter of the missing rifle to be explained. As I said before, I think we'd better have a talk with young Willard."

"I stick to my hunch—Hanford had it done," declared Brucker stubbornly. "You forget we haven't had a look at that movie camera."

Bill Pitt heaved a sigh.

"Suppose nothing else will satisfy you," he grunted; "you might as well fetch it—and Lansey, the cameraman, too. Got to give you your way. We'll have Willard in later."

Brucker, thrilling with the hope of developments which he believed would prove his hunch, got the camera and summoned Lansey. The latter slouched in, his face set in sullen lines, and Bill Pitt, waving him to a chair, reached into a spacious pocket and produced an ink pad. Lansey drew back protestingly.

"Huh!" grunted Pitt. "See that you know what it means; you've been finger-printed before."

"Sure he has!" exclaimed Brucker.

"Done time at Sing Sing, haven't you?" demanded Pitt.

"Say," growled Lansey, "you ain't got no call to rub it in on me like

this. I ain't got nothin' to do with this croak. I'm goin' straight."

Pitt reached toward the bulky camera and set it on the table.

"Roll up the rest of the film and seal it," he commanded. "Mind you, no tricks, Lansey."

**G**RUMBLINGLY the cameraman obeyed and ground away at the crank for a few minutes, attending to the proper mechanism and sealed the film so that the light would not fog the sensitive gelatin.

"Now we'll have a look at the box," grunted Pitt. Brucker leaning over his shoulder, the camera was subjected to minute scrutiny. The eager look of expectancy in Brucker's eyes faded. There was no place where a cartridge-firing device might have been concealed.

Brucker's hunch was wrong.

Lansey was subjected to a thorough questioning, following this disappointment, but nothing of value was pried from him. He stuck to his story that he knew nothing about the visit to Roanoke Court except that Hanford had wanted to take a picture of the house and pose Miss Winter beside the fountain on the front lawn. The rest of the picture was being staged in the studio. He did admit, however, that the reason he had kept turning the crank of his machine when he realized that a man was perhaps fatally wounded before his very eyes, was that he could realize a little private profit, perhaps, by selling those few feet of film to one of the companies manufacturing news reels; it had flashed through his mind that he could get a pretty figure for such a dramatic flash. Banker Willard was a prominent figure in the financial world.

When Lansey was allowed to depart, Pitt glanced to Brucker.

"Well, young un, you guessed wrong. We don't seem to be making much progress, eh?"

"I'm sticking up for Pierce Willard," insisted Brucker. "He didn't do it."

"Let's see what he has to tell us."

Brucker found young Willard in the library, and the latter nodded absently when told that the detective wanted to have a talk with him. His face set, he entered Pitt's presence and sank down wearily into a chair.

"Mr. Willard it becomes necessary for me to ask you some questions."

"You needn't mince words about it," interrupted Pierce. "I know what is in your mind. Officer Brucker, of course, has already told you my explanation. I'm afraid that's all I have to offer. I went to the gates, had the watchman admit Hanford's car, and then went back to look for my cigarette case. I didn't know what had happened until I came out from under the trees and saw Brucker talking to the movie people."

"Ah, yes, the movie people," murmured Bill Pitt. "You have been attentive to Miss Winter, I believe."

Pierce nodded slowly.

"'Have been' is right," he said with some bitterness. "She was the first one to desert me. I'm afraid that I've been playing the fool—which is according to my usual form."

"She was trying to get you to put up the money for a picture of her?"

"No, but Hanford was."

"And he intimated more than once, perhaps, that the quickest road to Miss Winter's heart was the one which would point the way to her being a great star."

"You mean—that she was deliberately playing me?" gasped Pierce.

"I mean that very thing," nodded

Pitt. "She received your attentions under the impression that you had money of your own."

Pierce flushed.

"I may be responsible for that," he admitted. "I didn't disillusion her about it. It came to a show-down the day before yesterday. Hanford was pressing me for a decision—he demanded to know if I would go in with him. I had to admit that I had no money of my own—that is, none of my own except a fifty-thousand-dollar trust fund left by my father, and which was entirely in my uncle's hands. I told him that I would get that, demand that Uncle David turn my own money over to me. Hanford said fifty thousand dollars wasn't enough, but that it would help.

"Last night after dinner I put it up to my uncle. He turned me down and refused to give me a cent of it. I drove out to the studio and told Hanford."

"And that was when he asked you to let him come to the grounds and make a sunrise picture of the house?"

"I believe so."

"Did Hanford know of your uncle's custom of leaving the house at eight o'clock?"

"Perhaps he did. I've always considered it a great joke, calling Uncle David the human clock. Like as not I mentioned it." His muscles grew rigid. "Great Scott!" he cried. "Are you intimating that Hanford killed Uncle David so that he could get hold of money from me? It's too preposterous!"

"I am intimating nothing," answered Pitt; "just asking questions, seeking a little light. Now, if you don't mind, we'll turn to something else. You own a rifle?"

Pierce shrunk slightly, flinching with the realization that the finger

of suspicion was pointing now toward himself.

"Yes, I own a rifle."

"What caliber?"

"It's a .30-30, high velocity."

"Where is that rifle now, Mr. Willard?"

"It's upstairs, on the top shelf of my closet, in a tan case. I haven't touched it in nearly two years—not since I was doing some shooting in Maine, a year ago last autumn."

Pitt shook his head slowly.

"You are mistaken, Willard," he said; "I have acted upon my official privilege of searching your room. I found the rifle case, but the rifle is missing!"

Pierce Willard sat rigid, a dazed look on his face, as he realized the significance of this damning evidence. The only man who could not account for his presence at the time the fatal shot was fired—and his rifle unaccounted for.

"I'm innocent!" he cried hoarsely. "Some one took that rifle; some one is trying to put this crime on me!"

Bill Pitt stirred slightly.

"My duty is very clear, Mr. Willard," he said. "I shall parole you to the freedom of the grounds temporarily, but in the face of such strong circumstantial evidence I have but one official choice. I declare you under arrest for the murder of your uncle, David Willard."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TRAPPED IN A LIE.

ONCE again Brucker and Bill Pitt were alone. Brucker glanced at his watch. Only ten minutes past noon! Just four hours and ten minutes since the murder of David Willard; it seemed to him impossible that such a brief space of time had elapsed.

"So you've decided that it was the nephew?"

Pitt wiped his perspiring forehead and heaved his ponderous sigh.

"Young un," he grunted, "there's a complete circumstantial case against Pierce Willard—enough to send him to the death house. Motive? Good and sufficient. Crazy infatuation for a beautiful woman. Decides only way to win her is to finance her trip to movie stardom; Hanford keeps hammering that in. Admits his uncle wouldn't let him have money; in a frenzy of infatuation, sneaks rifle out of the house and hides it in the shrubbery. Makes an excuse of looking for cigarette case. Slips through the trees and waits until Willard comes out of the house. Fires the shot. That's the way it looks, huh?"

"On the face of the facts, yes," admitted Brucker, "but you didn't see him coming through the trees with that grin on his face. How could a man smile like that when he'd just done for his uncle?"

"Some people are possessed of an inhuman lot of nerve," ventured Bill Pitt.

"And what is more," argued Brucker, "he came straight through the trees. If he was guilty, why in the name of common sense wouldn't he conceal his movements by taking a roundabout course?"

"It's been my observation," countered Pitt, "that the criminal mind always overlooks something. You'd be amazed at the boners that are pulled by the cleverest of 'em. Yeah, they always overlook something—always."

"Then there's the rifle," persisted Brucker. "I've been over the premises with a fine-tooth comb. Where could he have hidden the rifle? I had an eye open for that. Young Willard couldn't have got it back

into the house, you know. It's bound to be somewhere among those trees."

Big Bill Pitt nodded soberly.

"You've got me there," he admitted solemnly. "I'm wondering about the rifle and that chalk smudge on the door. Somehow, my boy, I don't seem to get that chalk smudge off my mind. Oh, I know it looks like grasping at straws, but the darn thing puzzles me." He reached into his pocket and examined the piece of chalk he had picked up from the lawn.

"Then, too, Brucker, the simple process of elimination puts it on young Willard. Take your own list here. An alibi for every one of 'em except Pierce Willard. Servants? All absolutely accounted for. I'll take an oath that none of the servants did it. Muriel Talmadge and Ruel Sutton in the house—oh, I tell you, lad, young Willard is in a tight box."

"I'm afraid I'll never believe it until I hear him confess," declared Brucker stubbornly. "I tell you, Pitt, that boy is no murderer."

"A pleasing personality, yes, but remember what I said about that charming chap who cut his own father's throat. Personality isn't always character. It's a stone wall of fact that we're up against, and we'd better have another search for that rifle."

Brucker knit his brows thoughtfully, feeling certain that somewhere there was an elusive clew that would lead to the truth, hoping against hope that he might be able to find it eventually.

"I'm going to keep on trying," he said slowly. "I'll admit that we're up against stubborn facts. I admit that it would have been physically impossible for any of the servants, or for the stepdaughter or Ruel Sutton to have done the murder—and

that leaves Hanford or his cameraman."

"Insisting on sticking to that, aren't you?" grunted Bill Pitt. "Let me impress on you that such a wound as killed David Willard could have been inflicted only——"

There was a discreet tap at the door, and Wicks slipped in.

"Tubbs, the watchman, has telephoned that the undertaker is asking for admission to the grounds, sir; he wishes to remove the body."

"Eh?" grunted Pitt. "Who called the undertaker, may I ask?"

"Mr. Ruel, I believe, sir."

"Hm-m-m! Suppose you ask Sutton to come in and speak to me about it."

Wicks retired, and a moment later Sutton appeared.

"What's this I understand about your calling an undertaker to remove Mr. Willard's body?" demanded the detective.

"You understand correctly," replied Ruel. "Why not? The doctor has made his examination and gone. There is no need to delay the embalming; it isn't as if it were a case of the cause being in doubt. Acting as a member of the family I called the undertaker."

"Don't you think I should have been consulted?" demanded Pitt.

"It didn't occur to me. Surely there is no objection."

Pitt's languid gaze rested on Ruel's face for a moment.

"As it happens," he said slowly, "there is no objection, but the point I am making is that I am in charge of this house. No one enters or leaves the grounds without my permission. I have so instructed Wicks and the watchman. Kindly bear that in mind, Mr. Sutton."

"Then it will be all right to admit the undertaker?"

"Yes, I'll permit that."

BRUCKER stared after Sutton, as the latter retired, closing the door behind him.

"It strikes me," he observed, "that Sutton is mighty anxious to have the body out of the house."

"And the same thing strikes me," nodded Bill Pitt; "perhaps he's one of those high-strung, jumpy fellows that have a horror of having a dead body around." He pursed his lips meditatively and took up the interrupted conversation.

"I was saying, apropos of the movie people, that the wound which killed David Willard could have been inflicted only by a high-powered rifle. It couldn't have been a pistol, or any other short-barreled weapon. It was a rifle, and a rifle, as I have reminded you before, is a conspicuous object. Hanford was sitting at the wheel of his auto. Use your logical powers, Brucker. Could he have handled a rifle without Miss Winter seeing him, without Sutton on the doorsteps seeing him? Obviously not. Could Lansey, the cameraman, have handled a rifle, without observation, while working his camera? Same answer.

"No, the movie people, as I see it, are counted out."

"Unless it's a new wrinkle in murder," said Brucker; "every now and then there's something new in killings. Mark my words for it, you'll find an explanation that will free Pierce Willard."

"With the movie trio removed from suspicion——"

"Well, there're not—so far as I'm concerned," cut in Brucker quickly.

"Granting that they are, my insistent contemporary," went on Big Bill Pitt, "we are, to repeat, faced with this collection of unbreakable alibis. Every one of 'em is eighteen carat, one hundred per cent. No chance, either, of a confederate be-

ing hidden in the grounds—the actual slayer, for instance.

“Don’t you see how tight the web weaves about Pierce Willard? We can’t very well believe in the occult and the impossible. As it looks, Pierce Willard wrote the warning note to confuse the investigation—he pinned it to the door as he left the house this morning. He fired the shot—he’s the guilty man. Yes, I’ve reasoned it forward and backward. It’s the only explanation; I’m sorry, too, young un. It would please me a lot better to have a different solution of it.”

“Then you’re going to let Hanford and Lansey go?”

“What have we got to hold ’em for?” returned Bill Pitt. “Detaining people without sufficient cause is liable to get a fellow in uncomfortably hot water. Yes, I’m going to let them leave Roanoke Court.”

“You’re the boss of this job, but I can’t but have a feeling it’s a mistake,” said Brucker, getting to his feet. “I’m going to have another search for the rifle. It hasn’t got wings.” Pitt, too, lumbered to his feet, and both men moved toward the door; as Brucker opened it, there came to their ears the sound of a ringing telephone. As they went on down the hall in the direction of the library, they heard Wicks answering, and then the butler came toward them. Pitt turned.

“That call happen to be for me, Wicks?” he asked.

“It’s for Mr. Ruel, sir.” He stepped to the door of the library. “You’re wanted on the wire, Mr. Ruel.”

**B**RUCKER took a step forward, glancing into the room. Ruel Sutton was there alone; the others being elsewhere. It had been in his mind to have another talk with

Pierce Willard; Pierce being absent, he turned away.

“Hello,” said Sutton into the transmitter of the library phone, an extension. . . . “Yes, Sutton talking. Who? . . . Hello—hello.” His voice became impatient. “Hello—damn this phone!” He slammed down the receiver and bolted out of the door. Across the hall there was another extension connected into a virtually sound-proof booth built into the space beneath the stairway. Brucker stared after him curiously.

“I wonder,” he said, “if Sutton wanted his conversation to be strictly private?”

“Hum!” grunted Bill Pitt. With more haste than was customary he waddled into the library and lifted the receiver of the phone to his ear. There would, he reasoned, if the line were in order, be no difficulty in overhearing a conversation. But the line was quite dead. It took him a few seconds to figure it out—a switching mechanism which, by the pressure of a button, cut all the other phones on the line out of communication, giving the speaker complete privacy. There was every possibility that Sutton, using the instrument under the stairs, had done this very thing.

Pitt lumbered back to the hall.

“You hit it,” he said. “Sutton wants privacy with that call.” He waited until Ruel reappeared; Pitt asked him no question, but there was a mildly inquiring look in his eyes that Sutton did not miss.

“The bank was calling,” he said; “I was so devilishly cut up over this thing that I’d forgotten to get in touch with them. They wanted to know why Mr. Willard hadn’t got down; it’ll be quite a shock—a heavy blow. The men at the bank were all very fond of Mr. Willard—very fond of him.”

"Of course," said Pitt absently. He seemed to think no more about it and moved on toward the front door; but, as Sutton returned to the library, he wheeled and made for the booth telephone beneath the stairs. Brucker watched him curiously.

Very shortly Bill Pitt reappeared, streaming with perspiration from the heat of the phoning compartment. He jerked his head toward the porch, and Brucker followed him there.

"Something to look into, Brucker," he grunted. "In a case like this lies and evasions often have something more sinister behind them. Wasn't bank calling at all; Sutton lied. Long distance out here, you know; no trouble at all to trace it. Simply got the operator. Number of Willard's bank is Wall 092—and it wasn't Wall 092 that put that call through. It was Cedar 024—Hitson & Needles, Wall Street brokers."

"Why did Sutton lie about a phone call?" demanded Brucker. "You mean—that you think it may have been Sutton. Impossible! His is the perfect alibi."

"What I mean," retorted Big Bill Pitt, "is that we're not going to overlook any bets. Yes, I know his alibi is perfect; mind you, I'm not spinning any wild theories about it, but Sutton has got something he don't think we ought to know about, and I feel differently about it. Sutton lied about that call coming from the bank, and I want to know why he lied."

Bill Pitt looked across the porch in the direction from which had come the fatal bullet from the rifle which seemed to have disappeared so mysteriously.

"Brucker," he said slowly, "that motor cycle can get you into New York in an easy hour, can't it? I

want you to go to the city, go to the offices of Hitson & Needles, and find out if you can what the telephone conversation was about."

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## CHAPTER IX.

### A RELUCTANT WITNESS.

**H**AD it been a straightaway, Joe Brucker would have made it within an easy hour, but traffic, once he got off the Chambers Street ferry—he came down the Hackensack Road, crossing the State line into New Jersey, and thus to Jersey City—delayed him. It was a quarter of three when he pulled up in front of the brokerage offices of Hitson & Needles, on one of those narrow streets in the heart of New York's financial district.

A dust-covered, grimy-faced spectacle he was, as he pushed within the mahogany-paneled office. Clerks stared, and a stenographer tittered. He made his way to the information desk, presided over by a young man who seemed to take the job very seriously. He eyed Brucker's approach with frank disfavor.

"I want to see Mr. Hitson, on a matter of urgent and utmost importance," said Brucker.

"Za' so?" The loftily inflected question was accompanied by a doubtful glance. "You've got some distance to travel. Mr. Hitson is in Bar Harbor, Maine."

"Then I'll see Mr. Needles," said Brucker firmly.

"You will, eh? You seem to be very positive about it. I'll take your card in, but I don't think he'll see you."

"I have no card, but——"

"Then I know he won't see you. Busy."

"But I have this." Brucker had his police star pinned to his shirt

underneath his coat; he produced it. "It is necessary that I get from Mr. Needles some very important information."

"Oh, that's different. Why didn't you say who you were? Is it official business?"

"Official business."

The young man retired into an office, the glass-paneled door of which bore Mr. Needles's name in gilt letters; in a minute he returned and held open the mahogany gate.

"He'll see you," he said.

**M**R. NEEDLES was a crisp-looking man of past forty, with a severely cut gray mustache and a steely gaze. He had been dictating some letters and was impatient at the interruption.

"Well?" The question was curt.

"Mr. Needles, I am with the State Troopers, stationed forty miles up State. I've made a flying trip into the city to find out something about your business relations with a man named Ruel Sutton. A telephone conversation—"

The broker frowned.

"We never give out information regarding any of our clients, except through legal process. If there's any official call—Sutton, hm-m-m!" It was as if he were trying to place it.

Brucker stood his ground.

"I see I've gone at it wrong," he said. "Perhaps I'd better begin by saying that it is in connection with the murder of Mr. David Willard at his country estate this morning."

"What! Dave Willard—murdered! You don't mean the banker?"

"Hasn't the news of it reached the papers yet? I presumed you'd heard; the local correspondent must be asleep on his job. It's true. Banker Willard was shot to death from ambush, as he was leaving his

country home at eight o'clock this morning."

The broker looked up slowly.

"Sutton?" he murmured. "The name had escaped me for the moment. I remember now; Sutton is Mr. Willard's secretary. Never met him personally, but have heard the name. Your visit here—your inquiry—does that mean that—"

"It means, Mr. Needles, that the circumstances of Mr. Willard's death are very mystifying, and we're running down all possible clues." He debated for an instant and took a plunge.

"I'm going to lay all my cards on the table," he said. "I know that it isn't customary for you to give out information concerning your customers except, as you said, by legal process. But I know, too, that you won't stand behind a legal technicality if it may possibly defeat the ends of justice. I hope you are not that sort of man. What you tell me will be treated with all possible confidence."

"I promise you nothing; the relations between broker and client—but go on; I'll listen."

"You never met Mr. Willard's nephew, I presume?"

"Didn't know he had a nephew."

"I was hoping you had," said Brucker; "a decent fellow, in my opinion. He's under suspicion—serious suspicion. It isn't necessary that I go into all the details of that. What you're chiefly concerned about is why I want to know about Sutton."

"Apparently there isn't a shred of evidence against him. He was standing beside Mr. Willard at the moment of the murder, within the sight of witnesses."

"Then why investigate him?"

"I'm getting to that. Something like an hour and a half ago there was a telephone call for Sutton. There

was something secretive about his conduct. He told us that the call came from Mr. Willard's bank, but we traced the call, and it came from your office here. He lied about it, and we want to know why he lied."

The broker lifted back the lid of his cigar humidor, deliberately selected a smoke, and did not reply until he had it going.

"My dear sir!" he murmured. "It doesn't strike me as being so unusual that a man should be secretive about possible stock-market operations. Most men are."

A pall of disappointment settled over Brucker; the broker's tone told him that no information would be forthcoming. Still he persisted.

"Won't you tell me why some one from this office called Sutton?"

"How should I know that?"

"It must have been important—a long-distance call—"

"The interests of our clients are always important."

"Then Sutton is a client?"

The broker lifted his shoulders.

"We have a good many hundred clients, my dear sir. You could hardly expect me to remember. Mr. Sutton may be doing some trading with us in a small way; he may have good and sufficient reason to conceal his market operations."

Brucker lost his temper.

"Do you realize that you may be thwarting justice, giving protection to a criminal?" he demanded hotly.

"My dear sir! You have just told me with your own lips that there's not a shred of evidence against Mr. Sutton. How could I be thwarting justice if such is the case? You go much too far. If it is a matter of legal importance, the courts are open to you for proper proceedings. But we must decline to give out information such as you request. Perhaps some one from this firm did call Mr.

Sutton over the phone; brokers call their clients every day." He turned in his chair with a gesture of finality; and Brucker knew that it was hopeless; until such time as the bookkeepers of the brokerage firm could be summoned by legal process, the hidden story of Sutton's market activities would remain as closely guarded as a client's confidences to his lawyer.

Brucker wondered if he had bungled his mission; if, perhaps, he had gone at it differently, he might have got the facts that he had come for. Of only one thing was he positive—Ruel Sutton had been stock gambling through the firm of Hitson & Needles.

That might mean, of course, that the market had gone against him; it might even mean that he had used his opportunity as the banker's secretary to get the money for his speculations. Admitting, even, that all this was true—how would it have been physically possible for Ruel Sutton to be guilty of the banker's death?

It was a question which seemed impossible of answer. Discouraged by his defeated effort to elicit any information from Needles, baffled by the whole mysterious affair, Brucker left the brokerage office for his return trip to Roanoke Court. He was discovering that being a detective is no easy business.

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## CHAPTER X.

### FILMED EVIDENCE.

ON his way back the sturdy motor cycle began to develop engine trouble. It was, for this reason, quite dark when he reached Roanoke Court. Big Bill Pitt must have been waiting impatiently for his return, for the detec-

tive came across the porch and met him at the edge of the gravel driveway.

"I've made a mess of it, Pitt," he said glumly. "Guess I'd better stick to chasing speeders. Saw Needles, but he wouldn't come through; respect for the confidence of his clients and that sort of thing." He repeated the substance of his interview with the broker, making it as verbatim as his memory would permit. Pitt digested the account and for a moment or so made no reply.

"Hm-m-m!" he grunted presently. "Maybe you haven't made such a mess of it as you think. You've done something anyhow—discovered that Sutton is a customer, that he has been bucking the market. That's something. Moreover, it looks to me as if Needles was unnecessarily stingy about handing out a little harmless information. Don't believe he would have taken that attitude if Sutton had been piking along for a few measly shares. Like as not it isn't so important anyhow, so far as that's concerned."

"Meaning that Sutton couldn't have done the job."

"That's the size of it, and still I'm overlooking no bet."

"Let Hanford go?"

"Yes; Lansley, too. They went back to Midvale shortly after you started for New York. Not the slightest excuse for holding 'em here. I've attended to something else while you were away; sent that film Lansley took, in to be developed."

"Not to Hanford's studio?"

"Hardly that," grunted Pitt. "There's a small studio there that makes a business of turning out small slapstick comedy reels. I had one of their men come over to get the film. He's telephoned me that it actually shows something. He's go-

ing to bring it back along with a projecting machine which we can put up in the library. He ought to be here soon."

"I wonder if Lansley did get it," said Brucker. "An actual movie of a murder! But, of course, it won't show anything except Willard and with Willard staggering back when Sutton standing on the doorstep, the bullet got him."

Pitt looked toward the trees.

"Hasn't it occurred to you, young un," he asked, "that it might be a severe strain on a guilty man's nerves to see his crime enacted before his very eyes? Strong men have broken down under more pleasant third-degree tests than that."

"I—I hadn't thought of that!" gasped Brucker. "Say, Pitt, that's an idea! But you aren't going to leave Hanford and Lansley out, are you?"

"They'll be here," replied Pitt; "that's one of the conditions I made—for them to return at eight."

"If it's Lansley or Hanford they'll know what the picture shows and will be on their guard—no chance of springing it as a surprise on them."

"I didn't think it necessary to have Miss Winter see it—or Miss Talmadge, either, for that matter. I've counted them out entirely. Nice girl, Miss Talmadge. She and I had quite a talk while you were away."

"She is the other person besides myself who feels that Pierce Willard is innocent."

"Of course; she's in love with young Willard."

"I rather guessed that; young Willard ought to know by this time that she's worth a hundred like the Winter girl. You're still of the mind that Willard is the man?"

"Have to stick to that unless it can be proved I'm wrong. Let me tell

you something, Brucker; I've been in this sleuthing game for fifteen years. My experience is that in just about ninety-nine times out of a hundred, Pierce Willard would be the guilty man."

"Didn't find the rifle?"

"No sign of it; I waddled around the place half the afternoon with the two gardeners, but that's all the good it did. That gun seems to have vanished in thin air."

"Figured out about the chalk smudge on the door yet, Pitt?"

The other man shook his head.

"No, I haven't figured it out yet, but I'm still wondering about it now and then some."

AS they went toward the house Joe Brucker realized that he had missed his lunch; he mentioned this oversight, and Pitt said that he would have Wicks look after the matter. Pitt himself had shortly before finished dining with Miss Talmadge and Ruel Sutton. Pierce Willard had not joined them in the evening meal; evidently he had begun to feel the alarming meshes of the web pressing closer and closer about him. He had kept to his room, thinking Heaven only knows what.

While Pitt and Brucker waited for Wicks to call the latter into the dining room, the detective indulged himself in a cigar, one of the two a day to which he limited himself, and puffed meditatively.

"Funny what little insights to people's character can be picked up by seeming idle conversation," he murmured. "For example, what would you make of a fellow who mistreated a horse? Maybe you don't consider that such a sin, eh? I'm too confounded fat to ride 'em, but I love horses, and it makes my blood boil to see 'em abused."

"You mean that Pierce Willard really——"

"No, it's Ruel Sutton who, when he rides, brings his horse back to the stable with his mouth sawed to a bleeding pulp. And I can't help thinking that the man who does that sort of thing is likely to be the kind who would kill a man with a dum-dum bullet." He threw up his hands in a weary gesture. "But that's impossible, physically impossible. I've got to stick to facts, and facts virtually convict young Willard."

Wicks appeared to announce that Brucker's belated dinner was ready.

"I won't go in with you," said Pitt. "That man ought to be here from Midvale with the film and the projecting machine any time now. I want to get it up; for you and I, Brucker, will have a little private exhibition of it before we give our performance."

Brucker went into the dining room, where the butler served him with his solitary meal. He ate absently, for his mind was too much occupied with traveling around the endless circle of mere speculation. Shortly before he finished his coffee, he heard an automobile coming up the driveway and took it for granted that it was the arrival of the man from Midvale with the film.

SO it proved to be; returning to the library he found Pitt and the movie man at work erecting the projecting machine. The latter had brought along a silver sheet which was hung across the wall, and in considerably less than an hour it was all ready.

"It doesn't give us much projection distance," grunted Pitt, measuring the distance between the machine and the screen. "However we oughtn't to kick; this room wasn't built for a theater."

"You've got a clear film," said the movie man, a fellow named Curtis. "I could see that when I was developing it. Believe me, it was some job to get it ready for you in this time. I'm ready now, Mr. Pitt, if you are."

The detective closed the door and locked it.

"Go ahead," he instructed tersely.

The projecting machine had been hooked up with the house electric-light circuit. Curtis snapped off the lights, threw in the switch, and the carbon burners began to sputter and sizzle. A stream of strong white light leaped through the darkness and bathed the screen. Then the operator began to turn the crank, and the east view of Roanoke Court's stately architecture was before them. For a moment there was no movement except the weaving of an awning fringe on the front porch. One of the windows on the second floor was opened, and the face of one of the maids appeared for an instant and then disappeared.

The nose of the banker's limousine, Derby at the wheel, poked its way into the picture and came to a halt to the left of the east entrance, the door of which was open. Derby sat soldierly erect, both hands on the wheel.

Ruel Sutton appeared in the doorway; he stood with his body against the left side of the opening, turned half sidewise, his fingers closing and opening in what seemed to be a nervous state of repression. He looked at his watch and then glanced back within the house, as if impatient.

David Willard suddenly stood beside him, his newspaper tucked beneath his arm; there was a preoccupied frown on his face, as if his mind were already leaping ahead to the day's business before him. He took out his cigar, snipped the end

with the cutter on his watch chain, struck a match and lighted it carefully.

Ruel Sutton again glanced at his watch; it almost seemed that the hand which held the timepiece was shaking. There was a strained, intense look on his face; his gaze went upward and then down toward the camera. David Willard suddenly moved a little forward, as he started down the steps to his waiting auto. Sutton's hand went out and touched him detainingly on the sleeve for a brief instant. His lips moved, and Willard stopped, his gaze looking straight to the point where the camera must have been. His own lips moved in reply, an indignant look on his face.

For the third time Sutton looked at his watch; it seemed almost that he was timing the minute fractions, and then a dazed, almost puzzled look came into the banker's face. His body tensed, his hand was flung to his chest, and he staggered back, his mouth hanging loose, his eyes staring. Back he teetered into the shadows of the hallway.

The fatal bullet had been fired and had found its mark.

His hands gripping, Brucker kept his eyes glued to the amazing picture of a murder. Ruel Sutton had turned his head away, one hand flung over his mouth, the other clenched against his chest. He made no move to stoop to the aid of the wounded man. He was still frozen in that attitude of petrified terror when the light from the projecting machine leaped out white again. The picture was ended; the camera had finished its story.

Brucker grasped Bill Pitt's well-padded arm.

"Heavens, what a picture!" he whispered. "Murder before our eyes."

"Let's have the lights on, Curtis," Pitt called to the operator. "Yes, what a picture! What do you make of it?"

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## CHAPTER XI. SUTTON SLIPS.

WHEN Brucker went to Pierce Willard's room he found the young man slouched moodily in a chair. On the table by his elbow was a decanter of whisky, but it was untouched.

"I don't believe I would do that if I were you, old man," said Brucker. "Yes, I know, it's a temptation, but that isn't going to help any."

"What is—going to help any?" demanded Pierce jerkily. "For hours I've been battling the thing out; I'm as good as convicted right now. My rifle—me out there among the trees—the only man who had a chance to do it, they say. Everybody thinks I fired the shot—everybody except Muriel, Heaven bless her!" A look of pain shot across his face. "I've learned to know what a treasure she is—when it's too late."

"Every one, perhaps, except Miss Talmadge, Wicks, and myself," amended Brucker.

"Thanks," answered Pierce. "But not Wicks; he's trying to be loyal, but I think he, too, is losing his faith in me."

"Mr. Pitt wants to see you in the library, Willard—you and Sutton together." He hesitated for a moment and then asked: "You and Sutton don't get along very well, do you? Don't care much for each other?"

"No; we've never managed to hit it off."

"I'm wondering if it isn't because Miss Talmadge—"

"Nothing of the sort," interrupted

Pierce almost indignantly. "It's just—well, he just naturally couldn't help hating me; I guess that's it. You see, he came to live with Uncle David when he was just a kid. So far as Muriel's concerned, that's ridiculous. Ruel's engaged to Miss Batson, daughter of one of the vice presidents at the bank. Why are you asking me these questions?"

"Just wondered," replied Brucker; "I rather got the notion that it would please him mighty well to see this crime fastened onto you. You'd better be getting on downstairs. I've got to find Sutton."

I think he's in the billiard room; I heard the balls clicking a minute ago. Yes, I'll get on downstairs. I wonder how long it will be before—before I'll be arrested—formally?"

In the billiard room Brucker found Ruel Sutton. For a moment he stood in the doorway, watching a perfect two-cushion shot. Certainly it took a steady nerve to do that, but when Ruel laid down his cue and went to light a cigarette, it was plain that such nerve control was something that he had to accomplish by sheer force of will power.

"Well?" asked Sutton. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Mr. Pitt wants to see you down in the library."

"What—again! Isn't that fellow satisfied yet? What more does he want?"

"You'll have to ask Pitt that," retorted Brucker and then added: "However it's a safe bet that he wants to be sure that he's got the right man."

THEY went downstairs; at the entrance to the library Sutton stopped, staring questioningly at the silver sheet on the wall and the projecting machine. Pierce Willard was already there, patently

as much puzzled by this strange proceeding as was the other man.

"Sit down here, Mr. Sutton," requested Bill Pitt without any preliminary explanation, indicating a chair within a few inches of young Willard. "All right, Curtis; go ahead."

The lights snapped out, and the projecting machine shot forth its stream of light upon the screen. An instant later there flashed into view the picture of the house. Ruel leaned a little forward in his chair, his arms folded across his chest. The reel unwound, and in the picture Sutton appeared in the doorway, nervously glancing at his watch.

"Gad!" he whispered. "The fellow did get a picture of it, didn't he?" Brucker strained his eyes through the gloom, trying to get a glimpse of his face. There was no recoiling fear, as he had hoped to see.

The machine clicked on; David Willard stood in the doorway beside Sutton. He lighted his cigar, puffing slowly; Sutton looked at his watch again. The banker moved as if to descend the steps toward the waiting limousine; Sutton's hand went out detainingly, his finger pointing. And then, as Pitt and Brucker had seen before. Banker Willard staggered back, with that look of blank horror suffusing his whole face.

Pierce Willard was plainly more affected than Sutton; a cry burst from his lips, as he half raised from the chair.

"Great heavens!" he shouted. "It's a picture of the murder!" He sank back again, buried his face in his hands, and began to sob. Evidently Curtis, the operator, had his instructions, for he wound back the reel a few feet and showed it over again.

"Stop it!" cried Pierce. "In Heaven's name stop it!"

"I should think it would tear at your conscience," said Ruel Sutton grimly. "Mr. Pitt, I congratulate you; you are a better detective than I thought. Thanks to the coincidence of this picture, you have a virtual confession."

"You lie, Ruel Sutton—you lie!" almost screamed Pierce. He would have struck him except that Brucker pinned his arms. "I didn't kill him; God is my judge that I didn't kill him!"

Sutton shrugged his shoulders.

"Turn on the light, Curtis," ordered Bill Pitt. He stood in front of Ruel and Pierce, eying them stolidly. Brucker, too, was watching them. Pierce Willard's face was haggard, ghastly pale; that of Sutton was tense, but nothing more.

"Willard, since you have seen this picture, have you any further statement to make?" demanded Pitt.

"No." There was a world of hopelessness in that monosyllable.

"You have my permission to return to your room. Mr. Sutton, you will remain for a talk with Brucker and me."

**S**TUMBLINGLY young Willard left the library. Pitt nodded Curtis toward the door, and the operator likewise made his exit, closing the door behind him. Ruel reached for his inevitable cigarette.

"Seems to me you're taking long chances, not putting him in custody," he observed.

"Safe enough," answered Pitt easily; "he can't get away."

"But—er—mightn't he try to do away with himself? That would be the easiest way out for him, wouldn't it? The way he went to pieces when he saw the murder, that's a clincher of his guilt."

"It could be grief," declared Brucker.

"Nonsense! Conscience, that is what it is. I tried not to believe that he did it, but facts are facts."

"So they are," nodded Pitt, "and Brucker and I are going to stay right here on the job until we've found out at least two things."

"Don't tell me that you're not satisfied!" scoffed Ruel.

"I'll never be satisfied, Mr. Sutton, until I find that missing rifle, and I never quit a job until I'm satisfied. We'll search again to-morrow; we're going to find that rifle if we have to tear up every blade of grass, uproot every shrub, and ransack every building. That rifle is on the place here, and we're going to produce it. That's one of the things."

"The other?"

Bill Pitt reached into his capacious pocket, and his pudgy hand came out, the fingers closed.

"The other thing is to find the explanation of this." Slowly his fingers opened, exposing to view the half-inch length of white chalk. Brucker could not be sure, but he thought he saw Ruel Sutton's muscles tense. Certainly his eyes narrowed, as he stared down into the detective's palm.

"A—a piece of chalk, eh?" he asked. "You—aren't you joking? What's a piece of chalk got to do with the murder of Mr. Willard?"

"That," answered Bill Pitt, "is just what I want to know."

"It's preposterous! A piece of chalk!"

"Little things sometimes have big meaning," observed Pitt. He looked up at the ceiling and then at Sutton again.

"Brucker here took a little motorcycle trip into New York this afternoon," he said deliberately. "He dropped in to have a little talk with

your brokers—Hitson & Needles, you know."

"What!" The word snapped from Ruel's lips, and his head jerked up, his black eyes hot. "May I ask just what you mean by that?"

"Yes, and I'll answer it, too, Sutton. I caught you in a little lie this afternoon and was checking up on you. You said that telephone call came from the bank."

"Well, what if I did? I've a right to some business privacy."

"Playing the market rather strong, Sutton—for a man of your income."

"That's none of your confounded business. What's the meaning of this? If you're trying to intimate that——"

"I intimate nothing, but it's my business to be curious. I caught you in a lie; you brought it on yourself. What have you got to say about that market plunging?" His tone might have been considered to imply that he knew all about it anyhow. Ruel Sutton bit his lip for a moment and then smiled a little.

"It was ridiculous of me to lie about it," he said easily. "The call did come from Hitson & Needles; they wanted to ask me about some margins. I suppose the reason I concealed it is that bank employees are forbidden to speculate. That's the whole of it, Mr. Pitt."

"Sure of that, eh?"

Ruel became defiant.

"Hanged if I submit to any more of this cross-examination. What bearing has my market operations on the death of Mr. Willard? First thing I know you'll be trying to accuse me of the murder—even in the face of the positive proof shown by this film. I decline to be humiliated by any more of these questions."

"Oh, that's all right, Sutton; I wasn't going to ask any more," answered Bill Pitt. "You can go."

## CHAPTER XII.

## A BAD DIG.

FOR a full three minutes Pitt stared at the now blank movie screen, while he plucked absently at his double chin. Brucker waited impatiently.

"Well, what do you make of it, our test with the film?" Pitt asked presently. "Sutton didn't turn a hair, did he?"

"Nerves and nerve; he's got 'em both, if you ask me," said Brucker.

"Young Willard rather went to pieces, eh?"

"Yes, I've got to admit that he did; he's about at the end of his string anyhow. I found him up in his room with a decanter of whisky, and Sutton playing solitaire billiards."

"Still sticking to it that Willard is a victim of circumstantial evidence?"

"I'm afraid that I'm beginning to waver a little," admitted Brucker. "He did blow up when he saw his uncle staggering back in the picture. If it's narrowed down to Sutton or Willard, it'll have to be Willard. Sutton acts mighty nervous in the film, but the film proves that he isn't the guilty man. He's hiding something; like as not, he played the market with money he had taken from Willard and is keeping his mouth shut. Dead men tell no tales to the grand jury."

"He seemed to be slightly startled about that chalk, didn't he?" murmured Bill Pitt. "He hid it well—still he was startled."

"Why do you keep harping on that chalk business?" demanded Brucker.

"Because I've got a hunch, young un; when you've been in this business as long as I have, you'll begin to have some regard for hunches."

Pitt lumbered to his feet and rang the bell for Wicks; the butler dragged himself in wearily, the dignified erectness of his shoulders lost in a dejected slumping of the muscles.

"Brucker and I are staying all night, Wicks," said Pitt.

"Yes, of course, sir."

"It seems to be that I recall a bedroom on the second floor, just at the head of the stairs. That is a guest room, I believe."

"That is correct, sir."

"It has two beds; Brucker and I will occupy that room, Wicks. Almost ten o'clock; we'll be turning in, I think."

"Your bags, sir?"

"Haven't any," declared Pitt.

Five minutes later the two investigators of the Willard murder were settled in the big bedchamber, Wicks having located some sleeping garments for them.

"You seemed rather particular in the choice of quarters," observed Brucker.

"I was—for reasons. It might occur to you, young un, that with a sharp ear to that door it'll be impossible for any one to get down the stairs without detection."

"You mean——"

"I mean, my young friend, that I have in my mind a careful map of the house. Ruel Sutton's room is down at the end of the hall, toward the front; that of Pierce Willard adjoins it. Miss Talmadge has two rooms across the hall. Just a precaution, Brucker. We'll divide the shift, draw straws for it, if you like. You watch until two o'clock, while I sleep, or vice versa."

"You think that some one will attempt to go down the stairs?"

"I think they might."

"Why?"

"Well," answered Pitt puffingly,

struggling out of his coat, "I happen to have something like a suspicion that there might be an effort to get hands on that rifle."

"Another hunch?" asked Brucker. "I haven't got much faith in 'em. Turn in, Pitt; I'll take first watch, although it's my notion that I'm going to waste good sleep for nothing."

"Perhaps; that remains to be seen. So you speak for first watch, eh? Suits me; get a chair and put it there by the door, and remember that if any one does try to get downstairs, it will be done mighty quietly. No napping, understand. Got to be on the alert."

"And if any one tries it——"

"Let 'em," cut in Pitt. "Give 'em time to get a start and wake me. I sleep lightly. And then follow 'em. That's the program, in case they try it."

"Which they won't!" retorted Brucker.

"Having the sporting instinct, I'll just bet you a five-spot on that," grunted Pitt, sitting down heavily on the edge of the bed and beginning a puffing battle with his shoe laces.

"I'll just take it," said Brucker. "There's no reason I can think of why any one should go to such pains in helping us resurrect that rifle. The principal aim so far seems to be keeping us from finding it, and they've been successful enough at it. You're holding out on me," accused Brucker. "You got hold of some clew that you haven't said anything about."

"You wrong me!" murmured Bill Pitt. "Huh! I'll say Wicks is a rotten judge of circumference; how in thunder does he expect me to get into these pajamas? However, it's all right; I wasn't going to wear 'em anyhow."

HAVING removed only his coat and shoes, Big Bill Pitt lowered himself flat on the protesting springs of the bed, giving a wearily contented grunt. Brucker, although he had no faith in the vigil, drew a chair near the door and sat down. Presently he heard a light, nervous step, which he was sure must be Ruel's approaching from the direction of the billiard room. His muscles tensed, but the footsteps passed his door, proceeding on toward the front of the house. A door shut somewhat noisily, and all was still. Eleven o'clock came, and he could tell from the fading of the tiny glow of light through the keyhole that some one, probably Wicks downstairs, had switched off the lights in the hall. Eleven thirty passed and no sound came to Brucker's ears to break the stillness enveloping Roanoke Court, except the regular, somewhat noisy snores of Big Bill Pitt.

The nervous tension of the most exciting day that he had ever passed was relaxing, and he had to fight off the sudden daze which began to steal over him. Repeatedly he yawned, glancing longingly at the empty bed and reproachingly at the miniature mountain which was the sleeping Pitt, silhouetted faintly in the gray shadows of the room. Downstairs the old Westminster-chime clock voiced its musical prelude to the striking of midnight; yards to the east, along the main road outside Roanoke Court's stone wall, an automobile siren smote the stillness, and the unmuffled roar of a high-powered car, raced at speed, vibrated.

"I don't need any speedometer to tell me that they're hitting up to fifty," grunted Brucker. The time dragged on, the house seemingly wrapped in a deep slumber. Drowsi-

ness became insistent, but he fought it off, eager for two o'clock when he could turn what seemed a most futile job over to Pitt. And then his dulling senses snapped into life. He could not be sure, but it had seemed to him that he had caught just the faintest suggestion of a creaking hinge. He couldn't take the chance of opening the door, for that might give warning that he was on guard. Perhaps Bill Pitt's hunch was going to stand up after all.

His ear held close to the door panel, waiting for a possible creeping footstep to pass on the way to the stairs, he listened, every nerve straining. A footfall? He couldn't be sure; sometimes a man's imagination plays tricks on him in such moments of tenseness, but he felt very sure of some softly moving presence in the hallway outside, but the person did not approach the stairs. Of that he was certain, but presently, being unable to detect any other sounds which would confirm the others, he decided that it had been nothing but his own fancy. One o'clock dragged past, one thirty, and then two.

His watch was ended, and he was very glad. Brucker felt that he had been cheated of good sleep. It was Bill Pitt's turn at it now, if he wanted to waste his time, so Brucker roused the sleeping detective.

"All right," Pitt whispered. "My sentry duty, eh? Hear anything suspicious?"

Brucker admitted that he thought he had, but was no doubt mistaken about it. Gratefully he began to remove his clothing and fell exhausted across the bed. His mind was well on the shadowy road to unconsciousness, when the silence of the big house was broken by the shrill scream of a woman—a scream full of surprise, anguish, terror.

Just that one piercing wail, and all was still again. Joe Brucker leaped up.

"Great guns, Pitt, what was that?"

"Get your clothes on," said the detective tersely, his hand on the knob. He snapped on the light and stepped into the hall. There was no doubt that the scream had come from the same floor and down the hall. That cry had come from Muriel Talmadge; that was certain.

AT the door of her room Pitt paused, his heavy knuckles striking on the panel. But there was no response; within that room there was no answering sound. Brucker, his feet bare, having only put on trousers, was in the hallway behind him.

"You think it was Miss Talmadge?"

"I know it was; she's the only woman sleeping on this floor, so it had to be she."

"Probably nightmare."

"She doesn't answer."

Pierce Willard's door opened, and he stood before them, fully dressed.

"Whatever is the matter?" he demanded. "Didn't I hear——"

Pitt laid his hand on the knob of Miss Talmadge's door; it answered to his touch and the portal swung back. The boudoir lamp beside the bed in the corner was burning, its delicately colored shade casting a soft glow over the room.

Muriel Talmadge lay stretched before them on the floor, unconscious.

"Look!" cried Brucker.

On the rug, just within the doorway, rested a sinister thing of blue-steel barrel and polished—the missing rifle!

For once Pitt's wooden face betrayed surprise; his jaw sagging in an expression of amazement, he stared at the rifle, at Brucker, and

at Pierce Willard who was in the doorway.

"My rifle!" young Willard cried hoarsely. "What does it mean? What's it doing in Muriel's room?"

Pitt stooped over, picked the young woman up in his arms, and, placing her on the bed, drew the covers over her.

"Those are some questions that I want answered myself," he said grimly. "Get a glass of water, Brucker; Miss Talmadge is in a faint."

"What's all the racket?" It was Ruel Sutton's voice; he stood behind Pierce. "I heard a scream, a commotion, voices——"

"The missing rifle," said Pitt, "has suddenly reappeared. There it is on the floor."

"In Muriel's room?" asked Sutton. "That's queer."

"Yes," said Bill Pitt, "it most certainly is—queer." He picked it up, rubbing the end of his little finger to the tip of the barrel. It came away stained with burned gunpowder. It was a magazine rifle; Pitt worked the lever, and an exploded shell was ejected and fell at his feet.

"My rifle!" said Pierce Willard again. "I don't know what it means."

"Pulling the surprise stuff, eh?" asked Ruel. "Hiding behind a woman's skirts, huh? Well, I guess that is to be suspected from a man who would shoot his uncle from ambush."

"I ought to kill you for that!"

"Get out, both of you; go to your rooms and stay there until I want you," snapped Pitt. "I want to revive Miss Talmadge and hear what she's got to say."

As Ruel Sutton turned, Brucker looked at him with speculative curiosity; on the man's left cheek was

a long scratch that had not been there a few hours before. Sutton seemed to sense the question behind the stare, for his hand went to his face.

"Must have been a pin in my pillow," he said; "gave myself a bad dig just now."

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### ROSES AND THE RIFLE.

AS Muriel Talmadge's eyes fluttered open, and her memory began to function again a shudder shook her body.

"It—it must have been a dream," she whispered. "It couldn't be true—it couldn't."

"You mean about the rifle?" asked Bill Pitt gently.

"Then it was true—that rifle is here!" She began to sob wildly and uncontrollably.

"What you think, Miss Talmadge," went on Pitt, "is that Pierce slipped the gun into your room—that Pierce did that, thinking you would conceal it for him."

"I don't know what I think. What can I think? I can't believe Pierce did it; I know he didn't do it, but——" Loyalty, love, and doubt were fighting a battle in her brain. "Pierce! I want him to tell me that he didn't do it." Her voice rose to a higher pitch, a wild cry with a prayer in it; it must have reached the ears of young Willard in his room across the hall, for he came to the door.

"I didn't do it, Muriel," he told her solemnly. "I didn't put the rifle in your room, and I didn't do the other."

"I believe you, Pierce—I believe you. I know that you had nothing to do with it."

"Tell us what happened, Miss Tal-

madge. What it was that made you scream?" asked Bill Pitt.

She choked back her tears.

"There isn't much to tell. I was asleep; I must have had a nightmare that woke me up—a terrible dream with Pierce in prison. Oh, I can't bear to think about it! Anyhow, I woke up and turned on the boudoir lamp to see what time it was. My hand was on the button to turn the light off again, when—when I saw it. At first I thought it must be part of the dream, too. I couldn't believe it; I just couldn't believe that it was real—until I got out of bed and touched it. That was when I screamed. That's all I can tell you."

"You don't lock your door at night?" asked Pitt.

"Very seldom, if ever," she replied. Her fingers reached out and caught the detective's big, pudgy hand imploringly. "Tell me," she begged, "that—that you don't think that—"

"We'll have to wait for daylight," he interrupted gently; "I don't think any of us can tell right now what daylight will bring, Miss Talmadge. Sometimes, my child, daylight brings sunshine."

And with this somewhat enigmatical response he turned from the room, motioning for Brucker to follow. Pierce Willard still stood in the hall by the door.

"Willard," said Pitt, "I am willing to hear you explain why you are up at two o'clock in the morning, fully clothed."

"I must have fallen asleep in my chair," answered Pierce; "it was Muriel's scream that awakened me. Is this another link in the chain of evidence against me?"

"Go back to your room," said Pitt. "I'm in no state just now to tell what I may, or may not, think. Come on, Brucker."

WHEN the two men who battled with the problem of solving the Willard murder were back in their bedroom, Pitt dropped heavily to the edge of the bed.

"Don't talk to me for a minute; I'm trying to make the brain perform a bit." Brucker waited, and presently Pitt was moved to speech.

"I don't want to cast any reflections on your reliability as a watchman," he grunted, "but are you sure that you didn't let any one get downstairs to-night?"

"Positive of that, but around one o'clock I thought I heard a door open. It seemed that I heard some one creeping along the dark hall. Of course I was waiting for some one to go down the stairs, and I didn't look out. I may have been mistaken."

"No, you weren't mistaken," declared Pitt; "the rifle proves that. What you heard was either Sutton or Willard coming out of their room—the question is, which? It seems easy to answer that question, eh? Willard is the suspected man, and we find him fully dressed at two o'clock in the morning."

"That's the odd thing about it," said Brucker. "If he did put the rifle in Miss Talmadge's room, why did he court further suspicion by leaving on his clothes when he had a good hour or more to remove them? Why should he have put the gun in her room anyhow?"

Big Bill Pitt did not answer for a moment.

"To indulge in logic," he said finally, "we might say that he didn't want us to find the gun, that he slipped it into her room, thinking she would find it in the morning and hide it to protect him. But she upset his plans by screaming and calling us in there. I wonder if she

wouldn't have protected him at that—if she hadn't fainted."

"That's logical, but I don't find it very convincing. That leaves Sutton. What motive could he have had for putting the rifle in the girl's room?"

"To further indulge in logic," grunted Pitt, "we might suppose that Sutton had some reason for wanting to produce the gun; we'll suppose that he was entirely willing for the crime to be fastened on young Willard. He doesn't want to put it in Willard's room, for Willard would, likely as not, transfer it to a less incriminating place. Possibly Sutton thought the girl would find the gun and would not protect Willard; let us suppose that Sutton doesn't like Willard, that he is not unwilling to make him lose the faith of the one person who still trusts him blindly, implicitly."

He heaved his shoulders.

"Oh, what's the use?" he muttered. "Theorizing is an interesting speculation, but it isn't getting us anywhere. The fact remains that downstairs we've got two hundred feet of film that proves Sutton didn't commit the crime."

"What puzzles me among other things," said Brucker, "is how that gun was got upstairs. You searched Willard's room—the whole house, so far as that is concerned—thoroughly. Sutton's room, too, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, I did that this afternoon. I didn't even spare Miss Talmadge's privacy. Yes, that's another poser: How did the rifle get upstairs? I've certainly known the whereabouts of both Willard and Sutton all through the day. Willard has kept to his room most of the time. Neither of them have been out on the lawn, and if they had they wouldn't dare walk into the house with the rifle."

Brucker lowered his shaggy head in thought.

"Did you notice that scratch on Sutton's face?" he asked.

"Yes, I noticed it; scratched himself with a pin, didn't he say?"

"I noticed it particularly; seemed to be rather wide for a pin scratch, Pitt, and something just occurs to me. There are some rambling roses planted on the side of the house where his room is, and roses do have thorns."

Bill Pitt's head jerked up, as he shot Brucker a quick glance of dawning realization.

"By Jove, young un!" he exclaimed. "That's a bet I certainly overlooked. Humph! He could have let himself out the window, couldn't he?" His jaw sagged suddenly, as he sat like a man in a daze.

"I've been dead from the neck up!" he went on. "The missing rifle—the chalk smudge on the door! I've got it; by the Lord Harry, Brucker. I've got the whole fiendish thing!"

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### PITT PUTS IT OVER.

IT was ten o'clock in the morning; in the library of Roanoke Court sat Bill Pitt, Joe Brucker, Pierce Willard, Ruel Sutton, and Muriel Talmadge. There was an air of tenseness in the room. Willard's face was haggard, and his eyes were bloodshot; the girl, too, showed the effect of a harrowing night. Ruel Sutton, easily the coolest man in the room, puffed slowly at one of his cigarettes.

Pitt sat by the table, the lethal rifle in front of him. He was stolid, his face without expression. Brucker was unable to so conceal his eagerness to see the enactment of the final

and dramatic climax to a mystery that had been filled with so many puzzling clues. The silver sheet upon which the murder film had been shown the night before still hung on the wall, but the projecting machine had been taken down and placed on the floor by the door.

The silence became oppressive. Ruel Sutton stirred impatiently.

"What are we waiting for?" he demanded.

"For Willis Hanford, Lansey, the cameraman, and Miss Clara Winter," answered Pitt. "I've urgently requested that they be present."

"What have they got to do with it?" demanded Sutton.

"It occurs to me," answered Pitt lazily, "that movie folk will have a keen interest in the dramatic. I think I hear their motor now."

So it proved to be; a few minutes later the movie trio came in. Hanford offered no protest at the summons; Lansey was sullen of mien, as was his nature, and Miss Winter, looking very chic, took a chair and glanced toward Pierce, giving him what was evidently a forced smile.

"Just touch that bell, will you, Brucker," requested Pitt, "the one that calls the butler." Brucker did so, and Wicks entered.

"Our little gathering is now complete," said Bill Pitt. "I can state positively and without reservation that the slayer of David Willard is now in this room." There was a uniform shudder, and nearly every glance went toward Pierce Willard.

Pitt reached into his pocket and brought forth a pair of handcuffs which he jingled meaningly, and young Willard unconsciously drew his wrists closer to his body. Sutton, one chair removed from him, lighted another cigarette; his hands before his face shielded the smile which faintly moved his lips.

At a signal from Pitt, Brucker arose, and both men crossed the room. But it was in front of Ruel Sutton and not Pierce Willard that they paused.

"Let's put 'em on, Sutton," grunted the detective. "You're under arrest for the murder of David Willard."

RUEL leaped from his chair, and the mask of mastered nerves dropped from his face for a moment, as gasps of amazement sounded through the library. Brucker seized his arms from behind, and Pitt snapped the handcuffs shut. In a moment Sutton, although his face was pale, had to some degree mastered his terrified surprise.

"What sort of an outrage is this?" he asked. "You're crazy. I killed Mr. Willard?"

"It could not be!" whispered Wicks. "I was standing right behind him, sir; you are making a mistake."

"The bull is off his nut," grunted Lansey, the cameraman. "Wasn't I standin' right in front of him with the box—didn't I get a picture of the whole thing?"

"Yes, the picture," said Pierce Willard dazedly. "I saw the film. Ruel! It's impossible!"

Pitt returned to the mahogany table, while Brucker stood guard over the prisoner.

"Sutton killed him with this," said the detective, pointing down to the rifle. "Oh, he didn't have it in his hands; he didn't pull the trigger, and yet he murdered David Willard as surely as if it had been his finger that sped the dum dum bullet to its fatal mark.

"The film seems to prove him innocent, but in the face of other evidence it will serve to find him guilty before a jury."

"Gad, what a drama!" whispered Hanford, the movie director. "I can't believe it."

Clara Winter gave a half-frightened, half-pleading glance toward the man who she had been so sure had killed his uncle in order that he might get the money which was to finance her try for a stellar place in the movie world.

Ruel Sutton sat rigid in his chair, and there was evidence that his nerves were fast getting from under his control.

"This rifle," went on Pitt, "belongs to Pierce Willard. There has been a determined effort on the part of Sutton to get the crime fixed upon young Willard, although I am not so sure that it was his intention at the time he took the gun from the leather case in Pierce's closet.

"Ruel Sutton had planned this crime for three days or more. Each morning for three days he got up before the house was well astir for a walk in the grounds. He was planning his crime, craftily, carefully.

"He bought a cheap writing tablet and with a typewriter wrote a vaguely threatening note to David Willard, which he pinned to the door of the house with a tack, thinking that this would confuse the detectives."

"How was the murder done?" asked Hanford.

"I'll get to that in a minute," went on Pitt. "The motive for the crime was that Sutton had been playing the stock market with money belonging to his employer, money which he had an opportunity as Willard's secretary to get his hands on. Perhaps Willard would not have sent him to jail, but Sutton is engaged to the daughter of one of the bank's vice presidents, a young woman wealthy in her own right. He knew that exposure as an embezzler would,

if not send him to prison, at least prevent him from marrying a comfortable fortune."

"The whole thing's a lie!" Ruel cried hoarsely. "It's a trumped-up lie. Mr. Willard gave me those bonds that I used for margins at the brokerage house—he gave them to me as a present."

"Thanks for the information," retorted Pitt. "So you covered your margins with bonds stolen from Mr. Willard? Quite easy to understand it all now. Your losses were getting so heavy that the brokers were threatening to sell your bonds, eh? You knew that if the bonds were sold there was no way you could ever return them to the man from whom you had stolen them. You begged your brokers to hold off. They called you up yesterday afternoon, and you instructed them to go ahead and sell. Isn't that it?

"When Brucker went to see Needles, Needles wouldn't talk. I can understand that, too, now. The firm stood in a good way of standing the loss for 'em. But I'll be getting on.

"Sutton has always hated young Willard, and when circumstances pointed to Willard's guilt, he was secretly pleased. He had no fears for himself; he thought his scheme much too clever for detection, thought he could kill two birds with one stone—remove himself further from suspicion and at the same time satisfy an old, groundless grudge.

"No criminal is as clever as he thinks he is. He is always face to face with the unexpected; he plans on circumstances being too kind to him. After the shot he made a great show of effort to catch the man who fired it. He ran off through the trees, but Brucker rode in on his motor cycle and stopped him before he had a chance to remove the damning evidence of his guilt.

"This unexpected occurrence accounts for the missing rifle. It was the missing rifle and a chalk smudge on the door which turned suspicion in Sutton's direction. I'll get to that in a minute.

"Last night Sutton learned that Brucker and I would never quit this job until we'd found that rifle, and he was afraid we would find it. I suspected him from the moment I saw the confession of guilt mirrored on his face in the film which seemed to clinch his innocence beyond all argument.

"I stationed Brucker at the door to watch for Sutton going downstairs. He fooled us with this." He reached to a box under the table and produced a length of rope, knotted every two and a half feet to give a foothold for climbing. "He tied this rope to the hot-water radiator and went out to the grounds. As he dropped into the rosebushes beneath his window he scratched his face on a thorn. You see the mark on his face.

"He got the rifle, climbed back into his room with it, slipped out into the hall, opened Miss Talmadge's door, and put the gun inside—to tighten the net about Pierce and to make Miss Talmadge, the person who had the greatest faith in him, think he was guilty.

"But he did not retrieve this." He reached again to his box under the table and brought forth an alarm clock, one of the junior sizes, not a great deal larger than a watch. The clock was fastened to a board which also had some strange-looking metal arrangements attached to it.

Ruel Sutton shivered like a man in the grip of a sudden chill, and a moan burst through his lips.

"This is how Sutton killed David Willard from a distance of fifty yards, while at the same time he

stood beside him," explained Pitt. He picked up the rifle and put it on the board, fastening it with the clamps until it was in an entirely rigid position.

"This is the death trap," went on Pitt, "just as it was until Sutton sneaked out and removed the rifle last night. The board was nailed high in a heavy-foliaged tree. The clock, you see, is camouflaged with green paint; the board, also.

"The whole thing was planned on the certainty of David Willard's regularity of habit. Sutton was reasonably sure that nothing but illness would prevent his victim leaving the house at eight o'clock. Sutton on the morning of the murder got up early, went into the grounds, and climbed the tree, where he had already placed the gun and his firing mechanism. As he departed from the house he made on the door a white chalk mark which would be the level of a man's chest. From the tree the chalk mark gave him his target; he aimed the rifle at that identical spot, set the alarm for eight o'clock, or a minute or so after, attached a piece of string to the hammer which rings the alarm bell, the other end of it to the trigger of the gun.

"It's a hair trigger, the faintest touch letting down the firing pin. The bell of the clock, as you see, had been removed; there was no more noise than a faint whirring sound.

"He realized that Mr. Willard might not stand so that the bullet would reach a vital spot, so he used a dum dum bullet and creased the nose of it, so that death would be certain, one of the inhuman methods of killing a man which are forbidden even in war.

"The movie tells the rest of it. Sutton preceded Mr. Willard to the

door, occupying the left-hand space of the threshold, so that Willard would be forced directly in the path of the bullet. The film shows his nervousness, the constant glancing at his watch. Mr. Willard started down the steps; in another instant he would have escaped death, but Sutton detained him—stopped him to wait for the leaden missile of death.

"As deliberate a murder as has ever come under my observation. Sutton, have you any statement to make?"

The guilty man licked his palsied lips and looked pleadingly at Brucker.

"My cigarette case, please," he said thickly. "With a smoke I'll have something to say. I can't reach them with these infernal things on."

Brucker accommodately got the cigarette case for him, and Ruel fumbled for one of the smokes. His hands were shaking horribly, and there was a sickly pallor about his face. He put the cigarette between

his teeth and crunched down upon it.

"Thank Heaven," he whispered, "that I was prepared for any emergency." A shiver passed over his body, and a glazed look cooled the fever in his eyes. "I—I've beat the chair! Capsule in end—of that cigarette—prussic acid—not as clever as I thought I was." Again a shiver went through his body.

Ruel Sutton was dead.

When the first horror of the thing had passed, Willis Hanford leaned close to Clara Winter and whispered something in her ear. She looked up quickly and nodded; then she turned toward Pierce Willard, with the smile which she hoped would make her famous. Hands outstretched, she took a step toward him.

"Pierce!" she murmured. "I'm so glad for you. Yesterday——"

"Thanks," broke in Pierce Willard with cold politeness. "Yesterday is yesterday, and"—his eyes went toward Muriel Talmadge—"to-day is to-day."

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## ESCAPE FROM PENAL COLONY

**T**HAT escape from Devil's Island, the dreaded French penal colony, is possible was evidenced by the arrival of six men in a sailing canoe in Willemsted, Curaçao. The men asserted that they had been serving sentences on the island for crimes which included murder and robbery. Early in September they succeeded in leaving the colony and reached Trinidad on September 26th. They were detained there until October 1st, when supplies and food were furnished to them by sympathizers, and they were enabled to set sail again. By October 11th, they were headed for South America. Later, out of water and provisions, they were obliged to make for port.

The party consisted of five Frenchmen and a Spaniard, all of whom had been serving sentences of from five to ten years. Another member of the party was an Italian who explained that he was not a convict, but that a steamship had left him behind in Trinidad.

Though the men were anxious to continue their journey, the authorities detained them as unadmitted foreigners without proper identification papers.

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# SIMON TRAPP GOES TO SING SING

By ROY W. HINDS

THE visitor's eyes twinkled. A humorous idea had just taken form in his mind, and, while giving it voice, he watched Simon Trapp closely, so that he might enjoy to the full the old man's consternation. The pawnbroker's feelings in certain matters were well known in the underworld.

The visitor said solemnly: "It looks like you'll have to do this job yourself, Simon."

Simon Trapp gasped.

"Me! Wha-what?" He stared, then grinned a sickly grin. "You should better go and have your head looked into, Ed. You're crazy. Me go up there to that place!"

"And why not?" Ed Spangle inquired quite seriously. "The job calls for an old man, don't it? Well, you look the part, and you're clever. You could pull it off fine, Simon."

But the Broome Street pawnbroker still thought that his friend jested. He waved a hand impatiently.

"Don't be foolish, Ed. Try and help me out, but you shouldn't joke about it no more."

"Simon," Ed Spangle assured him, "I ain't joking. I say the idea's a good one. Think it over."

Though he had no intention what-

ever of taking the idea seriously, Simon Trapp found himself in a curious state of mind. He was frightened by the very thought of it. The thing was so appalling that even to think of it as a joke inspired no humor within the breast of Simon Trapp.

The pawnbroker had mingled with crooks through years and years, men who knew no fear. Indeed, lie himself was a man of great courage. He had engaged in enterprises without number, in which disaster hung over his head by a mere thread, and he hadn't winced. As a matter of fact, Simon Trapp's manner of life was such that he lived in constant peril, but somehow the constancy of it had rendered that peril commonplace. His was an adventurous spirit. It was singular that any idea involving danger should so upset the Broome Street pawnbroker, but this—this was so different, so filled with dread.

Sometimes, brave men face vast dangers without weakening, only to flinch in the face of something which to others appears insignificant. Every man perhaps has his own particularly deep aversion, and Ed Spangle had touched that tender spot in Simon Trapp. Throughout the years that aversion had been

instinctive, growing year by year until it overshadowed even the fear of death. A suggestion that he swallow poison couldn't have made the old man's hands tremble so violently or his voice quaver so pitifully, but the suggestion that Simon Trapp himself pay a visit to Sing Sing—

He shuddered.

"You should stop talking like that, Ed," he pleaded. "I don't like it. I tell you the truth, I got the creeps from just thinking about it."

**T**HIS was a rare treat for Ed Spangle, who had an active spirit of devilry in his soul. It was no common thing to see Simon Trapp with the tremors. And, besides, Ed Spangle really believed his suggestion good.

"Don't get stirred up, Simon," he rejoined. "It ain't nothing. A visit to Sing Sing! Why, how many men have you sent up there on errands? You can't count 'em. They didn't get in bad. They went up there and done their little jobs and come back with no trouble. You could do the same thing. You make more of a fuss about going up there on your own account than you would if a judge and jury told you to go!"

"I know it, I know it!" the old man admitted. "But I can't help it. It's the way I feel." He grew calmer. "It's funny I should feel that way, ain't it, Ed? I don't know what makes me. Every day of my life I take a chance on being sent up there, with no return ticket to come back by. I take them chances and don't worry. I'm careful in everything I do, but I bet I never think about that place when I go about a job. I just don't think about it; maybe it's in my mind, and I don't notice it. I ain't afraid about being sent up there—I mean, no

more'n you or anybody else. But, when I think about going up there as a visitor— Oh, my! oh, my! Ain't it awful! Going up there and asking to be let in—I can't do it, Ed."

"But there's thousands of visitors go to that place. Nobody knows that you're playing a game."

"I know it. I could act all right. I could do it as good as the fellows I send up there once in a while. I got nerve, Ed, but I bet I'd shake all over when I stood in front of that place. I always thought I'd be all right if I could get inside and should be talking to the man I go there to see, but it's the getting inside. You know, Ed, I never even got a glimpse of that place, and I'm afraid of them walls. I bet I should faint right away. Sometimes, in my walks, I get a look at the jail, and I have the funniest feeling. I turn right around and go away from there. I can't help it. The outside of a jail looks worse to me, I bet, than the inside does to you. It ain't nothing that you should laugh about. You shouldn't laugh at an old man—"

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Simon. But listen to me: Why are you afraid to do something that you ask other fellows to do?"

The pawnbroker shrugged his shoulders.

"That's their own business if they take the jobs I offer 'em. I ask a fellow to go to Sing Sing on an errand for me. I offer to pay him. He can turn the job down if he don't like it. Everybody don't feel the same's me about that, Ed. It ain't a hard job, and it ain't so dangerous as some others, but me—it gives me the creeps to think about going up there."

"I get you, Simon. 'Stoo bad."

"But use your head a little bit,

Ed. Can't you think of some old man that should do this job for us?"

Ed Spangle's brow wrinkled thoughtfully. He studied the grotesque pattern in the carpet of Simon Trapp's living room, at the rear of the pawnshop. He disposed of a cigarette-end in an ash tray and lit a fresh one. Finally, he said:

"I can't, Simon, to save my soul! It's got me stuck, same's it has you. The world is full of old men, but I can't think of a one that'll do us any good. This job takes cleverness, Simon. That 'clothesline code' ain't no cinch. Whoever does this job has got to be an actor every minute, and he's got to have a sure memory. It's easy enough to find a young fellow for the job, or a middle-aged man—but nothing doing! We got to have an old man, and no made-up old man, either. Disguises won't go up there. No false whiskers and a wig for this job. It's a fact, Simon, but I think you're the man for that job."

"Don't let's talk about that, Ed."

"Look at the money we're passing up!"

"We ain't passed it up yet."

"Ain't passed it up—huh! Like to know what you call it. The boy made the 'plant' in his letters. He was foolish to do that, but it's done now. He's rigged it up so nobody but an old man can get by up there with that line of stuff. I don't know what he was thinking about. Had you in mind, I guess, and had a foolish idea that you'd call on him. Never thought about you getting somebody else to visit him. He worked it nice, if he only hadn't laid the plant for an old man."

"How'd he come to do that?" the pawnbroker asked disconsolately.

"Just as I say, I guess he had you in mind. There he is, stuck away in that place, with nobody to advise

him. He started in right away to frame something before we could get any word to him. We didn't have no way to stop him, and all we could do was play to his leads. He led out with a letter to his 'father.' And me, as father, had to shoot right back at him. Back and forth we corresponded, regular father-and-son stuff, and them letters, all of 'em read in the office of course, built up the father until he's the real thing. The kid was wise in one way. It's easier for an old man to get by with a line of phony talk in that place than it is for a young one. They don't watch old folks as close. They feel sorry for 'em, and they ain't as suspicious. It's a good plant, all right, as the kid is looked on as a first-timer, and they don't figure him as wise enough to pull anything good. I expect they feel sorry for him, just a kid gone astray, and if a real sorrowful father got on the job, there'd be nothing to it. They could chin away, get the clothesline stuff across—and everything'd be merry. If we only had the father!"

"Well," Simon Trapp suggested with a happy thought, "that kid ain't very old. His father don't have to be more'n fifty."

"Say, Simon, what're you talking about? You read them letters. You know the stuff that kid pulled. He worried because father was so old and feeble, afraid he wouldn't be here when he got out, and that line of junk. You ain't right, Simon—you ain't thinking straight."

"I remember now, I remember," the pawnbroker hastened to say. "I didn't think about that. Maybe I ain't thinking straight, since you said for me to visit that place. I'm upset."

"And I stick by that idea!" Ed Spangle declared.

"You better let loose of that idea."

Spangle leaned across the table and spoke earnestly.

"And," he said, "I got another idea to go with it."

"I hope it's better'n your first idea."

"This idea'll make it easier," Spangle explained. "I'll go up to that joint with you."

"Wha-at?"

"I'll go up there with you. Listen, I'm clear. They don't know me up there. I can get by fine. I'm young enough for another son of yours, see? I'll be the kid's brother. That's a great idea, Simon! I like it better every minute. And we'll play the pitiful-old-man stuff clear across the boards. You'll be almost blind, see? You'll wear colored glasses. I'll lead you, and you'll walk feeble and moan about your poor boy in prison. Ain't that great?"

The ghost of a smile illuminated the old man's face.

"Maybe I wouldn't feel quite so shaky if you should be with me," he admitted reluctantly, adding quickly: "But I ain't said yet that I'll go up to that place."

"But you're coming around, ain't you?" Ed Spangle asked happily.

"Well, it don't look so bad now. But listen—why don't you go up there alone, as the brother of that kid, and say that your poor old father is sick in bed? Ah, ha!" he cried joyfully. "That's a good idea!"

Ed Spangle sank back in his chair and grunted disgustedly.

"How long do I have to harp on that father stuff?" he demanded. "Ain't it the pitiful old man that's going to put the thing across? A miss is fatal. That clothesline code, Simon, takes time. The father can stretch the visiting time where the brother would be cut off. I ain't

saying that it's impossible for me to handle it alone, but it's a cinch that you got a better chance. It's the sympathy racket that we got to work up there, and work strong. A husky guy like me ain't got much chance of playing for sympathy. It'll take an old man like you for that. We can't take no chances, Simon. The percentage is against us, anyway, and we got to play every trump we can. The old man is our best card. We can't toss that. We got to play it. But," Spangle added, "just to make it easier for you, I'll go along with you."

Simon Trapp drew a long breath, and his manner became one of resignation.

"And that kid," he said, "he knows the clothesline code all right, eh?"

"He learned it from me."

"I guess he should know it all right, then." The pawnbroker paused while his friend acknowledged the compliment with a smile. "Well," Mr. Trapp resumed, "I s'pose we got it to do. When—when should we go up there?"

"To-morrow."

Simon Trapp's hands again trembled.

"That's pretty sudden, ain't it?"

"Can't waste any more time. To-morrow's the day. I'll be in early in the morning. I'll help you get rigged-out. You want to look neat and clean, Simon, but poor, and older than you are, if you can. The older the better. I'll be a hard-working fellow, see? Steady and honest, but a trifle dumb in the head. Just plain folks. I'll see you in the morning."

"And the colored glasses?"

"Oh, yes; we need them."

"I'll get 'em. I'll get the spectacles. I like that idea—the colored glasss."

Ed Spangle smiled broadly.

"Them walls won't look so hard

and gray through colored glasses," he said. "They'll look softer."

The old pawnbroker did not smile.

"I like that idea," he repeated absently. "Colored spectacles."

**B**EHIND the somber walls of Sing Sing prison there languished a keen-witted young man who had been enrolled there as "William Cameron." Of course, that was not his name, but there was none who had him in charge that knew the difference. To Ed Spangle and Simon Trapp, he was known by his real name, but in their private conversations they referred to him as "the kid."

Strange as it may seem, the kid held the key to one of Simon Trapp's most important enterprises, in which the extremely clever and versatile crook, Ed Spangle, was also involved. It was seldom that the old pawnbroker's affairs rested on such doubtful ground; seldom that all the threads of one of his devious schemes converged in such an uncertain and inaccessible center. A trick of circumstances now made it necessary for Simon Trapp to invade the walls of Sing Sing in order to untie a knot that baffled him.

The kid was doubtful only on account of his youth and inexperience. So far as he had opportunity to prove himself, he was clever and trustworthy. He had nerve and the quality of "sticking." Simon Trapp had no fear of his weakening, but he did fear his youth and inexperience. It was necessary to untie the knot before the youth was led into some indiscretion and would make him wholly inaccessible.

Simon Trapp was accustomed to the position of leader in all his games. He was the commander, the man who decided every point finally, and whose word was law. But in

this trip to Sing Sing he automatically relinquished that position, hardly knowing it, so filled was he with tremulous dread. He placed himself wholly in the hands of the audacious Ed Spangle, reserving only the right to act as he pleased in certain small essentials.

A New Jersey bank was the ultimate object of Simon Trapp and Ed Spangle, a rich bank in a small town. On account of local conditions, the vault of that bank had to be opened by the silent method. The locking device of the vault was too "stiff" for the scientific burglars at the moment available to Simon Trapp. The vault was equipped so that it was considerably tougher for a thief than a safe, and yet not so tough as a thoroughly modern vault. It would have been easy for a crew with explosives; but, on account of the bank's location and the work that would have to be done in the deep, inner recesses of the vault, explosives were out of the question. The only way that Simon Trapp's crew, captained by Ed Spangle, could take the riches of that New Jersey bank was first to provide themselves with the combination of the vault.

The young man who languished in Sing Sing under the alias of "William Cameron" possessed that combination. It was written upon his brain. He had obtained it by working a confidence trick on a young employee of the bank, with whom he had been friendly since boyhood. That friendship was the only route into the confidence of the young man in the bank, for the purposes of Simon Trapp, and it was hard luck indeed that William Cameron had been picked up on another charge before he could relay the combination to Simon Trapp or to Ed Spangle.

**I**T was under the careful tutelage of Ed Spangle that the young crook had worked on the job. Things had gone fine until the kid, returning from New Jersey, was picked up by a New York detective and jammed into the City Prison on a charge from which he had been a fugitive a month or so. That charge was unknown to Ed Spangle and Simon Trapp. The kid was in jail under a name that meant nothing to them. He was afraid to attempt communication with either the pawnbroker or Ed Spangle, afraid that such an action would direct the attention of the police to the pawnshop.

He was convicted and sent to Sing Sing, and the first intimation that the mystified Simon Trapp and Ed Spangle got of his whereabouts was a letter which reached Spangle in rather a roundabout way, a letter in which the kid began to lay a plant for "father." The young man had worked all angles of that plant cleverly, and of course Ed Spangle, taking up his end of it from the prisoner's "lead," corresponded in a manner and tone to strengthen the plant. It was a pity for them that the kid hadn't been more fully instructed in the codes of the underworld, else he could have conveyed a wealth of information, including the combination of the bank vault, to Ed Spangle in his letters. But he was too young yet to have learned those codes, or even a smattering of them, and he couldn't get much across in his letters.

But he had learned the clothesline code, which of course is not a code to be used in writing. Crooks exchanging information by the clothesline code must be within sight of each other. It is a code for the transmission of figures, and in general the figures have their solution

in words and phrases, but for the purposes of Ed Spangle and Simon Trapp the figures themselves were sufficient. They wanted the figures of that vault combination, and they knew that William Cameron was prepared to give them those figures by the clothesline code, because in one of his letters he had said: "I'll drop you a lin next week about what to do with my cloths."

By picking out the only misspelled words in that sentence, it was easy to see that the kid emphasized "clothesline." And he had directed attention to that sentence by starting it with a capital "I," which is one of the most rudimentary details in the written codes of the underworld.

Such was the situation when a plainly-dressed young man with a simple and honest countenance led to the gates of Sing Sing an old man with pitifully stooping shoulders and feeble footsteps. It appeared that the old man was almost blind, for he put his feet down uncertainly and tapped and explored the ground with a heavy walking stick, while his eyes were screened and protected by a pair of large-lensed glasses darkly colored. Indeed, so faltering were his steps, it was apparent that, bereft of the guiding hand of his young companion, the poor old creature would have been hopelessly lost. Beside the infirmities of age, every line and every angle of the old man's figure betrayed that his heart was pressed down by a heavy grief. Though he bore it more strongly and seemed intent only on consoling his companion, it was plain that the young man, also, suffered from a weight upon his spirits.

"Be brave, father," the young man urged. "We'll soon see Willie." He added in undertone: "How does the old joint look, Simon?"

"Shut up, you fool!" the old man muttered. "This should be a fine time to crack jokes, ain't it?" He moaned in a louder voice: "My poor little boy, my poor little Willie!"

Ed Spangle chuckled deep inside, but managed to maintain his melancholy outward aspect.

"Poor little Willie!" he repeated. "I hope Willie ain't forgot his old clothesline lessons. Don't lose control of yourself, father. Poor old dad! What d'you think of them walls, Simon—and them steel bars? Look at 'em and weep!"

Simon Trapp groaned, and the groan was in no way artificial.

THEY came to the gates of the big prison and obtained admittance as the father and brother of the prisoner known as William Cameron.

A steel door clanged behind them. The sounds of sliding locks and of dangling keys reached their ears. Simon Trapp's flesh quivered, and he swallowed dryly. A series of tremors skittered up and down his spine, and neither were any of these reactions in any way artificial.

The preliminaries were soon disposed of, and permission was granted for the visit. They were led by a guard into the visitor's quarters. It wasn't long before William Cameron appeared before them, visible, but separated by screens meshed in such fashion that no object could pass between the visitors and the prisoner. Also, guards kept a vigilant lookout in the visitor's quarters, and listened to every word spoken therein.

"There's Willie, father," said Ed Spangle.

"My poor little Willie, my poor boy!" Simon Trapp cried.

"Don't weep, dad," the prisoner begged. "You'll break my heart."

"I won't cry! I won't!" the old man promised. "But why should you ever come to such a terrible place?"

The temptation to jest was too strong for Willie.

"I didn't come," he said. "They brought me."

"Father," Ed Spangle hastened to intervene, "tell Willie just what you think we can do for him."

And the game began.

Simon Trapp gathered his courage. After all, the old man was a consummate actor. He talked. With every word his wits and his imagination grew fresher. He ran on in the veins previously discussed with Ed Spangle. He talked of imaginary relatives and related in detail intimate family affairs, interrupted now and then by a question or a suggestion from the imprisoned Willie. He enlarged upon "plans" for obtaining the boy's release. He bemoaned his fate one moment and implored him to cheer up at the next.

And all the time the clothesline code was in operation between the prisoner and Ed Spangle.

Occasionally, Ed Spangle took part in the conversation, and the whole comprised a marvelous exhibition of a visit by a bereaved father and brother to a wayward youth. There was no slip in the talk; there was not the slightest let-down in the assumed mannerisms of the three. They lived their rôles like good actors. They felt the thrill that comes with success. As clever crooks, they reveled in the game of putting one across within the very walls of Sing Sing!

"Your eyes any better, dad?" the prisoner asked at one point in the conversation.

"Not much, Willie; not much," the pawnbroker replied. "I can just about see you, and that's all. The

sun hurts 'em, and I wear these spectacles in daytime."

"Poor old dad!"

"Never mind about me, Willie. I'm an old man, and it don't matter. But you're only a boy, and we got to look out for you. You just keep your upper lip stiff and——"

And so it went, from one thing to another and back again.

**G**RADUALLY the clothesline code did its work, conveying to the brain of Ed Spangle the magic numbers that would open that bank vault in New Jersey—the *Open Sesame* to riches. Ed Spangle stored each number up in his brilliant memory until he could get outside and write them down, and exulted inwardly on the facility and absence of fumbling with which the kid, his protégé, handled the code.

And the kid did it well. Undoubtedly, he had practiced it in prison to keep it fresh in mind, although there isn't much to remember in the clothesline code.

In its operation four fingers are employed, the forefinger and middle finger on each hand. The man "sending" the code apparently moves his hands casually. The two sets of fingers take the form of two clothespins. The various positions signify numerals from "1" through "9" to "0." Any amount of time can elapse between the registering of a number containing only one figure and the registering of the next number; but, where a number contains two or more figures these figures have to be registered close together to avoid confusion. Where a table or an edged surface is available, the edge constitutes the "clothesline," and the manner of displaying the fingers above the edge, "putting on the pins" as crooks call it, forms the figures.

As no table or edged surface was available to William Cameron in the present instance, he overcame that difficulty by resting his hands against the screen with only the two sets of fingers extended. As he proceeded, his operations excited no more suspicion than the occasional movements of the hands of a man under nervous agitation. The significant movements were mingled with various meaningless gestures, and everything was lovely.

The transmission of the number in a combination was easy, and before the game started the prisoner made Ed Spangle understand that, when he dropped his right hand to his side, the movement meant "right" in the combination, and the left hand "left." He accomplished that by repeating the gestures over and over until Ed Spangle caught on. That understood, there was no further difficulty. In the absence of an edged surface, the sender merely extended and doubled the various fingers, the extended position being that of registration.

The right forefinger extended signified, 1; the right middle finger, 2; left forefinger, 3; left middle finger, 4; right forefinger and middle finger, 5; left forefinger and middle finger, 6; right forefinger and left middle finger, 7; left forefinger and right middle finger, 8; right forefinger and left forefinger, 9; right middle finger and left middle finger, 0.

By that code Ed Spangle got the combination of the New Jersey bank vault.

They made William Cameron understand that they would spare no efforts to get him out, and after an affectionate and wordy farewell the pawnbroker and Ed Spangle departed. It was hard for Simon Trapp to stop talking once he got wound up, and he had almost forgot-

ten his surroundings. Ed Spangle dragged him away, however, and their poses were carried out until they were safely away from the prison.

Simon Trapp drew a sigh of relief. Ed Spangle chuckled happily. The bank vault combination was safely written down, and the colored spectacles now reposed in one of Simon Trapp's pockets.

Ed Spangle's spirits overflowed. He chattered. He dropped occasionally into a facetious mood. He felt proud of himself at having dragged Simon Trapp into Sing Sing prison. That was an accomplishment almost unbelievable in the underworld. The old man's horror of visiting Sing Sing was one of the traditions of the strata in which they moved. Mr. Spangle couldn't pass up the opportunity to josh Simon Trapp. He recalled with quaint phraseology the pawnbroker's manners and words while approaching the prison, and his tremors. He adorned these reminiscences with various original and extravagant embellishments. By the time they got back to New York, Ed Spangle had constructed for the edification of their friends a highly picturesque and mirth-provoking yarn.

But Simon Trapp was strangely silent and content, impervious to the gibes of his friends.

THAT night there gathered in Simon Trapp's living room Ed Spangle and the two men who were to work with him on the New Jersey job. Details were discussed and a finished plan laid down, after which Ed Spangle indulged in levity.

The story of the visit to Sing Sing grew in the telling, at the expense of the pawnbroker. Not one twitch of his muscles or one tremor of his

voice escaped the humorous attentions of Mr. Spangle. The living room resounded with laughter.

"Well, Simon," Ed Spangle asked at length, "what d'you think of that place up there, anyway?"

"I don't know," the old man rejoined. "I didn't see it."

"Ha!" Spangle croaked. "Scared blind, huh?"

"No," the pawnbroker assured him seriously, "I wasn't scared blind; but I tell you the truth, I didn't see that Sing Sing place."

"Didn't see it—ha! That's a good one, Simon. Didn't——" Ed paused. He had a premonition that the joke wasn't quite altogether on Simon.

"You ain't as smart as you think you be, Ed," the pawnbroker told him quietly. "I tell you the truth, I went up there and done my business, but never once did I get a look at them walls and bars. I didn't see a speck of that Sing Sing place, so don't go around telling that story as a joke on me."

He produced the colored spectacles he had worn that day.

"Put 'em on," he suggested.

Ed Spangle did so. Then he removed the glasses.

"You win, Simon," he admitted. "Con't see a thing through them glasses. What'd you do to 'em?" He examined the inner sides of the lenses. "I see. Pasted cloth over 'em, huh?" He grinned. "I thought you played that blind-man game pretty strong to-day. You're clever, Simon. Can't even get a joke on you."

Their companions turned the laugh on Ed Spangle.

"I don't care about a joke," the old pawnbroker explained, "but I went all these years without seeing the inside of a prison, and I shouldn't want to break my luck."

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# BAIT FOR THE BEAST

By E. L. WHITE

**T**HIS story begins with a murder, and ends with a mousetrap. The murder can be disposed of in a paragraph.

An attractive girl—carefully reared and educated for a future, which proved to hold only a twisted throat—at the end of seven months, an unsolved mystery and a reward of five hundred pounds.

It is a long road from a murder to a mousetrap—and one with no finger posts; but the police knew every inch of the way. In spite of a prestige punctured by the press and public, they solved the identity of the killer. There remained the problem of tracking this wary and treacherous rodent from his unknown sewer in the underworld, into their trap.

They failed repeatedly for lack of the right bait.

And, unexpectedly, one spring evening, the bait turned up in the person of a young girl—cheese.

Inspector Angus Duncan was alone in his office when her message was brought up. He was a red-haired Scot, handsome in a dour fashion—with the chin of a prize fighter and frigid blue eyes.

He nodded. "I'll see her."

It was between the lights. River, government offices and factories were all deeply dyed with the blue stain of dusk. Even in the city, the lilac bushes showed green tips and

an occasional crocus cropped through the grass of the public gardens, like scattered orange peel. The evening star was a jewel in the pale-green sky.

Duncan was impervious to the romance of the hour; he knew that twilight was but the prelude to night and that darkness was a shield for crime.

He looked up sharply when his visitor was admitted. She was young and flower-faced—her faint freckles already fading away into pallor. Her black suit was shabby, although her hat was garnished for the spring with a yellow rose.

As she raised her blue eyes, he saw that they still carried the sweet memory of the things that constitute a country life.

Thereupon the inspector looked at her more sharply, for he knew that, of all poses, innocence is easiest to counterfeit.

"You say Roper sent you?" he inquired.

"Yes. Maggie Roper."

He nodded. Maggie Roper—Sergeant Roper's niece—was already shaping as a promising young store detective.

"Where did you meet her?"

"At the girls' hotel where I'm staying."

"Your name?"

"Jenny Morgan."

"From the country?"

"Yes. But I'm up now, for good."

For good? He queried that.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"How's that?" He looked at her mourning. "People all dead?"

She nodded. From the lightning sweep of her lashes, he knew that she had put in some rough work with a tear. It prepossessed her in his favor. His voice grew more genial as his lips relaxed.

"Well, what's it all about?"

She drew a letter from her bag.

"I'm looking for work and I advertised in the paper. I got this answer. I'm to be companion-secretary to a lady, to travel with her and entertain her and be treated as her daughter—if she likes me. I sent my photograph and my references and she's made an appointment to meet me."

"When and where?"

"The day after to-morrow, in the first room in the National Gallery. But as she's elderly, she is sending her nephew to drive me to her house."

"Where's that?"

"That's what Maggie Roper is making the fuss about. First, she said I must see if Mrs. Harper—that's the lady's name—had taken up my references. And then she insisted on ringing up the Hotel Cecil, where the letter was written from. The address was *printed*, so it was bound to be genuine, wasn't it?"

"Was it? What happened then?"

"They said no Mrs. Harper had stayed there. But I'm sure it must be a mistake." Her voice trembled. "One must risk something to get such a good job."

His face darkened. He was beginning to accept Jenny as the genuine article.

"Tell me," he asked, "have you had any experience of life?"

"Well—I've always lived in the country with auntie. But I've read all sorts of novels and the newspapers."

"Murders?"

HE could tell by the note in her childish voice that she ate up the newspaper accounts merely as exciting fiction, without the slightest realization that the printed page was grimmest fact.

He could see the picture; a sheltered childhood passed amid green spongy meadows; she could hardly have culled sophistication from clover and cows.

"Did you read about the Bell murder?" he asked abruptly.

"Auntie wouldn't let me." She added in the same breath, nodding, "Every word."

"Why did your aunt forbid you?"

"She said it must be a specially bad one because they'd left all the bad parts out of the paper."

"Well, didn't you notice the fact that that poor girl—Emmeline Bell—a well-bred girl of about your own age, was lured to her death through answering a newspaper advertisement?"

"I—I suppose so. But those things don't happen to oneself."

"Why? What's there to prevent your falling into a similar trap?"

"I can't explain. But if there was something wrong, I should know it."

"How? D'you expect a bell to ring or a red light to flash 'Danger'?"

"Of course not. But, if you believe in right and wrong, surely, there must be some warning."

He looked skeptical. That innocence bore a lily in its hand was to him a beautiful phrase, and nothing more. His own position in the sorry scheme of affairs was, to him, proof positive of the official failure of guardian angels.

"Let me see that letter, please," he said.

She studied his face anxiously as he read, but his expression remained inscrutable. Twisting her fingers in her suspense, she glanced around the room, noting vaguely the three telephones on the desk and the stacked files in the pigeonholes. A great Dane snored before the red-caked fire. She wanted to cross the room to pat him, but lacked the courage to stir from her place.

The room was warm, for the windows were only opened a couple of inches at the top. In view of Duncan's weather-tanned color the fact struck her as odd.

Mercifully, the future is veiled. She had no inkling of the fateful part that Great Dane was to play in her own drama, nor was there anything to tell her that a closed window would have been a barrier between her and the yawning mouth of hell.

She started as Duncan spoke.

"I want to hold this letter, for a bit. Will you call about this time, to-morrow? Meantime, I must impress upon you the need of utmost caution. Don't take one step on your own. Should anything fresh crop up, phone me immediately. Here's my number."

When she had gone, Duncan walked to the window. The blue dusk had deepened into a darkness pricked with lights. Across the river, advertisement-signs wrote and effaced themselves intermittently in colored lights.

The inspector still glowed with the thrill of the hunter on the first spoor of his quarry. Although he had to await the report of the expert test, he was confident that the letter which he held had been penned by the murderer of poor ill-starred Emmeline Bell.

Then his elation vanished at a recollection of Jenny's wistful face. In this city were scores of other girls, frail as windflowers, too—blossom-sweet and country-raw—forced through economic pressure into positions fraught with deadly peril.

The darkness dropped down overhead like a dark shadow pregnant with crime. And out from their holes and sewers stole the rats.

AT last, Duncan had the trap baited for his hat; a young and pretty girl—ignorant and unprotected—cheese.

When Jenny, punctual to the minute, entered his office the following evening, Duncan instantly appraised her as his prospective decoy.

His first feeling was one of disappointment. Either she had shrunk in the night, or her eyes had grown bigger. She looked such a frail scrap as she stared at him, her pretty lips bitten to a thin line, that it seemed hopeless to credit her with the necessary nerve for his project.

"Oh! Please, do tell me it's all perfectly right about that letter."

"Anything but right."

For a moment, Duncan thought she was about to faint. He wondered, uneasily, whether she had eaten that day. It was obvious from the keenness of her disappointment, that she was at the end of her resources.

"Are you sure?" Jenny insisted. "It's—very important to me. Perhaps I'd better keep the appointment. If I didn't like the look of things, I needn't go on with it."

"I tell you, it's not a genuine job," he repeated. "But I've something to put to you, which is the goods. Would you like to have a shot at five hundred pounds?"

Her flushed face, her eager eyes, her trembling lips, all answered him.

"Yes, please," was all she said.

He searched for reassuring terms. "It's like this. We've tested your letter and know it is written, from a bad motive, by an undesirable character."

"You mean a criminal?" she asked.

"Um-m-m! His record is not good. We want to get hold of him."

"Then why don't you?"

He suppressed a smile.

"Because he doesn't confide in us.

But, if you have the courage to keep your appointment to-morrow, and let his messenger take you to the house of the suppositious Mrs. Harper, I'll guarantee it's the hiding place of the man we want. We get him—you get the reward. Question is—have you the nerve?"

She was silent. Presently she spoke in a very small voice. "Will I be in great danger?"

"None. I wouldn't risk your safety for any consideration. From first to last, you'll be under the protection of the police."

"You mean, I'll be watched over by detectives in disguise?"

"From the moment you enter the National Gallery, you'll be covered doubly and trebly. You'll be followed every step of the way and directly we've located the house, the place will be raided by the police."

"All the same, for a minute or so, just before you can get into the house, I'll be alone with—him?"

"The briefest interval. You'll be safe at first. He'll begin with overtures. Stall him off with questions. Don't let him see you suspect—or show you're frightened."

Duncan frowned as he spoke. It was his clear duty to society to rid it of a dangerous pest, and, in order to do so, Jenny's coöperation was vital. Yet, to his own surprise, he disliked the necessity, in the case of this especial girl.

"Remember! We'll be on hand," he said. "But, if your nerve goes, just whistle and we'll break cover immediately."

"Will you be there?" she asked suddenly.

"Not exactly in the foreground. But—I'll be there."

"Then—I'll do it." She smiled, for the first time. "You laughed at me, yesterday, when I said there was something inside me, which told me —things. But I just know I can trust you!"

"Good." His voice was rough. "Wait a bit. You've been put to expense coming over here. This will cover your fares and so on."

He thrust a note into her hand and hustled her out, while she protested. It was a satisfaction to feel that she would eat that night.

As Duncan seated himself at his desk, preparatory to work, his frozen face was no index of the emotions raised by Jenny's parting words. Hitherto, he had thought of women merely as "skirts." He had regarded a saucepan merely as a weapon.

For the first time, he had a domestic vision of a country girl—creamy and fragrant as meadow-sweet—in a nice womanly setting of saucepans.

JENNY experienced a thrill, which was almost akin to elation when she entered Victoria Station, the following day. At the last moment the place for meeting had been altered in a telegram from "Mrs. Harper."

Immediately she had received the message, Jenny had gone to the telephone box in the hotel and duly reported the change of plan, with a request that her message should be repeated to her, to obviate any risk of mistake.

And now—the incredible adventure was actually begun.

The station seemed filled with hurrying crowds as Jenny slowly walked toward the clock. Her feet rather lagged upon the way. She wondered if the sinister messenger had already marked the yellow flower in her hat, which she had named as her mark of identification.

Then, she remembered her guards. At this moment, they were here, unknown, watching over her slightest movement.

It was a curious sensation to feel that she was spied upon by unseen eyes. Yet it helped to brace the muscles of her knees when she took up her station under the clock, with the sensation of having exposed herself as a target for gunfire.

But nothing happened; no one spoke to her; she was encouraged to gaze around.

A few yards away, a pleasant-faced, smartly dressed young man was covertly regarding her. He carried a yellowish sample bag, which proclaimed him a drummer.

Suddenly, Jenny felt positive that this was one of her guards. There was a quality about his keen, clean-shaven face—a hint of the eagle in his eye—which reminded her of Duncan.

She gave him the beginnings of a smile, and was thrilled when, almost imperceptibly, he fluttered one eyelid.

She read it rightly, however, as a signal for caution; alarmed by her indiscretion, she looked steadfastly in another direction.

Still—it helped her to know that, even if she might not look at him, he was there.

The minutes dragged slowly by. Jenny began to grow anxious as to whether the affair were not some hoax. It would be not only a tame ending to the adventure, but a positive disappointment.

She would miss the chance of earning a sum which, to her, was a little fortune. Her need was so vital that she would have undertaken the enterprise for five pounds. Moreover, after her years of green country solitude, she felt a thrill at the mere thought of her temporary link with the underworld. This was life in the raw; while, screening her as she aided him, she worked with August Duncan.

She smiled—then started, as though stung.

Some one had touched her on the arm.

HAVE I the honor, happiness, and felicity of addressing Miss Jenny Morgan? Yellow flower in the lady's hat? Red flower in the gent's buttonhole, as per arrangement."

The man who addressed her was young and bull-necked, with florid coloring which ran into purple blotches. He wore a red carnation in the buttonhole of his checkered overcoat.

"Yes, I'm Jenny Morgan." As she spoke, she looked into his eyes.

She felt a sharp revulsion—an instinctive recoil of her whole being. "Are you Mrs. Harper's nephew?" she faltered.

"That's right. Excuse a gent keeping a lady waiting, but I just slipped into the bar for a glass of milk. I've a taxi waiting, if you'll just hop outside."

Jenny's mind worked rapidly as she followed him. She was forewarned and protected. But, were it not for Maggie Roper's intervention, she would have kept this appointment in very different circumstances. She wondered if she would have heeded that instinctive warning and refused to follow the stranger.

She shook her head; her need was so urgent that in her wish to believe the best, she knew that she would have summoned up her courage and flouted her fears as nerves. She would have done exactly what she was doing—accompanied an unknown man to an unknown destination.

She shivered at the realization. It might have been herself—that other girl—gone to her doom.

At that moment, Jenny encountered the grave scrutiny of a stout clergyman who was standing by the bookstall. He was ruddy, wore horn-rimmed glasses, and carried the *Church Times*.

His look of understanding was almost as eloquent as a vical message. It filled her with gratitude. She was certain that this was a second guard. Turning to see if the young commercial traveler were following her, she was thrilled to discover that he had preceded her into the station yard.

He got into a taxi at the exact moment that her companion flung open the door of another, which was waiting.

It was only this knowledge that Duncan was thus making good his promise which induced her to enter the vehicle. Once again, her nerves rebelled and she was rent with sick foreboding.

As they moved off, she had an overpowering impulse to scream aloud for help to the porters—just because all this might have happened to some poor girl who had not her own good fortune.

Her companion nudged her. "Bit of all-right joy-riding, eh?"

She stiffened, but managed to force a smile. "Is it a long ride?"

"Ah! Now you're asking."

"Where does Mrs. Harper live?"

"Ah! That's telling."

She shrank away, seized with dis-

gust of his blotched face so near her own.

"Please give me more room! It's stifling here."

"Now don't you go taking no liberties with me. A married man I am, with four wives, all on the dole." All the same, to her relief, he moved farther away. "From the country, aren't you? Nice place. Lots of milk. Suit me a treat. Any objection to a gent smoking?"

"I wish you would. The cab reeks of whisky."

They were passing St. Paul's, which was the last landmark in her limited knowledge of London. Girls from offices passed on the pavements, laughing and chatting together or hurrying by, intent on business. A group was scattering crumbs to the pigeons which fluttered on the steps of the cathedral.

Jenny watched them with a stab of envy—safe, happy girls!

Then she remembered that, somewhere in the press of traffic, a taxi was shadowing her own. She took fresh courage.

The drive passed like an interminable nightmare, in which she was always on guard to stem the advances of her disagreeable companion. Something seemed always on the point of happening—something unpleasant, just out of sight and round the corner—and then, somehow, she staved it off.

The taxi bore her through a congested maze of streets. Shops and offices were succeeded by regions of warehouses and factories, which, in turn gave way to areas of dun squalor, where gas works rubbed shoulders with grimed laundries, which bore such alluring signs as Dewdrop or White Rose.

From the shrilling of sirens, Jenny judged that they were in the neighborhood of the river, when

they turned into a quiet square. The tall, lean houses wore an air of drab respectability. Lace curtains hung at every window. Plaster pineapples crowned the pillared porches.

"Here's our destination!"

As her guide inserted his key into the door of No. 17, Jenny glanced eagerly down the street, just in time to see a taxi turn the corner.

"Hop in, dearie!"

On the threshold, Jenny shrank back.

SOMETHING very evil hovered there. Never before had she felt its presence. But she recognized it. Like the fumes creeping upward from the grating of a sewer, it poisoned the air.

Had she embarked on this enterprise in her former ignorance, she was certain, that, at this point, her instinct would have triumphed.

"I would never have passed through this door!"

She was wrong. Volition had nothing to do with the matter. Her arm was gripped, and before she could struggle, she was pulled inside.

She heard the slam of the door.

"Never loiter on the doorstep, dearie. Gives the house a bad name. This way; up the stairs—all the nearer to heaven."

Her heart heavy with dread, Jenny followed him. She had entered on the crux of her adventure—the dangerous few minutes when she would be quite alone.

The place was horrible—with no visible reason for horror. It was no filthy east-end rookery, but a technically clean apartment house. The stairs were covered with brown linoleum. The mottled yellow wall paper was intact. Each landing had its marble-topped table, adorned with a forlorn aspidistra—its molt-

ing rug at every door. The air was dead and smelled chiefly of dust.

They climbed four flights of stairs without meeting any one. Only faint rustlings and whispers within the rooms told of other tenants.

Then the blotched-faced man threw open a door.

"Young party come to see Mrs. Harper about the situwation. Tootle-oo, dearie. Hope you strike lucky!"

He pushed her inside and she heard his steps upon the stairs.

In that moment Jenny longed for any one, even her late companion. She was vaguely aware of the figure of a man seated in a chair. Too terrified to look at him, her eyes flickered round the room.

Like the rest of the house, it struck the note of parodied respectability. Yellowish lace curtains hung at the windows, which were blocked by pots of stringy geraniums. A walnut-wood suite was upholstered in faded bottle-green rep, with burst padding. A gilt framed mirror surmounted a stained marble piece, which was decorated with a clock—permanently stopped under its glass case—and a bottle of whisky.

On a small table by the door rested a filthy cage, containing a poor old gray parrot, its eyes mere slits of mystery.

It had to come. At last, with an effort, Jenny looked at the man.

He was tall and slender and wrapped in a once-gorgeous dressing gown of frayed crimson-quilted silk. At first sight his features were not only handsome but wore an air of breeding. But the whole face was blurred—as though it were a waxen mask half melted by the sun and over which the fiend, in passing, had lightly drawn a hand.

His eyes drew her own. Large and brilliant, they were of so light

a blue as to appear almost white. The lashes were unusually long and matted into spikes.

The blood froze at Jenny's heart. The girl was no fool. Despite Duncan's cautious statements, she had drawn her own deduction which linked an unsolved murder mystery and a reward of five hundred pounds.

She knew that she was alone with a homicidal maniac—the murderer of ill-starred Emmeline Bell.

IN that moment, she realized the full horror of a crime which, a few months ago, had been nothing but an exciting newspaper story. It sickened her to reflect that a girl—much like herself—whose pretty face had smiled fearlessly upon the world from the printed page, had walked into this same trap, in all the blindness of her youthful confidence. No one to hear her cries. No one to guess the agony of those last terrible moments.

Jenny, at least, understood that first rending shock of realization. She had to fight for self-control. At sight of that smiling, marred face, she wanted to do what she knew instinctively that other girl had done, precipitating her doom. With a desperate effort, she suppressed the impulse to rush madly round the room, like a snared creature, beating her hands against the locked door and crying for help. Help which would never come.

Luckily, common sense triumphed. In a few minutes time she would not be alone. Even then, a taxi was speeding on its mission; wires were humming; behind her was the protection of the police.

She remembered Duncan's advice to temporize. It was true that she was not dealing with a beast of the jungle which sprang on its prey at sight.

"Oh, please!" She hardly recognized the tiny pipe of her own voice. "I've come to see Mrs. Harper about her situation."

"Yes." The man did not remove his eyes from her face. "So, you are Jenny?"

"Yes, Jenny Morgan. Is—is Mrs. Harper in?"

"She'll be in presently. Sit down. Make yourself at home. What are you scared for?"

"I'm not scared."

Her words were almost true. Her strained ears had detected faintest sounds without—dulled footsteps, the cautious fastening of a door.

The man, for his part, also noticed the stir. For a few seconds, he listened intently. Then, to her relief, he relaxed his attention.

She snatched again at the fiction of her future employer.

"I hope Mrs. Harper will soon come in."

"What's your hurry? Come closer! I can't see you properly."

They were face to face.

The scene reminded her of the old nursery story of "Little Red Riding Hood"—of the child's startled exclamation—"What big eyes you've got, grandmother!"

The words swam across her brain.

Terrible eyes! Like white glass cracked in distorting facets. Jenny knew she was looking into the depths of a blasted soul. Down, down—That poor girl—But she must not think of *her*. She must be brave—give him back look for look—

Her lids fell; she could bear the sight no longer.

She gave an involuntary start, observing his hands for the first time.

They were beyond the usual size—unhuman—with long knotted fingers.

"What big hands you've got!" Be-

fore she could control her tongue, the words slipped out.

The man stopped smiling.

But Jenny was not frightened now. Her guards were near. She thought of the detective who carried the bag of samples; she thought of the stout clergyman. She thought of Duncan.

AT that moment, the commercial traveler was in an upper room of a wholesale drapery house, in the city, holding the fashionable blond lady buyer with his magnetic blue eyes, while he displayed her stock of crêpe-de-Chine underwear.

At that moment, the clergyman was seated in a third-class railway carriage, watching the hollows of the Down fill with heliotrope shadows.

He was not quite at ease. His thoughts persisted in dwelling on the frightened face of a little country girl, as she drifted by in the wake of a human culture.

"I did wrong. I should have risked speaking to her."

But—at that moment—Duncan was thinking of her.

Jenny's message had been received over the telephone wire, repeated and duly written down by Mr. Herbert Yates, shorthand typist—who, during the absence of Duncan's own secretary, was filling the gap, for one morning.

At the sound of his chief's step in the corridor outside, he rammed on his hat, for he was already overdue for a lunch appointment with one of the numerous "only girls."

At the door, he met Duncan.

"May I go to lunch now, sir?"

Duncan nodded assent. He stopped, for a minute, in the passage while he gave Yates his instructions for the afternoon. "Any message?" he inquired.

"One came this instant, sir. It's under the weight."

Duncan entered the office. But in that brief interval, the disaster had occurred.

Yates could not be held to blame for what happened. It was true that he had taken advantage of Duncan's absence to open the window wide, but he was ignorant of any breach of rules. In his hurry, he had also written down Jenny's message on the nearest leaf to hand, but he had taken the precaution to place it under a heavy paper weight.

It was Duncan's Great Dane which worked the mischief.

He was accustomed, at this hour, to be regaled with biscuit by Duncan's secretary, who was an abject dog lover. As his dole had not been forthcoming, he went in search of it. His great paws on the table, he rooted among the papers, making nothing of a trifle of a letter weight.

Over it went. Out of the window, at the next gust, went Jenny's message. Back to his rug, went the dog.

The instant Duncan was aware of what had happened, a frantic search was made for Yates. But that wily and athletic youth, wise to the whims of his official superiors, had disappeared. They raked every place of refreshment within a wide radius. It was not until Duncan's men rang up to report that they had drawn blank at the National Gallery, that Yates was discovered in an underground dive, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes with his charmer.

Duncan arrived at Victoria Station, forty minutes after the appointed time.

It was the bitterest hour of his life. He was haunted by the sight of Jenny's flower face upturned to his. She had *trusted* him. And in his ambition to track his man, he had

taken advantage of her necessity, to use her as a pawn in his game.

He had played her—and lost her.

The thought drove him to madness. Steeled though he was to face reality, he dared not let himself think of the end. Jenny—country raw and blossom-sweet—even then, struggling in the grip of murderous fingers.

**E**VEN then—Jenny panted as she fought—her brain on fire.

The thing had rushed upon her so swiftly, that her chief feeling was of sheer incredulity. What had gone before was already burning itself up in a red mist. She had no clear memory afterward of those tense minutes of fencing. There was only an interlude filled with a dimly comprehended menace—and then this.

And Duncan had not intervened.

Her strength was failing. Hell cracked open, revealing glimpses of unguessed horror.

With a supreme effort she wrenched herself free. It was but a momentary respite, but it sufficed for her signal—a broken, tremulous whistle.

The response was immediate. Somewhere a gruff voice was heard in warning: "Perlice!"

The killer stiffened—his ears pricked, every nerve astrain. His eyes flickered to the ceiling which was broken by the outline of a trapdoor.

Then, he noticed the parrot.

His fingers on Jenny's throat, he paused. The bird rocked on its perch, its eyes slits of old dreaming.

Time stood still. The killer stared at the parrot. Which of the gang had given the warning? Whose voice? Not Glass-eye. Not Mexican Jo. The sound had seemed to be within the room.

That parrot—

He laughed. His fingers tightened—to relax.

For a day and a half he had been in Mother Bargery's room. During that time, the bird had been dumb. Did it talk?

The warning echoed in his brain. Every moment of delay was fraught with peril. At that moment, his enemies were here, stealing upward to catch him in their trap.

The instinct of the human rodent—enemy of mankind, eternally hunted and harried—prevailed. With an oath, he flung Jenny aside and jumping upon the table, wormed through the trapdoor.

Jenny was alone. She was too stunned to think. There was still a roaring in her ears—shooting lights before her eyes.

In a vague way, she knew that some hitch had occurred in the plan. The police were here—yet they had let their prey escape.

She put on her hat, straightened her hair. Very slowly she walked down the stairs. There was no sign of Duncan or of his men.

As she reached the hall, a door opened and a white, puffed face looked at her.

Had she quickened her pace, or shown the least sign of fear, she would never have left that place alive. Her very nonchalance proved her salvation, as she unbarred the door with the deliberation bred of custom.

The street was deserted, save for an empty taxi, which she hailed.

"Where to, Miss?" asked the driver.

Involuntarily she glanced back at the drab house, squeezed into its strait waistcoat of grimed bricks. She had a momentary vision of a white-blurred face, flattened against the glass. At the sight, realization

swept over her, in wave upon wave of sick terror.

*There had been no guards!* She had taken every step of that perilous journey—alone.

Her very terror sharpened her wits to action. If her eyesight had not deceived her, the killer had already discovered that the alarm was false. It was obvious that he would not run the risk of remaining in his present quarters. But it was possible that he might not anticipate a lightning swoop; there was nothing to connect a raw, terrified country girl with a preconcerted alliance with the police.

"The nearest telephone booth," she panted, "quick!"

A few minutes later, Duncan was electrified by Jenny's voice gasping over the wire.

"He's at 17 Jamaica Square, S. E. No time to lose. He'll go out through the roof. Quick, quick!"

"Right. Jenny, where'll you be?"

"At your house. I mean, Scot—Quick!"

As the taxi bore Jenny swiftly away from the dun outskirts, a shriveled hag pattered into the upper room of that drab house.

Taking no notice of its raging occupant, she approached the parrot's cage. "Talk for mother, dearie!"

She held out a bit of dirty sugar. As she whistled, the parrot opened its eyes. "Per-lice!"

IT was more than two hours later when Duncan entered his private room, at Scotland Yard.

His eyes sought Jenny.

A little wan, but otherwise none the worse for her adventure, she presided over a teapot, which had been provided by the resourceful Yates. The Great Dane—unmindful of that little incident of the letter weight—accepted her biscuits and

caresses with hypocritical sighs of protest.

Yates sprang up, eagerly. "Did the coop come off, chief?"

Duncan nodded twice—the second time toward the door, in dismissal.

Jenny looked at him in some alarm, when they were alone together. There was little trace left of the machine-made martinet of Scotland Yard. The lines in his face appeared freshly retooled and there were dark pouches under his eyes.

"Jenny," he said slowly, "I've sweated—blood."

"Oh! Was he so very difficult to capture? Did he *fight*?"

"Who? That rat? He ran into our net just as he was about to bolt. He'll lose his footing, all right. No."

"Then, why are you——"

"You!"

Jenny threw him a swift glance. She had just been half murdered, after a short course of semistarvation, but she commanded the situation.

"Sit down," she said. "And don't say one word, until you've drunk this!"

He started to gulp obediently, and then knocked over his cup.

"Jenny, you don't know the hell I've been through. You don't understand what you ran into. That man who——"

"He was a murderer, of course. I knew that, all along."

"But you were in deadliest peril you——"

"I wasn't frightened, so it didn't matter. I knew I could trust you."

"Don't, Jenny. Don't turn the knife! I failed you. There was a ghastly blunder——"

"But it was all right, for it ended beautifully. You see, *something* told me to trust you. I always know."

During his career, Duncan had

known cases of love at first sight. So, although he could not rule them out, he always argued along Jenny's lines. Those things did not happen to *him*. They had the same philosophy.

He realized now, that it had happened to him—cautious Scot though he was.

"Jenny," he said, "it strikes me that *I* want some one to watch me."

"I'm quite sure you do. Have I won that reward?"

His rapture was dashed. "Yes."

"I'm so glad. I'm *rich*." She smiled happily. "So, this can't be pity for me."

"Pity? Oh, Jenny, girl——"

Click. The mousetrap was set for the confirmed bachelor with the right bait.

A young and friendless girl—country-bred and blossom-sweet—cheese.

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## TRUCK HELD UP IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

**I**N broad daylight the driver of a truck and his helper were kidnaped in New York City and silk valued at \$12,000 stolen.

The two truckmen, after having driven over from Paterson, New Jersey, stopped at West Thirty-fifth Street for some coffee. Just as they were about to reboard their truck an automobile with five men drew up alongside. Four of the men jumped out, leaving the fifth at the wheel of their machine. Two of them leaped to the seat of the truck while the other two with leveled guns ordered the truckmen into the bandit car. Both machines made off rapidly in different directions. The empty truck was picked up by the police at Fourth Avenue and Twenty-second Street, and the truckmen had been released at Tenth Street and First Avenue. The police have no clew to the identity of the bandits.

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## COUNTERFEITERS ARRESTED

**T**HREE men and a woman charged by the government with being members of a counterfeiting gang that has circulated more than \$300,000 in spurious ten-dollar Federal Reserve notes during a period of one year were recently arraigned in the United States district court in Brooklyn, New York. Two other men pleaded guilty and were used as government witnesses. Harry Mills, one of the two, was the only witness called. He testified to having made the plates from which the counterfeit bills were printed under duress. These bills were numbered "B27723486A" and "B16539392A."

Mills stated that he started a plate by engraving the borders of the front and back of a counterfeit bill in 1930, just for practice. In June of 1931, he claimed to have been taken prisoner by Sam di Santi, one of the gang, and confined in a house in Brooklyn until the plates were finished. He admitted having received small sums of money from Di Santi on several occasions. Di Santi is named in an indictment as a fugitive from justice.

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# THUBWAY THAM CONSULTS A DOCTOR

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

**T**HIS is a faithful and accurate chronicle of the manner in which "Thubway Tham," with whom you undoubtedly are well acquainted, took the cure.

What's that? Certainly not! It is not the sort of cure of which you evidently are thinking. It had nothing at all to do with drink or drugs, for Thubway Tham uses neither. This was a cure for a certain impediment of speech with which Thubway Tham had been afflicted since childhood, namely, lispings.

Thubway Tham always had lisped, and it rarely had bothered him. He was used to it. But it did set him apart from the bulk of his fellows, however. It was noticeable. And to be possessed of a certain characteristic that is noticeable is not the best thing in the world for a man whose activities are in the shadows, so to speak. Thubway Tham on one occasion had read a police-department notice concerning himself, at the bottom of which there had been appended this statement: "He lisps!" You appreciate the significance of it? Very well, then!

Yet it is possible that Thubway Tham would have gone on his way, lisping blissfully through life, had he not happened to allow his eyes

to dwell for a moment upon an advertisement in his favorite morning newspaper. It happened in the little restaurant where he generally ate his breakfast. The blond waitress put the paper down before him, as was her habit, and then departed kitchenward to get Tham his meal.

Tham looked over the sporting news and decided that the Giants were not yet quite up to form, and that the Yanks were going strong. He perused the police items and noted that disaster had come to a couple of his friends, one a burglar and the other a holdup man. He glanced at the front page and found nothing that was of much interest. The bacon and eggs were not before him yet, so he turned the pages of the paper idly, looking at this and that, and so he glanced at a few advertisements.

Fate must have had a hand in it. That particular advertisement had been running for a week or more, yet Thubway Tham never had seen it. But now it caught his eye, and he read it first swiftly, and then slowly and carefully:

"Do You Lisp? I can cure you in less than 48 hours! Terms moderate! Cure guaranteed! Be fair to yourself! Speak like others!"

There was more of it, of course, and at the bottom appeared the name and address of the physician who promised so much. He was a certain Doctor Liwell, and he had a suite of offices on upper Broadway.

Thubway Tham cut out the advertisement and slipped it into the pocket of his waistcoat. The thing intrigued him. He ate his bacon and eggs as though in a dream, paid the amount of his check, and, instead of wandering up toward Madison Square, as usual, he returned to the lodging house conducted by the ex-burglar, Mr. Nosey Moore, where Tham had his quarters. Mr. Moore was sitting behind his battered desk, with his feet cocked upon the same, and he squinted his one good eye when Tham entered the place.

"Something wrong, old-timer?" Mr. Moore asked. "How come you are back so early?"

"Nothey, I want to athk your opinion," Thubway Tham told him.

"Sure! What about?"

Tham showed the advertisement, and Mr. Moore read it and grunted.

"Sounds all right," he said. "But it'd probably cost you a lot of jack, Tham. A bird like this Doctor Liwell, with offices in that part of the big town, don't go in for charity work."

"Thay!" Tham gasped. "Don't you thuppothe that I can pay the man? Think that I am broke? Got an idea that——"

"Don't get sore, Tham!" Mr. Moore interrupted. "I'm just dropping a hint that it'll cost you somethin'. Why do it, anyway? What's the idea? You've lisped a good many years, Tham. Why, you wouldn't know yourself if you didn't lisp."

"And maybe thome other folkth wouldn't know me, either," Tham said. "Thee the point? Thuppothe,

Nothey, that I am picked up on thuthpithion by thome fool of a dick? He goeth into court, and he thayth that I am Thubway Tham. I athkth him how he knowth that I am. And the thilly athth thayth that I lithp. Then I go on the thtand and talk thtraight and trip him up. Thee?"

"Not a bad idea, Tham," Mr. Moore said. "Not a bad idea at all. Anyway, it'll only take you an hour or so to find out all about it."

"Then you thuggeth——"

"No, sir! I ain't givin' you straight advice. If anything went wrong you'd blame me!"

"I think," said Thubway Tham, "that I'll go uptown and thee thith doctor."

Thubway Tham thereupon hurried to the subway and caught an uptown express. The thing was on his mind to the exclusion of all else. He did not look around and pick a possible victim. He had no idea of "lifting a leather" on the present trip. Not that he possessed an abundance of funds, for he did not. But Thubway Tham was the sort that does one thing at a time and puts his whole heart and soul in it.

HE had little difficulty in finding the doctor's suite of offices. It appeared that Doctor Liwell was not a modest violet when it came to letting the world know where he held forth. There was considerable gold lettering on the glass doors of his suite. There was an air of prosperity about the place.

A dozen patients were waiting when Thubway Tham entered. A couple of nurses were flitting about. Tham's heart missed a beat, as he looked at them. He didn't like a nurse's uniform—it reminded him too much of hospitals and evil-

odored drugs and ambulances and things like that. He was compelled to wait for quite a time after stating the object of his visit. Doctor Liwell was a busy man, it seemed. But finally Thubway Tham was ushered into the consultation room and found the doctor confronting him.

Doctor Liwell looked the part. He was tall, of commanding presence, and had a professional beard. He cleared his throat often and spoke in a deep voice.

"A minor matter, my dear sir!" the doctor declared.

"You mean that you can cure me?" Tham asked.

"In a couple of days," the doctor told him. "It is quite simple. A German scientist who has made a lifelong study of lisping has pointed out the way. I am his accredited representative in this country. It is a joy to remove this impediment for those who have been suffering from it."

"How ith it done?" Tham asked.

"An operation—a very simple operation, my dear sir. Persons lisp because their tongues are too long. We simply clip off a piece of the end of the tongue, about half an inch, and sew it up again in such a fashion that neither the shape nor appearance of the tongue is changed. The tongue will heal within a week, and when it is healed you'll speak without a lisp. The operation is absolutely painless and without danger."

"My goodneth!" Thubway Tham gasped. "Tho it ith ath thimble ath all that?"

"You have to do your share, of course, my dear sir. While the tongue is healing, you must be careful about eating. And you must not try to speak. Utter only a few words, and all my work may be undone."

"Go without thpeakin' for a week."

"Absolutely! You'll have to make arrangements to do so. Can you?"

"I thuppothe tho!" said Tham.

"I can operate to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock, if you wish, right here in the office," the doctor said. "One week later you come to me, and I'll examine your tongue, and if it has healed properly you may speak—and without lisping."

"Your advertisement thaid forty-eight houth," Thubway Tham reminded him.

"Ah, yes!" the physician replied. "The work really is completed within forty-eight hours; but the tongue must be given a chance to heal, you see. I must warn you that if you speak before getting my permission to do so, the operation may not be a success. You must co-operate with me to that extent."

"How much doeth it cotht?" Thubway Tham wanted to know.

Doctor Liwell had a graduated scale of prices. In other words, he generally charged what he thought the traffic would bear. He looked Thubway Tham over quickly again. Tham was dressed for business, as it were, in an inconspicuous, rather shabby dark suit, and he looked none too prosperous.

"In your case, sir, one hundred dollars," the doctor replied. "Payment to be made before I operate. It is a labor of love and mercy on my part, please understand. I am glad to be of service to the human race. But I am compelled to pay high rent, hire my nurses, and all that."

"Of courthe!" Tham said. "I underthtand. What time to-morrow thhall I come here? Did you thay two o'clock?"

For Thubway Tham had crossed the Rubicon. He had decided that he would lisp no more.

IT was not going to be the easiest thing in the world, Thubway Tham told himself. For instance, there was Detective Craddock!

Craddock was the headquarters man who had sworn some two years before to catch Tham "with the goods" and send him "up the river" for a "long stretch." But Craddock had not been able to do anything of the sort. Yet he still had hopes. And he made it a point to keep in touch with Thubway Tham.

Craddock and Tham met often in Madison Square and engaged in repartee. Tham realized that, if he was not to be seen for a week, Craddock would become suspicious. And he did not want Craddock to know about the operation. He intended to continue lipping when he was talking to Craddock, even after he need lisp no more. He hoped in time to play a trick on the detective.

Aside from Craddock, it would be easy. Tham would confide in Mr. Nosey Moore, and during the week he would remain inside the lodging house, sending out for what food he dared eat, smoking and reading and resting and possibly playing cards with Nosey and a couple of trusted friends.

Down Fifth Avenue Tham walked until he came to Madison Square, and there he sought his favorite bench. He sat there for more than half an hour before Detective Craddock came along.

"Tho I thee your ugly fathe again, do I?" Tham grunted. "My good-neth, Craddock! Don't you ever work? Do you jutht play around all the time?"

"I'm working right now, Tham, old boy," Craddock replied. "I am keeping my eyes on a person under suspicion."

"Meanin' me?"

"Meanin' you, Tham!" the detective answered. "Are you thinking of taking a ride in our beloved subway this afternoon?"

"Why do you athk?"

"Because, if you are, I am going to trail right along, Tham. Strange though it may seem to you, there have been several reports lately of estimable citizens losing their wallets while riding in the subway."

"Thome folkth are tho careleth," Tham commented.

"Uh-huh! And there is grave suspicion in certain quarters, Tham, that you know a lot about it."

"Do tell!"

"I am," said Craddock. "Whereas and wherefore, it becomes my duty to see that you keep your hands in your own pockets."

FOR once Thubway Tham did not seem inclined to take offense and indulge in caustic rejoinder. Tham looked disconsolate. He had the appearance of a man in a fit of blues. Detective Craddock was quick to notice it.

"What seems to be the trouble with you, Tham?" he asked.

"Thome throat," Tham replied. "Thomething ith wrong with my talkin' apparatuth. The doctor ith goin' to put thome thtuff in my throat, and maybe I won't be able to talk for a few dayth."

"Heavens!" the detective ejaculated. "I trust that it isn't serious, Tham. I'd hate to have anything serious happen to you. I want you to live, so I can——"

"I know!" Tham interrupted. "Tho you can catch me with the goodth. Uh-huh! You've been tryin' to do that for quite thome time now, Craddock."

"Seriously, Tham, is there something the matter with your throat?"

the detective wanted to know. "I am grieved to hear it. Do you have to have an operation?"

"Jutht a minor one," said Tham. "I thuppothe that I'll have to be careful for a week or tho—thtay at home and be careful not to catch cold."

"A sore throat doesn't necessarily mean that you won't be able to use your hands," Craddock said.

"Do you mean to inthinate——" Tham began.

"No comedy, Tham—no comedy!" the detective put in quickly. "I wasn't born yesterday or the day before. Tham, I think that you are up to something."

"Don't thtrain your brain tryin' to think!" Tham warned him.

"You never answered my question. Are you going to take a ride in the subway this afternoon?"

"Yeth, thir! I am goin' to ride downtown and go home. I don't feel well."

"I suppose I'll have to go along," Craddock said, with a sigh.

"Oh, no, you won't have to go," Tham told him. "For the thake of the argument, let uth thay that I am a dip. Even tho, if I am, I won't be workin' at it thith afternoon."

"Your word on that, Tham?"

"Yeth, thir!"

"All right! You never have lied to me, Tham. I believe you. And I'm glad, Tham, too. Because I should get busy and find a real crook—a burglar they want to interview down at headquarters."

Hurling that insult, Detective Craddock grinned and continued through the Square.

Thubway Tham grinned when he found himself alone. A little later he went to the subway and journeyed down town. He walked to the lodging house and held speech with Nosey Moore. He had de-

cided upon the operation, he said. For a week he would not be able to talk. Would Mr. Moore do his best to help Tham pass the time in some manner? Mr. Moore would!

**T**WO o'clock the following afternoon found Thubway Tham in Doctor Liwell's operating room. There were a couple of nurses and a table and a lot of instruments. Tham felt the perspiration standing out upon his forehead, and he knew that his heart was hammering at his ribs, and that his face was white. But he had bravery of a sort.

He submitted to a local anæsthetic and felt his tongue grow numb and seemingly three times its natural size. He closed his eyes, while the low-voiced doctor fussed with his instruments. Tham felt that he was going to faint, but he did not. And, after a time, they helped him off the table.

"Do not remove that tiny bandage on the end of the tongue for two days," the doctor warned. "Eat soups and things like that. And do not speak until one week from today—not a single word! Come here then, and I'll examine you. The operation has been very successful, I feel sure. Thank you, Mr. Tham!"

Thubway Tham made his way down to the street and hurried toward the nearest subway entrance. His head felt queer; his mouth felt as though he were puffing out his cheeks, and the inside of it seemed dead and devoid of all sensation. He had left one hundred dollars behind, but he did not begrudge that. In a week he would speak as other men spoke!

Never will Thubway Tham forget that week. He kept to his room the greater part of the time. Nosey Moore ascended the rickety stairs

each afternoon to spend an hour or so playing cards with him. Tham, a "good feeder," felt that he was starving. But the ultimate end would justify a week of discomfort, he told himself.

His tongue was healing. He looked at it often in the mirror above his dresser. Toward the end of the week he was tempted to talk, but he curbed his inclination. He was going to give the famous Doctor Liwell every chance!

The last day came. Tham arose early; bathed and shaved and dressed and ate a portion of tomato soup. He was sick of soup. He promised himself a gorgeous meal later in the day. He would see the doctor, then he would be able to talk, to eat!

The hours passed slowly. Thubway Tham left the lodging house an hour earlier than necessary and journeyed uptown. He walked up and down the streets, looking at his watch every few minutes. And then, half an hour before the appointed time, he went to the offices of Doctor Liwell, hoping that he might gain a few minutes.

He would get a lot of fun out of it, he told himself. It was a hundred dollars well expended. He would pretend to Craddock that he still lisped. He would give the lie to his description at police headquarters!

When the elevator stopped at the proper floor, and Thubway Tham got out of it, the first thing that he saw was a policeman in uniform. The second thing was another policeman. Then he observed that the corridor before the suite of Doctor Liwell was crowded with men and women, and they were angry men and women. The crowd surged forward, and policemen were urging them back.

Thubway Tham stopped abruptly and looked over this unusual scene. And then he noticed that the angry men and women were lisping! Each and every one of them lisped. Tham thought that he understood it. The fame of Doctor Liwell had gone abroad. Men and women were storming the good doctor's offices to get relief. The police had been called to keep them in line!

Thubway Tham smiled, as he made his way forward again. A policeman blocked his advance.

"Get back!" the policeman commanded.

"But I have a date with thith doctor," Thubway Tham objected. "I wath to thee him thith afternoon."

"So were a lot of others. Stand back, there! We'll have no more doors smashed!"

Tham was about to protest again, when a hand fell upon his shoulder. He whirled around angrily and beheld a grinning Detective Craddock standing beside him.

"What are you doing in this end of town, Tham?" Craddock asked.

"I've got a date with thith doctor," Tham replied, "and thith cop—per—"

Tham stopped in horror! He had been talking! And he still lisped!

Craddock looked at him searchingly. And then the headquarters man laughed uproariously.

"You—you fell for it, too!" Craddock gasped. "Paid to lose your lisp, did you? Ha, ha!"

"Why the merriment?" Tham wanted to know.

"See all those people? They're after the doctor's scalp. And headquarters wants him, too. He's a fake, Tham! He's topped a hundred people all the way from a hundred dollars up! And you fell for it! This is rich! Ha, ha! Oh, this is rich! Operation on your throat, huh?"

But Thubway Tham waited to hear no more. He hurried to the elevator and descended to the street. He ate a huge meal at the nearest restaurant, and then he walked down Broadway, anger surging in his soul.

SO he had been fooled, trimmed like a sucker! And Craddock knew all about it! That was the worst. If he ever met that doctor again! Take a cool hundred, cause him a week of starvation, make him stop talking! Nosey Moore would laugh, too. Everybody would laugh! If he ever met that doctor he—

He met him. There passed him on the walk a man Thubway Tham recognized instantly. It was Doctor Liwell, and he was disguised and carried a bag. Evidently Doctor Liwell was hurrying toward the station and a train.

Thubway Tham hurried after him. The doctor rushed into a subway entrance at Times Square, and Tham followed. He darted into a car at the doctor's heels. He touched the doctor on his shoulder.

"Thay, you!" Tham said. "I want to thee you! I jutht came from your office. There ith a mob up there waitin' for you—altho a lot of copth."

"Hush, man! Hush!" the doctor begged.

"Don't you tell me to huthh!" Tham said. "You took a hundred dollarth of my money. You made me tharve for a week and go without talkin'. You—"

"Something went wrong with a lot of operations," the doctor explained.

"Yeth? You can tell that to the judge! I thee a detective up at the end of the car. I'll—"

"Wait! I'll make it right with you!" the perspiring and frightened quack said quickly.

The train thundered into the station. The quack got out, and Tham also got out, clutching the doctor by the arm.

"I feel like thlammin' you!" Tham said. "Foolin' folkth like that! You are a thkunk! You're a dirty crook! You—"

"Listen!" the doctor implored. "Here is your hundred."

"I don't know—"

"Take it, my dear sir! Here is another fifty for your trouble. I—I must catch my train."

Thubway Tham took the money and stuffed it into his pocket. But he retained his grasp on the doctor's arm. Doctor Liwell returned his wallet to his pocket.

"Must catch my train!" he gasped again. "Let me go!"

Thubway Tham grasped the other arm also and shook the physician.

"I ought to thmath you one!" he said. "I ought to turn you over to the copth!"

"I gave you your money—and more."

"All right! And you better catch that train!" Tham told him. "If you don't you'll thpend the night in jail! You'd better—"

But Doctor Liwell was gone. He darted rapidly through the crowd in the direction of the train gates. Thubway Tham grinned and returned to the subway, where he caught a downtown express.

The laugh was on him, he told himself. Detective Craddock and Nosey Moore and some of the others would have their fun with him. Yet Tham could laugh, also.

For in his coat pocket was a fat roll of bills. Tham judged that almost a thousand was there. The currency had come from the wallet of Doctor Liwell, which Thubway Tham had extracted from the physician's pocket, as he shook him.

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# TRAIL'S END

By FREDERICK J. JACKSON

**R**ANSCOMB was unscrupulous and merciless, but he was also a coward at heart.

The first two characteristics were the factors which impelled him to undertake to throw a monkey wrench into the machinations of the Camorra, and profit financially thereby, but if he had known he was bouncing a stick of dynamite in so doing, it is probable that his inherent cowardice would have caused him to refrain.

The way in which he became aware that the Italian banker, Ferrari, was debited for the sum of fifty thousand dollars on the books of the brotherhood is a story in itself. Likewise how he discovered that Ferrari, to prevent inevitable violence and disaster, was prepared to pay this sum and had withdrawn the money from the bank. Sufficient for this tale to say that Ranscomb, armed with a length of lead pipe innocently rolled in a piece of wrapping paper, called at the residence of the inoffensive little banker and murderously beat him down. It was the instinct of the coward that made him strike too hard and too often; Ferrari died from the beating. Ranscomb, at the moment, was not aware of this, however; but it would have made no difference if he *had* known. He and his conscience had long since parted company.

With Ferrari out of the way, Ranscomb searched for the money—and found it. When Mrs. Ferrari inopportunely appeared he likewise struck her down with the roll of lead. Then he slipped out the rear entrance, made his way through an alley and disappeared in the gathering dusk.

For a decade now he had chanced the authorities and had come to regard them with contempt. Therefore, as he hurried to his apartment, he was mentally patting himself on the back for the way he had gathered in fifty thousand dollars with hardly a risk.

Entering his rooms, he locked the door, hung a handkerchief on the knob and started to count the packet of currency. It was all there—fifty thousand dollars in bills of large denominations. Carefully retying the package, he placed it in a tin box and cannily buried it in the fireplace beneath three inches of ashes. Then he thoroughly wet the ashes, and heaped paper and fuel over them.

No sooner had he finished building the fire than a knock sounded at the door. Hastily he struck a match and touched it to the paper, before arising and crossing the room. A glance over his shoulder reassured him that the fire was blazing up.

His heart was thumping a little as he turned the key in the lock and opened the door a few scant inches.

It might be the police; if so—well, he could laugh at them. Out in the hallway it was dark—the lights had not yet been turned on—but he was able to see that a man of small stature stood there alone. He was unable to distinguish the features of the visitor, but the man's insignificant height and the fact that he was alone allayed whatever fears he might otherwise have felt.

"What do you want?" he demanded abruptly.

"A few words in private with you, my friend. It would be best that I enter, for the police may be about." The voice was low and suave. The owner of it obviously was harmless.

"Come in," invited Ranscomb, swinging wide the door.

THE stranger's swarthy face was undeniably Latin in cast.

The jaw was of rugged proportions, the neck thick and strong. His eyes, sinister and dark, gave forth the light of an inner power, an intangible sense of strength and virility, that caused the observer to forget the visitor's lack of inches. To Ranscomb he suddenly loomed up as being exceedingly dangerous; in the assertive air of confidence that hung like a cloak about him was something ominous. Ranscomb unaccountably began to feel vaguely alarmed.

"Well, what is it? What do you want?" he asked testily.

"Fifty thousand dollars," said the other softly, in the enunciation of a scholar.

"Why come to me? What's the joke?"

"Enough of this!" The voice had turned hard. "Within the hour, you murdered Ferrari and stole the money. But Ferrari's house was watched; you were the only person to enter, and you were followed here

when you left by way of the alley. You interfered with our plans, you murdered one of my countrymen; therefore you must pay. Return the money to me and you shall be allowed a slim chance for your life."

"Enticing, very!" drawled Ranscomb, as coolly as he could. "Do you mean to say that you intend to kill me?"

"Oh, not I—unless you render it necessary. But it will come to you in due time; the brotherhood will attend to that. If you are unwilling to return the money, you will draw a penalty unto yourself. It will come within a week, say—and your death will be attributed to natural causes. We do not wish unnecessarily to stir up the police. In the meantime, of course, you will be a prisoner."

"My death will not obtain you the money—if I have it."

"No? My friend, if the money is not returned we shall search for it. If it is not found, then—" The speaker spread his hands in an eloquent gesture.

"Then what?" Ranscomb was beginning to perspire. His mind, however, was clear, and he was planning how he could best maneuver around to the automatic which lay beneath the newspaper on the table.

"Then you will not die like a gentleman! Something else is liable to happen. To put it plainly, we have certain refined tortures that will have the effect of unlocking your lips and loosening your tongue. If these fail, then I, personally, am in favor of staking you out on an ant hill, propping your mouth open, and filling it with honey. There you will be left to die. I should judge that it is not a pleasant death."

Ranscomb shuddered, then looked again toward the hidden weapon. What difficulty he refrained from

crying out. On his face was horror as he gazed at the fierce-eyed little man who had mentioned the contemplated tortures as casually as though he were merely stating that it might rain on the morrow. But Ranscomb knew that he meant every word.

"Consider well those things, my friend," continued the Italian, after a short silence. "Are you willing to turn over the money?" The voice was cold, the eyes even more so.

"I know nothing of Ferrari! I have no money! If you kill me you kill an innocent man!"

"As you will!" said the other indifferently. "If you are so innocent why not call in the police? No? You dare not risk it? Then I intend to search this apartment!" With the words a long stiletto suddenly appeared out of nowhere and flashed in his hand. "Sit still! Would you have me pin your hand to the table?" The command forestalled Ranscomb, who has started to rise from his chair.

"You have a trouble with your eyes, my friend," explained the visitor, in silky tones; "you possess no control over them." With one hand he reached out and lifted the newspaper. "Ah! I was right!" He picked up the automatic, slipped down the safety catch with his thumb and pointed the muzzle toward Ranscomb.

"The trouble with a gun," he went on, "is that it makes too much noise to suit my purposes. I shall regret the necessity of using it, but, to prevent that, it is strictly up to you to remain where you are. Doing so will save trouble for both of us. This little one"—he flashed the steel blade—"is efficient and possesses the added advantage of being silent. If you should try to rush me I shall be forced to kill you. If the steel be insufficient I shall pull the trigger.

You see, knowing you as I do, I am taking it for granted that the gun is loaded. Am I right? Yes? To be forced to kill you would be regrettable, for I wish to be certain of obtaining the money. And in the event that you force my hand I shall take great pleasure in leaving your bleeding heart on the center of this table when I leave the room. To call aloud will be the signal for your death. We of the brotherhood waste no time in idle threats!"

**R**ANSCOMB was ashen to his lips. He felt as though he were in the throes of a horrible nightmare; the threatened cold-blooded butchery was unbelievable. His very heart seemed to be shrinking within him; he was nauseated; he vainly attempted to moisten his lips with a tongue that was harsh and dry.

"I—I know nothing of Ferrari's money," he managed to gasp.

"No? My friend, I fear you are of the type that go to the scaffold with a lie upon your lips. That is not good for the future of your soul. Think well. Then I fancy you will inform me where you have hidden the money. If you do I shall see that you have a start of two hours before the brotherhood seeks for you. In that event your life will be safest if you give yourself up to the police for another crime. The opportunity I am extending to you is my own responsibility, but with a full knowledge that you have no chance to escape. The arm of the brotherhood is long; vengeance will be ours in the end, for Ferrari had placed himself under our protection. With us it is a matter of honor that you die."

"Alluring proposition, to be sure," declared Ranscomb, his nerve returning to a certain extent now that

he knew he was not to be killed out of hand. "But I repeat that I know nothing of the alleged murder of Ferrari and the taking of his money."

The other smiled grimly.

"Do you know, I am almost tempted to believe you; you are such an excellent liar, and few men lie in the face of death. But I *know* you for what you *are*. You are the kidnaper of little Miss Pierpont; she died on your hands through lack of proper care. The police do not know you are the man; we of the brotherhood do. We have other information regarding your crimes in the past. If it were not for your record your word might carry some weight. But as it is—well, I am certain that our man made no mistake. You have concealed fifty thousand dollars within the walls of this building, perhaps in this apartment."

"Well, search," invited Ranscomb. "There is nothing to be found. When you become convinced of that, perhaps you will believe me."

"I intend to search." He pointed the automatic at Ranscomb. "Stand up!" he ordered, and the cornered man obeyed.

"Remove your coat."

Ranscomb threw it across a chair.

"Raise your hands and turn around."

When Ranscomb had complied, the Italian walked forward, placed the muzzle of the gun against the spine of the other and then felt of his person to see if the money were concealed thereon. Having ascertained that it was not, and keeping Ranscomb covered, he crossed the room and threw open the door leading into a closet. A brief inspection of the small room appeared to satisfy the Camorrista, so he ordered Ranscomb into it, then closed the door and turned the key in the lock.

Ranscomb immediately knelt before the keyhole. The key itself partially obstructed his view, but his coat on the chair and the blaze in the grate were within his range of vision. He saw the Italian lift the coat and search through it. A momentary smile flitted on the dark face as he brought the pocketbook into view. Then an exclamation of disgust at the contents, and the wallet was dropped back onto the coat.

P RESENTLY came sounds which indicated that the intruder was engaged in ransacking the bedroom. Bureau drawers were pulled out and their contents dropped onto the floor. The rattle and squeak of springs told of the mattress being lifted and examined, then a ripping which Ranscomb finally decided to be the slashing open of a locked suitcase. Breathing imprecations of disappointment, the Italian finally returned to the living room. Pictures he tore from the walls, books from their cases; the cushions of chairs were regarded with suspicion; the coals dumped from the scuttle. Ranscomb, watching anxiously, saw that the fire was not suspected of being a hiding place.

At last the Italian gave up the search and came to the door of the closet.

"You are growing weary? No?" he spoke. "But you are not lacking for entertainment. No man should when he has fifty thousand dollars."

"You think I have the money in the closet? Please come in and search. Then you might be convinced that I know nothing of Ferrari."

"Ah, no, my friend. You seem too anxious. I would be unable to search the closet and watch you at the same time. Therefore I must

have assistance. I have no desire to get into close contact with one so desperate as you probably are by this time. I might be forced to do something I would regret."

He wedged a chair beneath the doorknob of the closet as a further security against the escape of his prisoner, then crossed the room, unlocked the door leading to the hall and changed the key to the outside. Ranscomb, by listening closely, could guess every movement made by the other. He heard the hall door close and the key turn in the lock. Then the key was removed.

Half a minute Ranscomb waited, repressing with difficulty a desire to act before. A few blows with his heel served to kick out one of the flimsy lower panels in the closet door. Through this he reached with one hand, pulled the chair away from the knob and then turned the key. Stepping out into the living room, he quickly copied the Italian's tactics and wedged the chair against the outer door. Then he ran to the grate, knelt down, and hastily scraped the fire and ashes to one side.

With a curious breath of relief he opened the tin box and removed the currency. He rose and thrust the money into his coat and donned the garment.

For a moment he stood, deep in thought, his brain working desperately to evolve a method of escape. He did not contemplate risking a passage through the halls. He was unarmed, for the Italian had taken his pistol. And he did not know how far the latter had gone; it might have been only to the street entrance of the building. That meant a trip down four flights of stairs, however, which, together with the return trip, would take a little time—enough for a get-away.

Hurrying into the dismantled bedroom he snatched up two sheets. These he knotted together as he returned to the living room, after which he dragged the heavy table to the window. One end of the sheet-rope he bound high up on a table leg, then raised the window and clambered onto the sill. Pulling the table up to the level of the sill he slid down the makeshift rope. His feet struck the adjoining roof, fifteen feet below, and he ran for the door through which women came each day to hang their washing on the lines stretched on the roof of the cheap apartment house. This door was open, and he made his way down through the building to the rear of the first-floor hallway. Another door gave egress to a back areaway, which opened onto a side street. Gaining this, he walked rapidly, blessing the awnings of the small shopkeepers, which permitted him to walk in shadow part of the time.

Five blocks away he hailed a taxicab which had just discharged a passenger at the curb.

"Silver Junction, and quick!" he ordered, giving the name of the first station outside of the city limits.

A wait of twenty minutes at the junction, and he boarded an accommodation train headed for a city forty miles beyond. At midnight, equipped with a toothbrush, safety razor, and a few accessories he had been able to purchase at a drug store, he secured a berth on the westbound limited.

TWO days later, he felt secure, for he had taken quarters in a cheap lodging house and was living as inconspicuously as possible. He had placed a thousand miles between himself and the agent of the Camorra. The newspapers

gave him meager details of the progress in the search for the murderer of the banker. Some member of the Black Hand was suspected.

The next day, however, he again became alarmed, for the papers from her town reported that Mrs. Ferrari had regained consciousness sufficiently to give a description of her assailant, a description that all too accurately delineated himself. He realized his peril, not from the Camorra, but from the police, for he stood six feet in height and weighed only one hundred and thirty pounds. This, together with his distinctive face, made him easy of identification among a million.

At his lodgings he had registered under the name of Hugh Stillwell. He had no baggage, so he had paid a month's rent in advance to establish the confidence and good will of his landlady.

She was in the hallway when he returned to his room that afternoon.

"Oh, Mr. Stillwell," she said importantly, "a man was asking about you a little while ago."

"A bull, I suppose," he returned, with a forced smile.

"No, it wasn't. I know every dick in town. This fella kinda looked like a dago and wore a red necktie. He asked me when did you register, and a few things like that. About your baggage, too. I told him you had a lot of it. He looked kinda puzzled at that, but he said he would be in later to see you. He said he thought you were the man he had a deal on with. I watched him from the window when he left, and he walked right across the street to the telegraph office and didn't come out again for about ten minutes. Know who he is?"

"Sure! I've been expecting him. Thank you."

Again returning to the street, he

kept an alert watch for any one who answered the description given by his landlady.

Loitering in a doorway not twenty feet from the portals he had just quitted was a man who wore a red necktie and "kinda looked like a dago."

Ranscomb apparently paid no attention to him, but strolled away. In the next block, he casually glanced back and saw that he was being followed. A little farther on, he entered a pawnshop and purchased a heavy automatic pistol.

Then he walked straight back to his room, where he packed his toilet articles and stowed them in his pockets. Cautiously he opened his door. The hallway was clear, and he slipped down the rear stairs into the alley. Cutting across a vacant lot, he walked to the next corner, entered a saloon by way of the main door and then out through the "family" entrance. Two blocks more, and he boarded a street car, then transferred to another line that took him into the western suburbs. It did not occur to him that by renting a room in one of the quiet cottages in this district he might find a haven. His instinct bade him to travel, and an interurban car carried him to another town.

Again the railroad enabled him to make a jump of several hundred miles to the westward.

In this town he unconsciously gained the good will of a smiling, young Italian bootblack, and the lad, in a desire to please his much-liked patron, informed him of certain inquiries that were being made. Ranscomb traveled on.

By the time he had reached the Rocky Mountain district he was in a nervous panic, and came near to shooting an inebriated but would-be-friendly Greek under the impres-

sion that he was an Italian who desired, for ulterior purposes, to cultivate an acquaintance.

When he stepped from the train in a small Colorado town he saw a bearded man in the depot watch him keenly and then follow him to the street. Really frightened, Ranscomb climbed into an automobile bearing a sign which read, "For Hire."

"Take me west," he ordered quickly. "Money's no object. I've got to catch that train which just pulled out. Can you do it?"

"Sure!" said the youthful driver. "Ellison is twelve miles away. I belong there, and so does the machine. It takes the train twenty-five minutes to make it. I can do it in twenty, easy. It's a good road."

Ranscomb caught the train again at Ellison. He might have felt easier in his mind, however, had he remained behind in the other town to see the bearded stranger scratch his head and say "Gosh, I wonder if that was old Slim Coghlan? I ain't seen him in fifteen years."

**B**Y this time Ranscomb's fear had become an obsession. Pictured eternally in his mind was a vision of a man staked out on an ant hill, and his mouth filled with honey. He began to suffer sleepless nights, and—though it seemed impossible for one of his build—to lose even more weight. In Salt Lake City, his ever-burdened mind refused to give him peace, and he fearfully traveled on. He was safe by this time, but he did not know it. As a matter of fact, his trail had long since been lost. His was not the fear engendered by a guilty conscience. His was the purely physical fear of what would happen to him should he fall into the hands of the Camorra.

In a Nevada mining camp, he

turned a corner and almost ran into two Italian muckers who were off shift. They were conversing in their native tongue, but abruptly broke off their conference at his approach. In reality they were discussing the coming strike of the miners for higher pay, and glared suspiciously at the stranger. Ranscomb's white collar and Eastern clothing caused them to suspect him of being one of the new office force in the employ of the mine owners. Their look of suspicion set the hunted man off into another panic. He fled and took the first train out of town.

Leaving the limited at Sacramento, he journeyed southwest on a local. A week later—a week in which the hallucination of constant pursuit had heightened—he quietly arrived in the small town of Napoleon, in the hills north of San Francisco Bay. He could go no farther; his health had broken down; years of night life and dissipation had claimed their inevitable toll now that they were allied with the nervous strain engendered by constant fear of pursuit. He was forced to remain in Napoleon until his physical condition bettered. The more he thought of it the more determined he became to make a stand here. Napoleon was isolated; no railroad passed nearer than twelve miles away; practically the only visitors were the neighboring farmers. For the sixth time since murdering Ferrari he changed his name.

Three thousand dollars sufficed to purchase a small bungalow and a quarter acre of land a mile out of town. He spent another thousand in furnishing the house to a certain degree of luxury, according to the standards of the simple folk in that community. A Swedish girl, daughter of a near-by farmer, was hired to

come each day to cook his meals and take care of the house. For a week she added the duties of nurse to her other work, for Ranscomb was too weak to leave his bed for more than a few minutes at a time.

THE second week, he began to regain his health; likewise, to a certain extent, his confidence. During his convalescence, he spent his mornings seated in the sunshine on his front porch. He began to like this quiet farming country, where the rolling hills were aglow with California poppies. Outside the main window of his living room grew a rosebush, its branches clambering precariously up the wall of the house. He looked at the flowers and the wind-rustled grass and drew a deep breath of satisfaction. It was good to live here among these rustic people. The high cost of living was a myth in this district, and he possessed funds that would enable him to live comfortably for the rest of his days.

His thoughts turned to the farmer's daughter. Rosy-cheeked she was, with hair the color of the corn tassels in her father's fields. And her eyes—he liked her eyes. There was a light of sympathy, of understanding, of true womanhood in them. An innocence and tenderness, too, that are seldom to be seen in the eyes of a woman reared in a large city. And she could certainly cook, and knew how to take care of a man. Also, he was aware that she seemed to stand just a little bit in awe of him, and it flattered his nature.

Yes, he decided, he would try to marry this girl and round out his days with a few years of quietness and peace—and, possibly, happiness. He conjured up rosy visions as he sat there basking in the sun.

Then the thought of the relentless

pursuit again returned to mar his dreams. Well, he was prepared for discovery. The automatic he kept with him always, as he did his money. He was ever ready to flee the vicinity at a minute's notice. But he felt reasonably secure. He had severed all connections with his past and his old friends. No mail came to him. The main traveled highway was a mile distant. No visitors ever came near his bungalow. As long as he kept out of sight how could he be found? Thus he reasoned.

A few days later he felt so much better physically that he began to spend hours in roaming over the lonely hills. Life again became sweet to him; red blood coursed through his veins, and he began to flirt mildly with the pretty Swedish girl.

His former hectic existence he did not miss. He knew all too well the emptiness of it, the hollowness. He lived it only vicariously now—through the medium of books and magazines, with which he had stocked his home well. And he was satisfied that it should be this way.

He discovered a valley, the sides of which were covered with the burrows of ground squirrels. It was an excellent opportunity to practice with his automatic, and before he realized it, he had fired all but a single remaining cartridge. He grew vaguely alarmed when he became aware of this, and started to walk, by a roundabout way through the hills, to the town, with the intention of purchasing a plentiful supply of ammunition.

As he left the valley he turned for a last look back at the squirrels, dozens of which were peeping out of their burrows as they heard his departing footsteps. Then he halted in sudden alarm, for a man was

watching him from over the brow of a hill, only his head being visible. The watcher dropped back out of sight immediately after he had been seen by Ranscomb.

It was only the owner of the land on which Ranscomb had been shooting. He had been attracted to the scene by the sound of the firing, and had gone away again, glad at heart that some one was taking the trouble to decimate the pestiferous squirrels.

But Ranscomb did not know this, and his old fears immediately boiled up to fever heat as he hurried to Napoleon. When he arrived in town, however, he remembered that it was Sunday and all the stores were closed. Uneasy in mind, he warily and wearily trudged back to his bungalow. The sky became overcast, then darker—seemingly to match his thoughts. As he unlocked his front door, the threatened rain began to fall.

Carefully he locked the door from the inside, then walked through the rooms, stopping now and then to peer through the windows at the landscape, which was rapidly becoming sodden under the heavy rain. No one was in sight; therefore he reasoned that he had not been followed, and felt somewhat relieved. But he cogitated in uncertainty. Should he take a trip to San Francisco and try to lose himself there? No, he determined, he would stick it out and await developments. Perhaps the man who had watched him from the hill signified nothing.

**I**N an hour the Swedish girl arrived to cook his evening meal. Rain or shine made no difference to her. Her presence was a blessing to Ranscomb; he began to see more than ever just how much she could mean to him. But she

gave him a bad scare when she began to relate the latest gossip of the neighborhood. That day a man had called upon her father with inquiries about any small residence in the hills that might be for sale. He had also inquired about the neighbors, and her father had described Ranscomb's place to the investigator. The latter had been interested and had asked more about Ranscomb himself.

"How did your father describe me?" Ranscomb inquired.

"Just like you look."

"How do I look?" he asked, smiling a little and endeavoring to make light of the whole matter.

"I tank you look good to me!" She giggled shyly, then, blushing at her temerity, slipped out through the door and ran home across the muddy fields.

He made no attempt to call her back, preferring to bide his time until the morrow.

Presently it grew dark, and with the darkness came an increase in the force of the wind. Soon it was whistling mournfully over the house, and at times wailed like a banshee under the eaves. The rain drove in sheets and gusts on the wings of the gale and splattered in torrents against the windows on the weather side. The storm created a weird atmosphere in the living room where Ranscomb sat, despite the illumination given by the large oil lamp and the cheerful crackling of the grate fire.

Ranscomb, comfortably ensconced in a morris chair, endeavored to bury himself in a tale of adventure. The lamp on the table at his shoulder gave plenty of light, the room was warm, his cigar was good, but he shivered occasionally, and finally tossed the cigar into the fireplace. Despite his efforts to down it, a pre-

monition of disaster stole over him; fear began to clutch at his heart-strings.

Outside the window, not more than eight feet from him, a branch of the climbing rosebush swung in the wind and kept rattatting on the glass. Nervous though he was, Ranscomb paid no attention to this noise. It was all a part of the storm, a fitting accompaniment to the sound of the wind and rain.

**S**UDDENLY he ceased reading and sat bolt upright with a jerk, every sense alert, every nerve quivering, a feeling of panic overpowering him like an all-enveloping shroud. For a moment he wondered at himself; he dully noted that the automatic had found its way into his hand, but he had no recollection of reaching for it. He could not fathom the cause of the subconscious alarm. There had not been the slightest sound above the storm to indicate the presence of an intruder. The wind still howled and rain continued to beat down.

Then came realization, and he broke into cold perspiration. The room, too, all of a sudden seemed to have had its atmosphere lowered by many degrees.

It was the absence of a certain sound which had aroused him involuntarily to this high pitch. The branch of the rosebush no longer thumped against the glass!

Upon several occasions he had carefully noticed the rosebush. One branch stretched across the lower portion of the pane. Now that it no longer rattled on the window it could mean but one thing: some marauder stood without and had brushed the branch out of his way in order to look into the room. A quick, horrified glance had immediately shown him that the shade on

the window lacked a full three inches of reaching down to the sill.

Then hysteria and abject fear seized him as something clattered on the rear porch. It might have been some object displaced by the wind, but Ranscomb's fearful imagination distorted it into some one stumbling at the rear door.

The house was perhaps surrounded! Again, like a manikin flashed on a motion-picture screen, he conjured up the frightful vision that filled his evil dreams—a man staked out to die a hideous death on an ant hill.

Slowly he turned again to the window. He could visualize the Italian standing outside and holding the rose branch away from the glass. He figured his chances. If he fired a bullet through the glass an inch above the center of the ledge it would strike the sneak between the eyes. It was a pleasing thought, but—there might be two of them, and he might shoot between them. And there was at least one other at the rear door.

He wept brokenly as he bitterly cursed his folly in shooting away his ammunition. With a single cartridge what could he do? What chance did he have against the ruthless agents of the Camorra? He was a weak man, the night was stormy, and he was half a mile from his nearest neighbors.

One cartridge! Ah, why hadn't he thought of it before? It would have saved him this acute mental suffering. He laughed, the laugh of a maniac. Again he chuckled shrilly at the method by which he would thwart the inhuman fiends who had come to torture him.

Slowly, deliberately, smilingly, he raised the pistol to his temple and pulled the trigger.

When the Swedish girl, a song on

her lips, skipped up the path to Ranscomb's front door the next morning she noticed that the storm had torn the rosebush from the wall. Instead of climbing up around the window, the long branches lay flat on the ground. She stepped out into

the mud and tried to lift the thorny bush back into place before entering the house.

Neither she nor the Camorra ever connected this bit of minor destruction by the night wind with the working out of Ranscomb's destiny.

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### ALMOST THE PERFECT CRIME

**T**HE effort of a murderer to completely disfigure his victim almost resulted in the perfect crime.

Samuel Furnace, building contractor, who murdered Walter Spatchett, a young rent collector, in London, England, after shooting his victim several times in the back of the head, poured a can of paint over him, and then set fire to his office. A portion of the paint ran down the murdered man's neck and covered a laundry mark on the inside of his collar band. The paint, a noninflammable variety, acted as a preservative of the mark, and gave the first hint that the body was not that of Furnace, the owner of the office in which it had been found by firemen summoned to extinguish the blaze.

When young Spatchett failed to return home, it was thought that he had absconded with his collections. Instead he had been murdered and robbed. But for the finding of the laundry mark, the young man would have lain in Furnace's grave and the murderer would have gone free. The charred body had been falsely identified by Mrs. Furnace as that of her husband.

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### NEW JURY SYSTEM

**A** NEW jury system for the Supreme Court, New York City, with an estimated saving in excess of \$100,000, was inaugurated on the fifteenth of February. The new plan was adopted by judges of the court after a series of conferences as to its feasibility. It eliminates ten jurors a day from each of the nine trial parts, which previously have been supplied with fifty jurors a day. The elimination of a reserve part, which required forty more jurors each, means a further considerable saving. Under the new system one hundred and forty fewer jurors will be required for each day. With the jurors' salary computed on a four-day-week basis, the saving approximates \$2,800 per week.

David P. Germain, in conjunction with the Supreme Court judges, has evolved a plan for a central jury part in the municipal building in Brooklyn, where jurors not actually needed in trials may await call. The idea includes the establishment of a sort of club room, with books, magazines, newspapers, and telephones. One of the chief objections offered by jurors to the present system is the time spent in court merely awaiting a call, yet absolutely out of contact with their places of business.

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# CRIME AS A BUSINESS

(Minor Confidence Men)

By EDWARD H. SMITH

The purpose of this series of articles is purely informative. The writer assumes that the plain morality of the subject is too well understood to require further emphasis at his hands. On the other side, he realizes that there are between one and two million professional, chronic, occasional, single-offense, and other types of lawbreakers in the country. According to recent estimates of insurance experts, these men and women steal not less than three billion dollars in cash and goods annually. To police them, apprehend them, prosecute them, guard them, keep them while in prison, and support them elsewhere at intervals, costs another five billions. On the face of these figures alone crime is our greatest economic problem. If organized lawlessness can take three billions a year, obviously it must be recognized as a business. The author, after many years of close-hand study, is attempting simply to tell how that business is conducted, under what circumstances, and by whom.

THE great American confidence game costs our people at least two billion dollars a year. Enormous as the figure is, no man can call it fanciful or exaggerated. It bears the indorsement of the president of the New York Stock Exchange, who made his own investigations and estimated that the loss to crooked bucket-shop keepers in Wall Street and elsewhere in New York amounted to a billion dollars of itself. Various officials of the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World, all organizations which are fighting frauds of this kind, have independently arrived at estimates of two billions or more.

Since, according to the best procurable estimates, the annual property loss to criminals of all classes in the United States is about three billion dollars, the importance of the

confidence man in any consideration of the crime business will be apparent. He gets two thirds of all the loot.

Broadly speaking, the modern confidence man divides himself into two rather loosely assorted clans, either of which contains many subtribes and special families. A glimpse of many of these will be got, as we proceed. For the present, however, it will be enough to recognize the two main orders as the minor and major ranks of con men. Both are familiar enough to the investing and speculating public. The reader, however, is more likely to be acquainted with the minor type, for his colorful adventures and cunning devices have been spread upon many an innocent white page for many a suffering year. His bigger and somewhat younger brother is a figure less generally understood.

The minor order confidence man is the successor of the soundrels who made the country ache from such burdens as the bunco game, the gold-brick swindle, and the green-goods cheat. These were the original American confidence games, the models after which all others have been made. One thinks of these rich old frauds, which originated about 1850, as long dead and buried. One is likely to believe, without either knowing or thinking, that no one could be snared to-day by such ancient devices. The truth, alas, is otherwise. These ancient games are still played, under various and handsome disguises, and many a sedate man of means has been made to pay tribute to the old extortioners.

A few years ago, in Boston, there died an aged and choleric gentleman who had gone through life without wife or child. In spite of these handicaps, or, perhaps, because of them, he had accumulated a fat and tempting bank balance, plus various and handsome assortments of stocks and bonds, a fine house, some business properties, and other substantial attractions too numerous to mention. His will bequeathed these matters to a nephew, an amiable, a distant, and thunderstruck young man, who hastened from a small town in Maine to bury his uncle and confirm the excellent news.

An article appeared in each of the Boston papers, recounting the felicitous case of the gentleman from Maine. His name, according to best recollection, was Stack. His inheritance, when appraised, showed him to have been enriched to the extent of more than three hundred thousand dollars.

Young Mr. Stack had buried his munificent uncle, returned to his large house, bid adieu and good riddance to the last of the official

mourners, and settled himself among his new possessions, when the doorbell sounded, and a telegram was brought in. It was addressed to the dead man, and read:

Hit it at last. Expectations more than fulfilled. Richest strike in twenty-five years. All due to your generosity. Congratulations. Keep absolutely secret. Letter follows. Culberson.

ALL this was Greek to Mr. Stack, to be sure. He stared and gaped and pondered. Then he put the telegram away and decided to wait for the letter. Should he consult the family lawyer? Yes and no. Evidently this was some confidential business of his uncle's. No need to say anything until he understood it better. Where had the thing come from, anyhow? Stack got the mysterious telegram from its hiding place to search out this detail and read "Globe, Ariz.," as the point of dispatch. He raised his brows a little. Probably it was some mining venture. Well, he would keep his counsel.

At the end of the fourth day came the letter, written on several sheets of Western hotel stationery, in bold and reassuring characters. It read:

As I write this, you will already have had our telegram and the momentous news. On last Friday, on the middle ledge, where we have been working since spring, we came upon the long-expected vein. It turned out to be, as I wired, something beyond all our dreams. We have quietly traced the vein for more than a mile. There is a million dollars in gold in plain sight. The assay shows so high we'd rather show you than tell you. There's a fortune for each of us, and we owe all this to you. If you hadn't advanced the second twenty-five hundred, we would have had to quit work, and somebody else would have our claim. Please be sure that we are sensible of the debt.

How soon can you arrive in Globe? Your presence is absolutely necessary at

once. There are matters concerning the adjacent property and the outcropping law which only you can handle. In order fully to protect ourselves we shall have to take up the neighboring pieces. Otherwise some one else will buy in and take the thing away from us.

For this reason the utmost secrecy is imperative. If the slightest rumor of our discovery gets about, the others will be on the ground and take the thing over before we can protect ourselves. Say not a word to your own conscience even, but come at the earliest possible moment. Wire date and hour of your arrival.

Yours for a million.

Once more the mysterious Culberson, herein further designated by the initials J. H., signed himself to the communication.

The young and inexperienced Mr. Stack sat down, with the letter in a trembling hand, and gasped for deeper breath. He was not a fool, this young man from Maine. He had the natural shrewdness of a notably canny ancestry. But, after all, he was young, and he had just seen a miracle. A man who has just had destiny deposit some three hundred thousand dollars in his unexpected lap is in no mood for skepticism. He has been taught, by the thrice effective method of material and cash demonstration, that wonders do happen, and he is bereft of those inhibitions which might ordinarily restrain him from folly.

Mr. Stack slept upon that strange and provocative letter. In the night he dreamed of gold and grandeur. And in the morning he slipped down to the telegraph office and sent away a cryptic message which contained, among other things, the information that he would take train within the confines of that day. This done, Stack called on his lawyer, was assured that the formalities incident to the transfer of the inheritance to his control would soon be completed, and announced with a certain mys-

terious nonchalance that he thought he would start West at once—for his health.

FOUR days later young Stack lumbered off the train at Globe and fell into the arms of two stalwart persons who almost dislocated his spine and massacrated his fingers with their heartiness.

"So your uncle's dead, and you're his heir, eh?" said the grizzled veteran who bore the name of Culberson. "Well, son, it's tough to think of the old man passing in his checks without ever hearin' of this thing. It'd added a couple of years to his life. Eh, Bill? Too bad. What did he die of, huh? All of a sudden, huh? Well, that's the way it happens. When you got somethin' to live fer you die. A great old gentleman, your uncle. We'd be nowhar if it hadna been fer him. He owned a third interest in all this good luck of ours, and, since you're his heir, the third's yours. Lemme tell the story."

They sat down in Stack's room at the hotel, and Jim Culberson and Bill Hanley unfolded a tale. Culberson had been introduced to the dead uncle in Boston more than three years before. A friend had performed the introduction, inasmuch as Culberson had his goldmine idea, and the old uncle was known to have grubstaked a few fellows in his time. He put up twenty-five hundred for Jim and Bill. That was the beginning of the hunt. Then the money had run out, when hopes were highest. It had looked like a failure until the great old uncle had generously come to the rescue with a second contribution. He'd sent it in cash, too. Evidently didn't want his bank to know that he was staking any miners. Well, that was the end of the story except the trifling

matter of finding the gold. Wasn't it awful to think of the old man dwyng the very day they made their first casting of the metal? Too darn bad! Still, the gold would be more use to a young man than an old. Away back there in those old gray mountains, caught in the time-broken rocks, was a hoard that would make the world all velvet before the young man's feet. And to-morrow he was going out there to take a look.

They were off at dawn to the end of a rickety branch railroad. In the afternoon they set out from a squalid mining camp on horses. That night they camped on the mesa, and the tenderfoot from Maine heard the chilling note of the coyote, felt the first desert wind ripple along his spine, and watched the vast white torch of a mountain moon come floating up from the canyon. Late in the afternoon of the next day his horse, weary with the constant climbing, turned the shoulder of a great wind-scarred rock and stopped at the entrance to a shallow natural grotto. Here was the claim.

Mr. Culberson and Mr. Hanley immediately took their charge over the property, showed him the boundaries of their present claim, picked up a few samples of iron pyrites from the loose ore deposits, showed the base yellow metal to Stack's inexperienced and unsuspecting eye, and finally led him up the mountain, a quarter of a mile, to a higher outcropping of the yellow vein. Here they sat down and explained something that was sad, but had to be faced.

In all the mountain States, where precious or valuable metals were found, said these worthies, there was an outcropping law. This statute said, in effect, that a vein of gold or silver or copper belonged to the

highest claim where an outcropping could be found. In other words, this discovery of theirs amounted to nothing unless they could buy this claim above their own, where the gold cropped out at the highest point. Unless they did this, the fellow who owned the upper claim would prevent them from taking an ounce of ore. Yes, it was rather a strange law. It had been put on the statute books by the rich fellows and the big mining companies for two reasons: so that they could grab valuable veins by finding higher outcroppings, and so that a poor man couldn't cut in on their veins by staking out a claim lower down.

But, be that as it may, they would have to buy this higher claim and, for safety, several others in between. Only then could they be certain to keep their great find all to themselves. That was the reason for summoning Mr. Stack to Arizona. It would take money to acquire these claims. Fortunately they had it—in good red gold. They would show Mr. Stack in the morning.

WHEN the young man from Maine had gorged himself on thick bacon, ponderous camp-oven biscuits, and strong coffee, his friends disappeared into the back of the cavern, where they had slept, and dragged forth two dirty wheat sacks, which they threw at his feet, with the invitation to "look at these."

"Dump the stuff out on the sand there and give yourself a treat," invited Culberson, and the man from Maine obeyed.

Stack picked up the larger sack by the bottom, lifted at it with rather frail strength, and saw a yellow heap of great rough gold nuggets spill out at his feet—nuggets as big as potatoes, and bright as sunset.

Mr. Culberson picked up the second sack and added its burden to the pile. Then he sat down in the sand beside his hoard and began to fondle the bright slugs of metal and to explain. Young Mr. Stack and the amiable Hanley gathered, squatted, and listened, while their friend poured out his eloquent account. The man from Maine didn't quite understand most of it, still he had an idea.

Stack understood that the ore was so soft and so rich that it had been possible to stamp it by hand secretly, away up there in the mountains, refine it by some simple primitive process, which Culberson mentioned, but didn't explain, and then pour the liquid gold into molds roughly scooped out of the sand. All this had to be done circumspectly in the cave, which had a natural chimney at the farther end, through which the smoke of their smelting fire had been carried off.

"Why all the secrecy away up here?" demanded Stack, with a show of Western breeziness.

Culberson looked at him with well-disguised pity and pain.

"Well, son, if you'd been skinned out of as many gold claims as I have in my day, you wouldn't be askin' fool questions," he said. "A gold strike will leak fastern'n an old maid's secret. Why, boy, we been coverin' our tracks like hoss thieves fer the last year. And we gotta do some tall coverin' still. We can't be too careful."

Bill Hanley joined in with vehement confirmation.

"Why, Mr. Stack," he began, "if the least rumor got down to that mining camp below here, or into Globe, there'd be six million men, more or less, campin' out here tomorrow. If we even bought a new suit in Globe, or looked like we had

a grain of gold dust on us, the fellows that own the claims around here, especially that top claim, wouldn't sell for all the money in the Denver mint. You know how we got our first ore assayed? Well, we sent the samples East to a friend in Pennsylvania and asked him to send the package unopened to another fellow in Colorado, where the assay was made. That's how careful we gotta be."

Stack looked impressed, and Culberson continued the attack. He picked up from the pile before him a nugget somewhat larger than a duck's egg and tossed it carelessly at the young Easterner.

"Looka that!" he commanded. "Try your knife an' your teeth on it. Pure soft gold. Say, if I took that little sample into Globe and let my best friend see it, there'd be a riot. Stuff like that turns men's brains to fire, boy. Now, listen what we gotta do."

Culberson explained that he had, by careful and devious means, gone about and got prices on the various adjacent claims that were needed. It would take a little less than forty thousand dollars to buy them in now, while there was still no knowledge of the strike. That was why Stack had been called West. His job was to get hold of the forty thousand in short order.

**T**HE young man's natural caution rose. "How much gold have you in that pile?" he demanded.

"About ninety thousand dollars, as close as we can estimate."

"Well, you ought to be able to raise the forty thousand on that," the Easerner countered.

"Well, we can't," Culberson retorted with a show of teeth. "If we could we wouldn't have got you here

from Boston, would we? Use your brains. We can't show that gold anywhere. We can't even be seen with a speck of it. That's where you come in, and that's why you get a third of a million-dollar strike. Here's what's got to be done. You have to dig up the forty thousand quick from Boston, through the bank. To make you safe we turn over to you all this gold, more than twice as much as we ask you to put up. You take the gold East with you, turn it in to the mint, pay yourself back your forty thousand, deduct the expenses of your trip, and then send me and Bill our two thirds of what's left. After that you get one third of all the gold that comes out of the vein. Take it or leave it, as you choose."

Mr. Stack quite naturally hemmed and hawed.

"I suppose you wonder if it's gold, or if it's really as much as I say, eh? Well, son, I tell you what we'll do. We'll take all this stuff back to Globe with us and stick it away where it's safe. Meantime you take a coupla samples an' have them tested. Take the one you got in your hand. Here's another. Take any of 'em. How's that?"

Culberson picked up another nugget with elaborate casualness and forced it on the hesitant Stack, who stuffed the two lumps into his pocket.

"Keep them where you can lay hands on them. We'll have to pack up the rest of this stuff and keep it packed," said Culberson, beginning to drop the heavy castings back into the bags from which they had come.

Before afternoon the men had packed, loaded their gold on their horses, and started for Globe. Arrived there on the second day, the sacks were left in a safe-deposit

vault, to which Stack held one key and Culberson the other, neither having access without the knowledge of both.

Before night fell, Stack took a train to Phoenix, with his two sample nuggets. Next day he visited a jeweler, said that these two pieces of metal had been offered him, and asked what it would cost to have them thoroughly tested. The jeweler, having been initiated into the outer mysteries of the gold-brick lodge, bored a hole through both nuggets and tested the cuttings. He sank other holes into various parts of both ingots. He scraped till his tools wore out.

"Pure gold," he said; "nearly twenty-four carats fine. Where'd it come from?"

Mr. Stack looked sharply at the questioner, lied briefly, and went hurriedly back to Globe. The perfunctory question of the jeweler had confirmed in his mind all that Culberson had told him. Indeed, every one was prying. The secret must be closely kept.

One question still troubled him when he saw his new-found partners again. How could he know the total worth of the gold? Culberson scratched his head, like a man in a quandary.

"We can't take it and have it weighed as gold," he pondered. "The sight of that much yellow boy would set the mountains boiling. I'll tell you. We can get a rough idea by simply weighing the stuff on any butcher's scale and then translating the avoirdupois weight into troy. How'll that do? That way we won't have to take the stuff out of the bags, or tell what it is. It'll be safe and we'll be protected, too."

Stack readily assented. The bags were taken from the bank vault, carried to a butcher shop not far away,

and found to weigh about three hundred pounds. At bit of rough calculation showed that gold at twenty dollars a troy ounce would be worth close to three hundred dollars to the avoidupois pound. Ergo, three hundred pounds were worth between eighty and ninety thousand dollars.

"At least twice what we're asking you to advance," commented Culberson. "You can't lose."

THE same night Stack wrote to his attorney in Boston under the careful guidance of the astute Culberson. His letter recited that he had determined to make his residence in the West, and that he wished to acquire at once some property which could, at the moment, be bought at much less than its value. Accordingly he wanted his lawyer to make arrangements for an immediate advance of forty thousand dollars.

After several weeks of waiting and telegraphing the money arrived in a bank at Globe. A contract was drawn, by whose terms Stack was recognized as a one third partner. A clause provided that he was to sell the aforementioned gold, repay himself for the forty thousand dollars, remit two thirds of the balance to Culberson and Hanley, and participate according to the same ratio in future gold proceeds.

This formality concluded, a happy young man from Maine caught the train for Boston, with three hundred pounds of fine yellow metal in a trunk. In four days he was back in New England. In five he was a bit-terly disillusioned heir.

All the nuggets, except the two he had been given for sampling, proved to be very good brass.

Thus doth the ancient gold-brick game turn many a deposit of iron pyrites, the fool's gold of popular

speech, into profits for the confidence man.

Truth compels me to record that the gentleman who played Culberson for Mr. Stack of Maine, was subsequently sent to Atlanta for a similar imposition on another Eastern gentleman who inherited means.

Similarly, several others of the old, true, and tried confidence games are still being put to profitable use by the minor confidence gamester of the day. The old next-of-kin game is a flattering example. This ancient dodge has done service in America for a full century. Its mechanics are very simple. For example:

There are many Drakes in America. Some have means and position; some have none. Most are just plain folk. All have the usual human weaknesses. Long ago a shyster lawyer in New York conceived the idea of working the egotism of the Drakes for his own enrichment. He wrote to all the Drakes he could find listed in the directories of fifty or more cities, towns, and counties, telling them all of the vast estate of Sir Francis Drake, which was being held in chancery in London for the appearance of the true heirs. He asked every Drake to send him as much as he knew of his or her genealogy. From this information and the richness of his own imagination, the attorney constructed a family tree which led back to the old Elizabethan freebooter and admiral. The Drakes were asked to contribute twenty-five dollars each to defray the expenses of prosecuting their claim. Later on the demands for money grew. Every Drake who could be got to take the bait was bled until he was dry. Then all rumor of the great fortune subsided. First and last, according to figures made up by official investigators, several thousand Drakes are said to

have spent half a million chasing a fortune that never existed.

To-day this game has been exported to Europe by American confidence men working with European allies. Instead of fortunes left in escrow in European lands, they now peddle claims to the heart of New York City, large acreages of Harlem property, claims to fabulous California gold mines, and false titles to the Loop District of Chicago to credulous Europeans. They have even gone to the length of sending misguided families to this country in quest of their nonexistent billions, only to have them turned back at Ellis Island. One such case figured in the newspapers not long ago.

THE most persistently practiced of all the ancient games is the wire tap. This swindle originated in the plain tapping of wires to get the results of horse races in advance of the pool rooms, thus making it possible to place sure-thing bets at the last minute. The keepers of pool rooms soon beat this cheat, with the result that its originators and others turned the thing into a confidence game by hooking it up with simple people and a false pretense. The sucker was made to believe that the wire had been tapped. Believing that he had the result of a race, he rushed to the fake pool room conducted by his con men friends, bet a large sum on the supposed winner—and lost!

Well, the wire tap is very much alive to-day. It has simply been outfitted with a new regalia. Two of the most arresting reappearances of the swindle were noted at Long Branch, New Jersey, and at Denver, Colorado. At the former resort, during the summer season of 1922, well-known confidence men operated a combination brokerage office and

pool room, where the wire game was adapted to the stock market for those who cared nothing for the turf, or continued along the old lines for such simpletons as must wager their money on the ponies. At Denver a similar method was used, but the organization proved to be the greatest that has existed since the day of the Gondroffs and their contemporaries. One Lou Blonger, an aged politician and fixer, was sent to State's prison, with more than a score of his assistants. It is said several millions were taken from victims before the thing was stopped.

From the estimates of total takings which begin this article and some of the figures I have lightly mentioned since, it must be apparent that even the lesser con men are among the most opulent of thieves.

For this reason, and because of the comparative gentility and safety of confidence work, every thief in the underworld, who possesses the least cleverness or imagination, aspires to become a con man. Thus our fraudulent gentry stand at the top of their kind. They are the real lords of crookdom—as the bank robbers used to be.

Last summer Mr. Isidor Kooch, a dry-goods merchant of Wisconsin, started for Europe to enjoy himself. On the boat he soon glimpsed a very attractive young woman. She ignored him, but seemed, nevertheless, to cross his path much too often. And the inevitable happened. Mr. Kooch and Miss Laverne met without formalities. Miss Laverne soon introduced Mr. Kooch to Mr. van Bunk, a young confidence man masquerading as the scion of a New York family of the Four Hundred. Mr. Kooch, who had read about such persons in the papers, was quite beside himself with tickled vanity. He

wrote enthusiastic letters home "to knock his friends and relatives dead."

Three days out, Mr. van Bunk called the attention of Mr. Kooch to a morose and opulent-looking man who seemed to avoid every one. This, Mr. Kooch was informed, was the famous Bill Blake, the richest and most successful race-track plunger in the world. Van Bunk permitted himself the observation that a man who could win Blake's confidence was a made man. How? Well, that was Blake's secret. Evidently, however, the plunger was able to fix the races any way he wanted. Sure! He had stableboys and jockeys and owners all in his pay.

The palms of Mr. Kooch fairly wrinkled with itching. He slept ill. He was calculating. Presently he suggested that Miss Lavrene might be used to approach the formidable Blake. The lady was enlisted and soon managed the trick. She introduced Van Bunk and Kooch. Blake was pleasant enough, as long as one did not try to get confidential. But

Kooch was not to be put off. His greed was such that he determined to beard the plunger in his den and demand a chance to play the horses "right."

Blake threw the infatuated merchant out of his stateroom. Later in the day he suffered a change of heart, sought the bruised dry-goods seller, apologized for his rudeness, offered his hand, and started to go. Kooch refused to let such an opportunity slip. Once more he quite frankly demanded a chance to risk some money with the great Blake.

That evening the boat reached England. On the next day but one, Mr. Blake introduced Mr. Kooch and Mr. van Bunk into a club where bets might be laid on the Newmarket races. Kooch made himself deeply at home. Three days later the expected tip came from the race course. Blake, Van Bunk, and Kooch all plunged heavily. Something happened; the wrong horse won. Kooch was out twenty-seven thousand dollars. The wire game had got him. Blake owned the club, to be sure.

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### HIDES DEADLY POISON IN BUTTON

**T**HAT the British police are thorough was evidenced by the fact that in the search for Samuel Furnace, British murderer, the men from Scotland Yard stopped an express train between Southend and London and searched every compartment thoroughly for their man.

The Yard knew that their prey was exceedingly clever at disguises, and the officers, finding the holster of Furnace's pistol near Romford, issued an appeal to the inhabitants to be on constant watch for any person seemingly wearing a disguise.

Furnace was later apprehended and imprisoned, but proved himself cleverer in the end than the police, for, though they had searched him before locking him in his cell, he had sufficient deadly poison concealed in one of his coat buttons to take his own life. He had hidden it there so that he might cheat the hangman in the eventuality of his arrest. British justice is swift and sure. Furnace knew that once captured, his life was forfeited, so he was prepared.

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# LOCKED INTO DANGER

By DAHLIA GRAHAM

WHEN the eastbound flyer roared through the station at Battle Creek at over sixty to the hour, the lights in the Pullmans were dimmed, and the hooded, rear end of the last car was a blank of obscurity. The blackness beneath the rounded roof was made all the denser and more sharply defined as a space void of all sign of human presence, by the splendor and brilliancy of the night. The moon presided in serene beauty over a world of silver and velvety black. Yet, there was no one on the train to see how well the friend of lovers and poets had woven her spell of enchantment. In the Pullmans the curtains were tightly drawn. In the day coaches, uneasy travelers sprawled and snored. All aboard were normally human and commonplace until—Clem Driscoll became the pawn of his own will.

Barefooted, and clad only in his pajamas, he suddenly appeared at the rear end of the train. He came quietly, yet with no undue show of stealth. A white, lonely figure, he stood staring wide-eyed and with expressionless features. He heard, he saw; yet his memory would register no sound or scene. He was the plaything of his truant will power. His body obeyed the bidding of some obscure, controlling force; his

mind was clamped to obsessing, secret thoughts. He moved as one awake and conscious of his actions, but he was asleep; sound asleep.

Clem Driscoll had done something that in his waking moments he was oddly sure would never be found out; never be traced to him. He was on that train because he was bent on making his security and immunity from punishment all the more certain. He had made his get-away; but what he had not realized was the fact that a criminal's get-away is never completed. Not in this life.

In the light of day, when he was in full possession of all his senses, when his pride in his cleverness buoyed him to implicit belief in himself and the wisdom of all his actions, Clem suffered no pangs of fear, no mistrust of his plans. Now—well, sometimes the subconscious brain works more directly than is suspected. It does not perhaps guide better, but it perceives the simple truth and urges action regardless of consequences. The truth was Clem Driscoll had not finished his get-away. He had forced himself to believe that he had; but now, in this sleep, the sense that he controlled to dormant helplessness while awake, had broken loose. The dominant thought in his sleeping brain was—get-away! At this point the controlling impulse stopped

short. He did not reason. He could not. His faculty of analysis was dead. There was just the one determination, and all of his motor nerves were keyed to the fulfillment of that one objective.

"Get-away—get-away!"

The phrase was a command; a summons. There was only one method to get away; only one means of getting off the train. This is why Clem had slipped out of his berth and was now, with calm and deliberate action, hoisting himself over the rail that guarded the observation platform. Beneath him spun the whirring speeding wheels. The rushing, cold night wind tore at his flapping clothes. The roadbed, fanged with a blurred, gray ribbon that was saw-toothed rock, was flying away into the endless distance. Once that he loosed his hold on the rail, velocity would rend him to an inert body. From that crash there would be no awakening.

For some inexplicable reason the sleep-snared man did not fling himself bodily off the car. His movements were unmarked by any of the flurry and maddened, nervous energy of the conscious suicide. He lowered himself until he was in a sitting position on the iron-bound floor level of the platform. His wide-open, staring eyes passed over the door as he turned sideways. He had no knowledge that that door was now open—that the hunched bulk looming against the inner lights was the figure of a porter whose own black eyes were bulging and rimmed with circles of white.

Clem did not hear the gasping grunt of horror that came from the colored man as he freed himself from his palsy and launched himself at the rail. He did not even feel the grip of the big hands that reached down and grabbed him in a viselike

grip by arm and wrist and heaved him, tore him from his get-away which would have meant death.

**W**HEN the veil of sleep parted from Clem's numbed senses he was in mid-air.

He screamed shrilly, struggling so fiercely that the gigantic porter was hard put to it to hold him. Then, as his feet touched the platform, he became suddenly quiet.

"It's all right," he said calmly as he looked at the quivering black face of the man who had saved him. "What was I doing? Why did you lift me off my feet?"

"Why—why did I lift you off your feet?" gasped the porter. "Ain't you crazy? I thought you was off your haid. That's why I hauled you up."

"But what was I doing?"

"Is you plumb crazy or is I? You was—you was sitting out there wid your feet hanging over that track. You was—dog-gone it, you know what you was going to do, don't you?"

Clem Driscoll shook his head, but there was something very like fear in his puzzled gaze as he glanced over the rail.

"I—I didn't know anything about it," he muttered. "I was asleep. I've done that fool trick of walking around once or twice since I was a kid, but I made sure the habit had left me. I guess you saved my life, all right."

"Don't make no guess at it, mister," suggested the porter. "You jes' go back to your berth and thank Heaven you ain't smudged out all over that there track."

Clem shivered as he entered the car.

"We'll talk the matter over in the morning, and until you see me you may as well keep your mouth shut."

"I ain't saying a single word," retorted the porter. "I'd get called down for letting you slip by, an' 'sides that, I ain't anxious to be called a liar. I seed you, I yanked you back onto that there solid platform, but others ain't, and I know what folks'll believe and what they won't."

Clem Driscoll went back to his berth, but he neither prayed nor slept. He was too shaken, too scared to attempt the first or the last. Out on the rear end of the car his calm had been mostly the result of stupor and failure to completely realize what he had escaped. Now, the reaction was setting in, and he was a badly rattled man. Long before the train drew into the terminal he was dressed and anxiously eager to leave the train.

"Whatever possessed me to go wandering out there?" he asked himself again and again. "It's not as if I had any real reason for getting nervous or upset. I ain't left a clew. Not a trace of one. Yet, there I go and do a thing as fool crazy as I might be likely to do if Blake himself were on my trail. He might get me going; spoil my nerve. As it is, he ain't even got the ghost of an idea that I had anything to do with that—that little business. The last time I pulled that sleepwalking stunt was when I got away with that old woman's bunch of dough. I was hard pushed then. The cops and the dicks were buzzing after me like a lotta hungry bees after a mess of sirup. Now—I ain't got a thing to worry me. Got everything sewed up so tight nothing can slip. Not a thing. Yet, after all these years, and me with a roll it'll take some time to spend, I go and nearly step off this darn train as if I had to hurry over my get-away. I'll give it up."

Such was Clem's self-expressed resolve, but he did not keep to it. The occurrence had set all his nerves on edge. All his plans had been carefully laid. He had committed his long-premeditated crime. He was a cold-blooded, calculating murderer. The money that he had obtained as the price of his callous deed was packed in the suitcase that he had brought with him from Chicago. He was sure that he had left no loophole for suspicion. His alibi, his get-away, all had been prepared for. Since he had done this murder he had suffered no twinge of conscience, lost not a moment of sleep. What, then, had caused him to revert to a kiddish and dangerous habit?

WHEN he left the station at New York, Clem was still probing for the answer to his self-question. His thoughts ran in gloomy channels. He was full of misgivings. He had planned a day of enjoyment in town before taking the night boat for Albany, where he was to be a guest for a week or two of a trusted pal. But instead of visiting around and spending some of the wealth that his fingers itched to disperse, Clem went straight to a hotel. He hired a room and stayed in it until late afternoon. Did he sleep? He did not. He made no attempt whatever to make up for his lost rest. That was one of the things that he dared not do. He was as liable to go marching out of his room in the broad daylight as he was at night. Clem stayed in his room because he knew that this was the one problem that he could not shelve. He might, in time, forget all about trying to fathom the reason for his sleepwalking act on the train, but he could not neglect the finding of some way to counteract the dan-

ger that lay before him in the future. Sooner or later he would have to sleep. There was no escape from that. A man could go without food for days—for weeks. The period of time that he could go without sleep was measured by a few hours. The more he worried the more certain did Clem become that his case was becoming worse than ever. The more upset his mind was the more positive was his danger. He might close his eyes and awaken to find himself lying on the sidewalk. He might throw himself into the river. He might hide his money, or walk into the arms of the police and confess. There was no end to the dangerous, crazy deeds he might commit. How could he close his eyes and know for certain that he would not leave his bed until he awoke? Clem found the answer only after hours of stewing and fretting. He hurried out of the hotel, and down on Sixth Avenue he found a store where he made the most peculiar purchase a man of his kind has ever made. At the same store he bought an automatic and a box of cartridges. With these purchases in his pockets he returned to his hotel and treated himself to the best dinner he could order without exciting too much attention.

Over an after-dinner cigar he lolled luxuriously in the most comfortable chair in the smoking room and settled to his entire satisfaction all the details that should guard him during his coming journey on the night boat to Albany. These matters attended to, Clem went around town, bought rather more than a moderate amount of illegal drinks, and finally reached his boat mightily pleased with himself and his wonderful cuteness in solving the sleep question. He was sure his troubles were over.

HE had a stateroom to himself. It was all that could be desired in the way of comfort, but, after a brief look around, Clem sought the steward and expressed dissatisfaction. A liberal tip made plausible his objections, and he was given the choice of three other staterooms. The one he selected was not quite so well furnished, but, as he was paid to please, the steward made no comment. Clem's request for a pitcher of ice water was responded to with a wink of understanding.

"The stuff you get nowadays does give one a thirst in the night," said the steward, but he was as far from getting anywhere near the truth of the reason why his generous patron wanted the pitcher of ice water as he was in putting down his choice of a stateroom to the whim of an intoxicated man.

Clem Driscoll was not exactly sober, but he was far from being so far under the influence of liquor that he did not know what he was doing.

The stateroom he selected had a white enameled pillar in it that supported the deck. It was no ornament, and it was placed so that it interfered a trifle with easy access to the bunk. But this inconvenience did not bother Clem. It was precisely by reason of that slender steel pillar that he had chosen the stateroom.

"Now," he murmured as he loosened his collar, "I'll be able to sleep in peace and comfort. It takes me to get hold of the remedy for trouble."

When he had removed his vest Clem shifted his attention to other affairs. First of all he took a towel from the rack, soaked it in water and laid it on the floor alongside the bunk. Then he placed the pitcher on the towel and stretched himself

full length on the bunk. When he was satisfied that he could easily reach the pitcher from where he lay, he held out his left arm and juggled with a chair until he found he could lie in a comfortable position with his arm supported on the seat of the chair and his wrist within an inch or so of the post.

"Dandy," he muttered, and, getting up, opened his bag. For ten minutes he indulged in the pleasure of fingering his wads of booty. In easily negotiable currency, he had there, over twenty thousand dollars. He had shed blood to get it. He was a murderer, but he never gave that side of the question the least thought. Those bank notes only made him think of the good times that were in store for him.

"Some haul. Some get-away," he muttered gleefully. "That cocksure dick, Blake, would give both his ears to see me now. He's a back number. I'm going on and—I ain't doing no sleepwalking this night—or—ever again. I've got the remedy. It's a triple-sure cert. If I put foot on that wet towel I'm 'most bound to wake up. If I put a hand in that jug, it's a dead-sure thing that I'll come to the wide-awake with a yelp. Clem Driscoll ain't going on no prowling this night or any other night."

Placing the bank notes and his automatic under the pillow, Clem leisurely completed his undressing. The last thing he did before getting into his bunk was to take from his coat pocket his particular and pet purchase. This it was that had solved his problem.

"Good and strong. Tempered steel," he muttered as he held up the thing that was to insure him a night of slumber in safety. Then—he grinned. It was strange that he should dare to jest. The thing he held was—a pair of handcuffs! And

—there was nothing cheap or shoddy about them. Clem tested the snap of the spring and tried out the key.

"As good as they come," he muttered in great content, and, settling himself on his bunk, he handcuffed his left wrist to the pillar, dropped the key into the pitcher of water, and switched off the light.

**I**N less than three minutes he was sound asleep. Not once did he stir all night. It is probable that he would have slept for hours longer had not a hawser jangled against his porthole as the boat was warped to her mooring.

The sudden noise caused Clem to sit up, startled.

"Already," he muttered, and without waiting to unlock his imprisoned wrist he twisted round and, kneeling on his bunk, peered out of the window. The first thing he saw was what he sought to find. True to the criminal code of standing by a pal when he was needed, the man Clem had come to meet was there waiting for him. Clem chuckled, and, yawning luxuriously, let his gaze travel idly over the small group of people that had come to meet expected friends.

While he gazed and blinked away the sleepiness from his eyes, Clem began to chuckle over the success of his precautions against straying from his bunk and his cabin. Midway in one of his throaty gurgles his jaw dropped. His mouth gaped open stupidly. He knelt, staring, unable to believe the evidence of his own eyes. Was it possible that that figure standing with feet planted firmly apart, was—was—— Not daring to form even the name to himself, Clem pressed his blanched face nearer to the glass. Doubt speedily became certainty.

"Blake!" he gasped out hoarsely

and flung himself back in an involuntary reaction to alarm. The wrist, that up to now he had almost been unconscious of was still handcuffed, was twisted in a severe wrench, and to save himself from injury he shuffled backward off the bunk. One foot struck the side of the pitcher. It slid, rolled from the impact of his foot, and when he turned, a sudden panic seized him. He leaped blindly for the pitcher. He sprawled headlong. His finger tips touched the ice-cold, glassy surface. The pitcher rolled a little farther away. Then the boat gave a lurch and a bump. That completed the disaster. Six feet beyond the clawing fingers of Clem's right hand the pitcher struck the side of the wall. It would roll no more. In the broken fragments of china the frantic man saw the key. In the next three minutes he put in all the agony that could be compassed into a futile soul-rending struggle. By every conceivable means he tried to reach that key. He tried force; he tried patience; he did everything that he could think of. He even tried to wrench the pillar from its place twist floor and ceiling. Neither by strength of muscles nor strategy could he break free from the manacles that he had put on to safeguard his get-away. A cold perspiration of terror poured down his drawn, stricken face and trickled over his mumbling lips.

"I'll never make it—I'll never

make it! That cursed dick'll come in and get me. I won't stand a chance. I——"

Then he thought of the automatic. There was just a chance, a bare chance that he might shatter the lock of the handcuffs. He might then escape.

Reckless whether the report of the automatic would be heard, Clem fired once—twice—thrice. At the third shot a bullet plowed through his wrist, but the handcuffs remained intact. At that he gave up. He crumpled to the ground, sobbing with pain and fear. It was no use going any further. He was done. Finished. Blake would come in and then—and then—prison—sentence—and the death chair.

Clem reached for the automatic. Clutching it, he fired one more shot and made—his get-away.

The steward knocked at the door. He hammered for admission. Then, finding that he could get no answer, he summoned help and the door was forced. They found a dead man and much material for mystery.

It was Clem Driscoll's pal who supplied the solution to it all.

"It was the sight of Blake that must have sent him off his head," he mused. "Clem must have seen him waiting alongside of me and thought that Blake had come to take him in. 'Stead of that—the old dick was there to meet his sister. He had no idea that Clem was wanted."

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### DELINQUENT GIRLS YOUNGER

**A**CCORDING to Miss Caroline de Ford Penniman, girls sent to correctional institutions to-day average two years younger than they did two years ago. Then the age was fifteen, now it is thirteen.

Most of the mental disturbances peculiar to delinquent girls are directly traceable to nervous upsets and shocks. In older women, alcohol and drugs are the primary contributory force.

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# MR. CLACKWORTHY PAYS HIS INCOME TAX

By CHRISTOPHER B. BOOTH

**F**OR the past eight months Mr. Amos Clackworthy, the master confidence man, had been a strictly law-abiding citizen, and, since his income was derived solely from those shrewd schemes which had enabled him to poach so successfully upon the rich preserves of unwary bank balances, his earnings had been distressingly nil. Having accustomed himself to a life of comparative opulence, he found it difficult, if not impossible, to curb his expenditures, and accordingly, the state of his finances was rapidly becoming a matter of apprehensive concern.

Mr. Clackworthy had not voluntarily suspended operations, nor was his quest of the easy and unethical dollar in any wise less persistent; but, with equal persistency, his best-laid plans—to quote Burns, one of his favorite poets—had “gang aft a-gley.” Circumstances had combined against him, and that indefinite thing we call “luck” had jilted him cruelly and repeatedly.

The Early Bird, Mr. Clackworthy's slangy coplotter and chief assistant, who had a streak of superstition in him, blamed everything on

the fact that the master confidence man, in accepting the change from a twenty-dollar bill, had carelessly accepted five twos. A two-dollar bill, according to the Early Bird, was the symbol of evil fortune; he would have considered it safer to carry a rattlesnake in his pocket.

There is nothing that begets confidence so quickly or so surely as a show of ready money in generous quantities; a big factor in his success as a confidence man had been his working capital, the wherewithal to impress prospective victims of his financial solidity. The situation was becoming serious; his supply of cash had already been exhausted, and only that morning it had been necessary for him to make a last and final dip into the safety-deposit box, where there had reposed certain bonds. These he had converted into money with which to rehabilitate the checking account at his bank in the Loop.

Returning from the bank to his Sheridan Road apartment, Mr. Clackworthy paused at the entrance of his luxurious living room, bewildered by the disorder and confusion. Sheets of paper were scattered over the floor, and the Early Bird, seated

at the rosewood table, was a picture of despair. His collar was torn loose from its moorings, his hair, usually parted precisely in the center, was rumpled wildly.

At the moment of Mr. Clackworthy's entrance, the Early Bird, releasing a torrent of harmless, original profanities, grabbed up a handful of papers covered with a jumble of penciled figures and tossed them to the four corners of the room.

"Yah!" he shouted, as he leaped to his feet. "I'd rather go to jail!"

"My dear James!" exclaimed Mr. Clackworthy, aghast. "What's come over you? One would think you'd gone out of your mind."

"And that ain't a lot from bein' the plain, positive, sad, an' actual truth, boss! The old bean's headed for the silly house, reason is totterin' from its throne—which is a high-brow line that I heard you pull once. I stopped myself just in time." He staggered back into the chair, pressing his trembling hands to the sides of his head.

Mr. Clackworthy was not sure whether he should be amused or not. Open at the table was a dictionary; he found it impossible to imagine what the Early Bird had been up to.

"Speak up, man!" he commanded. "What's the occasion of all this excitement? Why have you littered up the floor of the living room with all these papers? Oh, confound you, James, you've spilled the inkwell on that seven-hundred-dollar Chinese rug."

"I know now why's there's anarchists," mumbled the Early Bird; "why guys go cuckoo an' toss bombs at congressmen an' sit up nights tryin' to figure out ways of gettin' kill-'em-slow-an'-painful drops into some senator's soup. Of course, boss, it's a pretty good government, an' I

ain't sayin' the government's to blame, but——"

"James, you are crazy," Mr. Clackworthy said flatly.

"Not half so loony, boss, as the bozo that cooked up the mess. Say! Listen to this"—he reached to the table, grabbed up a sheet of paper with an angry gesture, and began to read aloud: "'If desired, the net gain from the sale or exchange of capital assets acquired and held by you for profit or investment for more than two years, may be computed separately in Schedule D, instead of Schedule C, and a tax of 12½ per cent paid on the income from this source in lieu of the regular normal tax and surtax, provided that the total tax, Item 31, shall not——'" He stopped reading.

Mr. Clackworthy threw back his head and laughed.

"So that's it?" he chuckled. "You've been making out your income tax return, eh?"

"Whatcha mean, 'makin' it out?" grunted the Early Bird. "A guy's gotta be a graduate from three universities an' have the gift of second sight to be jerry to that stuff. I been consultin' your old pal, Webster, tryin' to trim some of them five an' six-layer words down to my size, but——"

"Oh, come, James," interrupted Mr. Clackworthy; "there's no sense working yourself into this state. All you have to do is make a trip down to the Federal Building and any one connected with the internal revenue collector's office will fill it out for you, free of charge. Besides which, my excited friend, you've got the wrong blank; your personal income hasn't exceeded five thousand dollars in the past twelve months, as far as I know."

"I'll say it ain't," grumbled the Early Bird. "Accordin' to my fig-

gers, the government owes me this year, nineteen bucks comin' my way, howsoever I don't find no printed form for sendin' Uncle Samuel a 'Please remit.' Seems to me this tax thing oughter work both ways." He sighed heavily. "I reckon it ain't gonna take no three-ton truck to haul back the kale when Uncle Sam trots down to the bank to cash your check, huh?"

Mr. Clackworthy smiled feebly.

"I am afraid, James," he answered, "that if I paid my tax this year in nickels, dimes, and quarters, the sum total of it wouldn't bulge a man's pocket. I hadn't thought much about the income tax, as a matter of fact; there's plenty of time. The returns aren't due until the fifteenth of March, and that's three weeks off."

"I was tryin' to be patriotic," said the Early Bird; "they're askin' us to cough up early this year." He sighed again. "The jinx sure seems to be keepin' us steady company," he added mournfully. "Didn't I tell you to lay off them two-case notes? Didn't I warn you that it was bad luck to——"

"James," ordered Mr. Clackworthy, "I don't want to hear any more of that superstitious nonsense."

"Well, y' gotta admit——"

"I admit nothing so silly!" exclaimed the other with dignity. "Clean up this mess, and then we'll have a drink; if we were as well fixed at the bank as we are in our private cellar, I would be in a more cheerful state of mind."

The Early Bird, starting to pick up the scattered papers, looked apprehensive.

"What's the low-down on the bank roll, boss?" he demanded anxiously.

"Nine thousand five hundred," answered the master confidence man.

"An' with Ol' Man Hoodoo callin'

every play we make! There's somethin' gotta be done; we gotta get the mitts onto some dough—quick."

"Admitted," agreed Mr. Clackworthy; "I have had in mind a certain Mr. Enos Skagway, but the bait with which to conceal our hook—I don't seem to be able to settle on just the proper twist."

"Who is this Skagway guy?" demanded the Early Bird without any particular enthusiasm. Mr. Clackworthy did not answer; frowning meditatively, he had stepped to the window which looked down upon Sheridan Road, his long, slim, fingers gently stroking his perfectly barbered Vandyke. Absently he watched a gang of street cleaners clearing off the previous night's snow.

Winter, raging into the city from across the open sweep of Lake Michigan, was dying a stubborn death. The sky was bleakly gray with the threat of more snow, and the weather man was pessimistic of early spring.

Into Mr. Clackworthy's eyes there came the gleam of dawning inspiration, and something like his normally expansive smile appeared. As he turned away from the window, the Early Bird was quick to see the transformation.

"Y'got a idea buzzin' around in the old bean, ain'tcha?" he demanded eagerly.

"Thanks to you, my dear James, I have," nodded the master confidence man. "You have given me an idea—a splendid idea. It's a winner; Mr. Skagway is hooked right now. I know it!"

"Me—slipped you an idea?" gasped the Early Bird. "Aw, you're kiddin' me. I ain't let out a chirp, and you know it."

Mr. Clackworthy chuckled.

"The credit belongs to you just the same," he said. "Pack our bags,

James, for we're getting the train for Keysville."

"That's one of the burgs down in the southern part of the State, ain't it?"

"It is; the chief industry is coal mining."

"Whatcha goin' to do, boss?"

Mr. Clackworthy laughed teasingly.

"Well, James," he answered, "one of the important things that I shall do in Keysville is to pay my income tax."

And with this cryptic explanation the Early Bird had to be satisfied.

**M**R. CLACKWORTHY and the Early Bird were on the train bound for Keysville, and the latter, his thin shoulders hunched forward, a cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth, was trying to figure out what connection there could possibly be between the master confidence man's income tax and the trimming of Mr. Skagway. Mr. Clackworthy smilingly declined to explain; he loved his dramatic dénouement with all the zeal of a theatrical director.

"Seems like this income tax thing is worryin' you all of a sudden, boss," he muttered complainingly. "How much has Uncle Sam gotcha on the hip for this year?"

The master confidence man did a swift mental calculation.

"Oh, I'd say roughly that six hundred dollars is a little more than the tax on my net earnings. It's been a lean year for us, James."

"Slim pickin's is right, boss. Say, what's the low-down on this Skagway gink, anyhow?"

"Mr. Skagway," answered Mr. Clackworthy, "is sometimes referred to as a captain of industry. However, in Keysville he's not merely a captain, but a major general. He's

a baby octopus, wrapping his greedy tentacles about almost anything in his home town that guarantees a profit.

"He is fifty-eight years old, a bachelor, and close to a millionaire. The only thing he loves better than a dollar is two dollars. He is president of the Skagway Trust Company, president of the Keysville Mercantile Company, president of a coal mining company, and vice president of another, stockholder in two others, an active, but not contributing, church member, and——"

"I gotcha, boss," broke in the Early Bird; "with that introduction I feel well enough acquainted with that goof to call 'im by his first name. How'dja get a line on his nibs?"

"That entails quite a story, James, but I shall make it brief. This story explains my eagerness to get at the business of reducing Mr. Skagway's surplus assets. You shall judge for yourself whether or not he deserves a good trimming—the stiffest that we can give him.

"Until something like two years ago the best-paying mine in the Keysville field was the Big Mogul, a wonderful grade of coal that commanded a higher price than the ordinary grades. Due to the formation of the vein, operating expenses were quite low, and, as a result, the profits were large. One of the big stockholders in the Big Mogul Company was Mr. Skagway, and——"

"Whatcha mean—was?" interrupted the Early Bird. "Why wouldn't a greedy guy like him freeze onto a good thing like that?"

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Clackworthy. "Thereby hangs the tale. As you may know, one of the big hazards in coal mining is fire damp, the spontaneous explosion of gases. There is no bitter without the sweet;

the Big Mogul was a perfect mine except for the presence of fire damp. Several times there were serious explosions, and the mine caught fire. These fires, as they occurred, were walled off, and the mining continued. There's no extinguishing them; in some of the old mines the coal has been burning for many years, underground furnaces with the fuel to keep them going for a century or more.

"The engineers of the Big Mogul knew that the mine was doomed, that it must be closed down, and the shafts sealed. Being a stockholder, Mr. Skagway, of course, had advance information of the true facts. He knew that stock in Keysville's best-paying coal mine was about to become absolutely worthless. It doesn't take much imagination to surmise what happened; Mr. Skagway——"

"Went fishin' for suckers an' got out while the gettin' was good, huh?" finished the Early Bird.

"Precisely, James," nodded the master confidence man. "And his victim was a woman who looked to his advice and trusted his judgment—the most despicable form of dishonesty, in my opinion.

"There resided in Keysville a certain Mrs. Holloway, whose husband had been a good money-maker, but also a good spender. Holloway died, leaving no estate except life insurance policies for fifty thousand dollars. The widow sought Mr. Skagway's advice, as banker and family friend. She wanted to know the best and soundest investment for her money. Skagway craftily pointed out that six per cent on fifty thousand dollars amounted to only three thousand a year, and, having lived in fine style, the bereaved woman had been accustomed to spend that much for her clothes

alone. After a number of conferences Mr. Skagway, pretending that he could use the money to better advantage in other investments, agreed to sell Mrs. Holloway his stock in the Big Mogul mine. He told her that, if the mine continued its previous earnings, she would get between twelve and fifteen per cent on her fifty thousand dollars."

"She didn't have sense enough to be leery of it, huh?" snorted the Early Bird.

"Mrs. Holloway sank her last dollar in Big Mogul stock, and then the mine closed down, just as Skagway knew that it would. She couldn't sell her stock certificates for the price of a hair net. There was no legal redress, no way for her to prove fraud, and the poor lady is now living in Chicago, eking out an existence as a dressmaker."

"Where'dja get wise to all that stuff, boss?"

"Quite by accident; she happened to do some sewing for Mrs. Bascom, the wife of our dear friend and frequent assistant. She told Mrs. Bascom the whole story, and Mrs. Bascom begged me to put Enos Skagway's name at the head of my list. That, James, explains why we are on our way to Keysville."

"Yeah, but it don't explain that stuff you was pullin' about comin' down here to pay your income tax. Ain'tcha goin' to play the record for me—ain'tcha gonna let me in on the know?"

Mr. Clackworthy chuckled.

"In the past, James, I have always possessed ample funds to make a big flash; I have been able to talk big money and to back up that talk with a check that was worth a hundred cents on the dollar. At present the cash is low; in these days of opulence a man with less than ten thousand dollars is a mere beggar. Any

common bootlegger can make a better showing than that. In successfully executing this scheme I must be a man of large substance."

"Huh!" grunted the Early Bird, impatient that he was not able to see through the scheme. "If this Skagway guy gets a peek at your income-tax return he'll see sad figures what'll melt his icy heart, an' he'll dig down for a five-spot to relieve your distress an' sufferin'."

But Mr. Clackworthy only indulged himself in a confident laugh and lighted another of his forty-cent perfectos.

UPON reaching Keysville the master confidence man put up at the best hotel—in which enterprise, incidentally, the prospective victim was a large investor—and immediately attracted much attention by demanding a suite of two bedrooms, two baths, and a sitting room. More than that, Mr. Clackworthy looked like the sort of man who was accustomed to such luxury.

He had arrived in the coal-mining town late in the afternoon, and the next morning he journeyed the length of three blocks to the Skagway Trust Company, the Early Bird accompanying him, where he deposited in cash the modest and unexciting sum of two thousand dollars; this amount drawn from his Chicago bank just before his departure from that city, left his home bank balance seven thousand five hundred dollars.

In the bank, also, he had his first glimpse of Mr. Skagway, whose desk stood on a sort of dais—like a king on his throne. Although there was a private office immediately behind him for use when the occasion arose, there was a strong streak of vanity in the man. He liked to feel people staring at his stern, harsh countenance; he even liked the stares of

those who hated him for his hard and grasping nature.

Mr. Skagway was a man of small stature, but, as he reminded himself frequently, so was Napoleon; and he liked to strut and pose for the eyes of the multitude in true "little corporal" fashion.

There was no intention on Mr. Clackworthy's part of transacting any immediate business with the local financier. The time was not yet ripe, and he proposed that Mr. Skagway should approach him, for at no time did he want the banker to feel that he was being sought after. One look was enough to tell him that Mr. Skagway was of an instinctively suspicious nature and would draw back within his shell of cold, austere reserve at the first effort by a stranger to cultivate an acquaintance.

Keysville was a town of some fifteen thousand, not large enough for a man of Mr. Amos Clackworthy's dignified and imposing presence to be ignored, and he further attracted attention by reason of the fact that he seemed, during the first three days of his stay, to have no ostensible business in Keysville. In fact this inactivity moved the Early Bird to protest.

"Honest, boss," he wailed, "we gotta get some action—an' get it quick. If you was gonna take a vacation, why'dja pick out a punk burg like this?"

"I am now engaged in advertising," explained Mr. Clackworthy.

"Advertisin' what?"

"Myself. Keysville is beginning to wonder why I'm here."

"That's nothin'," snorted the Early Bird glumly; "I'm beginnin' to wonder the same thing, m'self."

"People are always curious concerning those they can't understand. I can tell by the way they look after

us that we've succeeded in whetting the local curiosity. We are becoming a mystery."

So far, however, one resident of Keysville apparently cared not a tinker's hurrah who they were, why they had come, or how long they stayed. This was Mr. Skagway who, as it happened, lived at the hotel; they had passed him several times in the lobby or in the dining room, but not the slightest flicker of interest lighted the cold, gray eyes of the capitalist.

**B**EFORE leaving Chicago Mr. Clackworthy had left certain instructions with George Bascom and George's pretty wife. In accordance with these instructions the fourth day brought a deluge of telegrams, a few of which Mr. Clackworthy answered. But still no intimation of his business in the coal-mining town. He seemed, also, to have forgotten all about making out his income-tax return.

Practically a week had passed before he did anything, and then he merely walked into the office of a certain Mr. Hooperwaite, a consulting and practicing mining engineer. If, during his five days in Keysville, Mr. Clackworthy had talked little, he had listened well, his ears drinking in every possible scrap of gossip about anything and anybody in town, sifting from out of this useless lot of haphazard information an occasional grain of value. Thus he had learned that Mr. Hooperwaite, the engineer, was "keeping company" with Miss Prudence Skagway, the banker's niece and only living relative, and that Mr. Skagway approved of Mr. Hooperwaite about as much as he ever approved of any one.

"I am looking both for some general and technical information," Mr. Clackworthy announced after intro-

ducing himself. "I understand you are familiar with the conditions at the Big Mogul mine. If a consulting fee of five hundred dollars—I will take only a few minutes of your time—is satisfactory——"

It was quite satisfactory, and Mr. Hooperwaite placed his information at the master confidence man's disposal, being exceedingly curious to know the object of this consultation.

"Of course you understand, Mr. Clackworthy, that the Big Mogul is closed; the mine is sealed. Too bad! It was a wonderful property; a twelve-foot vein of coal, with practically only a handful of shale to the ton."

"Yes," nodded Mr. Clackworthy, "I was aware of that—which is precisely the reason I am interested. If all of the conditions are as I understand them, I shall acquire control of—you understand, Mr. Hooperwaite, that this is strictly confidential—the mine and resume operations."

Mr. Hooperwaite stared incredulously; this seemed on the face of it an insane statement for such a sane-looking man to make.

"There's a fire in the mine," he said. "It's not extinguishable."

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Clackworthy. "Is it now? That's the question, Mr. Hooperwaite—that's the question. There may be a surprise in store for you! Now we'll talk about the Big Mogul, if you please."

The engineer smiled with tolerant skepticism.

"You think it's possible to put out the fire in the mine?"

"I know it," Mr. Clackworthy answered positively, and he smiled shrewdly.

For the next hour Mr. Hooperwaite was busy answering questions,

drawing sections and cross sections, talking of elevations, tunnels, and hoists until he had exhausted himself, and Mr. Clackworthy knew quite as much about the Big Mogul as Mr. Hooperwaite did.

UPON the departure of the master confidence man, the mining engineer did exactly what he had counted on doing—he left his office and went across the street to the Skagway Trust Company.

"Good morning, Mr. Skagway," he said pleasantly, with a deferential, not to say almost humble, bow.

"Humph!" the banker grunted.

"Something odd happened to me this morning, Mr. Skagway," went on the engineer and aspirant to the hand of the banker's niece. "I wonder if you've noticed that we have a distinguished-looking stranger in town—that chap who's stopping at your hotel?"

Mr. Skagway looked annoyed.

"Do you think, young man, that all I've got to do is observe strangers who happen to come to Keysville?" he snapped.

"His name is Clackworthy," went on Hooperwaite, "and he's gathering information about the Big Mogul. He thinks he's got a way to kill off the fire and reopen the mine."

"Then he's a darn fool!" muttered the banker. "I hope you didn't come in here to waste a busy man's time with such nonsense?"

The engineer stroked his chin.

"It does sound like bunk," he admitted, "but this Mr. Clackworthy certainly does not impress me as being anybody's fool. Oh, I know that some of the best mining experts in the country have told us that there's no hope for the mine, but I thought perhaps you'd be interested. This Clackworthy's no piker, anyhow—

five hundred dollars consultation fee shows he means business." And he exhibited the check, drawn upon the Skagway Trust Company.

"I am not interested," grunted Mr. Skagway; "and if you've nothing more important to talk about, I am a busy man, sir—a very busy man."

And yet the local financier was human enough to possess a certain curiosity. Mr. Clackworthy had sown his seed shrewdly. That evening at dinner the master confidence man saw the banker, from a neighboring table, looking toward him with an inquiring scrutiny that had not been previously apparent. Even the Early Bird noticed it.

"Look, boss," he whispered; "the old boy is givin' us the once-over."

"So I see," nodded Mr. Clackworthy. "If I mistake not, he will very shortly seek to engage me in conversation. Things are beginning to come our way!"

This prophecy was fulfilled some twenty minutes later when the banker dropped into a chair—oh, quite casually, of course—within speaking distance of the master confidence man. Mr. Clackworthy puffed idly at an after-dinner cigar, leaving it to the other to make an opening. Mr. Skagway fidgeted for a moment and then took the plunge.

"It's—um—getting warmer," he said.

Mr. Clackworthy, staring absently past the local dignitary, aroused himself.

"I beg pardon," he murmured. "Were you addressing me?" His voice was cold, almost freezing.

"I said that it was—ah—that the weather—is—ah—" It disconcerted him immeasurably to be rebuffed in such a chilly fashion.

"Quite so," said Mr. Clackworthy, his tone sliding down to zero, just as Mr. Skagway himself had often cut

short those who had attempted to drum up a conversation with him. The banker, his face flushed angrily at this affront, leaped up from his chair and stalked toward the stairs. The Early Bird was appalled.

"Gee, boss," he complained; "what's the idea of handin' him the grand freeze when he was gettin' ready to warm up to you?"

Mr. Clackworthy chuckled.

"I've made him notice us, and I've made him mad enough to biff me in the eye," he answered softly. "I don't want him to like me, James; the old crook won't get a good night's sleep now until he's spiked my plans." He glanced at the calendar on the wall. "Let's be getting upstairs, James; to-morrow is the fifteenth—the last day for filing my income-tax return, and I want to juggle a few figures."

A LITTLE past noon the next day Mr. Clackworthy, wearing a distressed look on his face, strode into the Skagway Trust Company and approached the throne of Keysville's financial king. Mr. Skagway looked up with a stare of utmost dislike.

"Well?" he snapped, hoping fervently that the mysterious stranger had come to ask a favor.

"As a banker," said Mr. Clackworthy, "you have probably acquainted yourself with the intricacies of this mad-house concoction called Form 1040. I am credited with being a fairly intelligent business man, but this income-tax return is beyond my powers of understanding. I thought I might prevail upon you to iron out a couple of difficulties.

"I've been so pressed with other matters that I forgot all about the income tax, and to-day is the fifteenth, the last day of filing. My

attorney in Chicago had previously attended to this annoying detail, but I have just had his office on the long-distance telephone, and he's out of the city. No time for me to get to Chicago to-night, anyhow. Dash it all——" Here his voice broke off.

It was on the tip of Mr. Skagway's tongue that he was a bank president and couldn't be annoyed by any such petty business, but he checked himself, remembering that a man must bare his most intimate financial secrets in his statement to the government, and that chance, as he thought, had placed it in his hands to find out just who Mr. Clackworthy was.

"Come in," he said, motioning to the gate of the brass railing. "This is my busy day, but I shall spare the time to help you out of your difficulty."

Mr. Clackworthy entered the "holy of holies" and drew from his pocket a sheaf of papers and a small pocket ledger. Among the papers was the "work sheet" to be used in making the first rough draft of the tax return; from this Mr. Skagway was apprised that Mr. Amos Clackworthy lived in a very expensive section of Chicago, and that he was a "capitalist."

Without further ado they fell to work at the task in hand; it was straightway apparent to Mr. Skagway that he was in the presence of a man who could buy and sell him twice over—if, as the old saying has it, "figures can't lie."

"Interest on bank deposits, notes, mortgages, and corporation bonds, \$12,000; profit from sale of stock and bonds, \$22,000; dividends on stock of domestic corporations, \$19,000." And so on down the list.

Mr. Skagway was amazed. "Why, the man was a potential millionaire! Surely, he reasoned, a man of his

standing must know what he was about when he said that he could reopen the Big Mogul mine, as ridiculous as it seemed.

"It's discouraging for a man to make money," grumbled Mr. Clackworthy. He added a few other caustic remarks, produced his check book and wrote, payable to the Collector of Internal Revenue, a check which reduced his balance in the Chicago bank to exactly one thousand nine hundred and sixty dollars, the lowest it had been for a number of years.

Mr. Skagway witnessed his signature and offered one of the bank's envelopes. In the sudden largeness of his heart he even furnished the postage stamp.

"Just send it along with your bank's mail. if you don't mind," requested Mr. Clackworthy and offered the banker one of his forty-cent perfectos. His glum expression remained until he had left the bank; he seemed in a remarkably pleasant frame of mind for a man who, his own cash almost at the vanishing point, had made the government a present of five thousand four hundred dollars more than it was entitled to.

TWO days later Mr. John Skipworth, one of the coal operators of the Keysville field, dropped into the bank for advice. He was one of the Big Mogul stockholders who had been caught holding the bag.

"Say, Skagway," he demanded, "what's in the wind? Are you in on this scheme to get hold of Big Mogul stock?"

"What's that?"

"This morning, Skagway, a fellow named Clackworthy came to me and offered me five hundred dollars for a fourteen-day option on my block

of Big Mogul stock. Said he was willing to buy at par if he could get control of the company. Of course when the mine closed down, it was selling at almost one hundred and sixty dollars a share, but it ain't worth a plugged dime, as things stand. It's got me thinking."

The banker's frown showed that it had him thinking, too; Mr. Clackworthy was a rich man and a shrewd man, to judge from appearances and his income tax. He must be mighty sure of his plans to offer par for the stock. He remembered how the mysterious stranger had cut him short that evening in the hotel lobby, a slight that he would never forgive.

"Don't sell," he advised quickly; "if it's worth par to that fellow, there's something doing."

Skipworth nodded.

"Just the way I had it figured," he agreed. "Guess I'll hold on for further developments, but he's got options on quite a bunch of the stock. I don't think he's got quite as much as he wants. He seemed mighty eager to get mine; in fact he was so eager that I immediately smelled a rat."

When Skipworth had departed, Mr. Skagway got busy on the telephone, calling up those who had been caught in the collapse of Big Mogul. There weren't many of them, for it had been a closely held corporation. A few simple calculations, after these phone calls, told him that Mr. Clackworthy had got options on exactly eight hundred shares—just lacking two hundred and one shares of control. Most of them, he was informed, the stranger had contracted for at twenty-five dollars a share. And he could well afford to pay a stiff price for the balance of it.

A large block of the stock was owned by Enrich Duggins, and Dug-

gins was in Europe for the winter. There were just two ways for the man to get control—either buying Skipworth's holdings, or those of Mrs. Holloway who had the shares that Mr. Skagway had himself sold to her when he knew that the Big Mogul was doomed.

Mr. Clackworthy was anxious to get control and that was why he had been so willing to give Skipworth par. If he offered par he would give more. A slow smile spread over the banker's harsh features; there lay in his hands the power to get even with the stranger and at the same time make a neat little profit for himself.

The master confidence man's plans were sweeping along without a hitch; something like his old luck seemed with him again. The next day he called upon Mr. Skagway.

"I understand," he said, "that very shortly before the Big Mogul mine was closed down you disposed of your holdings to a certain Mrs. Holloway. My agents have tried in vain to locate her, and I am hoping that you can furnish me with her address. All of her old friends here in Keyville seem to have lost track of her entirely.

"Mrs. Holloway will be given a chance to realize something on her unfortunate investment, not what she paid for the stock, of course, but something. I know that as the person—ah—innocently responsible for her loss, you will be glad to see her get some of her money back." The word "innocently" was uttered in such a halting way that Skagway's cheeks burned hotly at the hidden accusation, and he longed to be at the other's throat.

"I may be able to locate the woman for you," he said shortly; "and then I may not. What price would you be willing to give her for the stock?"

"What price wouldn't I give her?"

retorted Mr. Clackworthy with seeming indiscretion. "My plans have gone wrong, Mr. Skagway. I thought I had the control in my hands—picked up nearly all I wanted at twenty-five dollars a share, and then Mr. Skipworth became stubborn. Why, bless your life, he wouldn't even take par for it! He's trying to take advantage of me, trying to make me pay a big price because he thinks he's got me on the hip, and that I'll have to meet his terms. No, sir! Not until I have left no stone unturned to find Mrs. Holloway; not if I have to spend twenty-five thousand dollars for private detectives to trace her."

Mr. Skagway concealed an elated smile, for Mr. Clackworthy had made it clear how eager he was to get control of the Big Mogul. Very carelessly, it would seem, he divulged the information that he had a chemical process which would smother out any fire that had ever burned in a coal mine—a gaseous mixture that would not fail.

When Mr. Clackworthy had departed, Skagway dug through his files until he found a letter from Mrs. Holloway in which she beseeched him to return part, at least, of her life insurance money which she had so foolishly invested.

"I know it was business," she wrote, "but I thought you were to be trusted, and I depended solely on your advice. I am living almost in want, and if you would give me back only a little of the money——"

But he was not concerned with the letter; all he wanted was her address, a mean rooming house in the shabby portion of Dearborn Street. Mr. Skagway wrote down the address in his note book and within an hour caught a train for Chicago.

He would have been a most amazed

man if he had known that, immediately after his departure, Mr. Clackworthy had withdrawn from the Keysville bank what remained of his two-thousand-dollar deposit, paid his bill at the hotel, and an hour later was following him.

THE next morning Mr. Skagway called upon Mrs. Holloway; he found her in a musty old house that forty years before had been a mansion. In the past two years she had become an old woman before her time. She received him with cold suspicion, managing to hide the elation which made her nerves quiver, for she was aware that there was a plan on foot to force the man to buy back the stock which she had bought so trustingly. By prearrangement Mrs. George Bascom was present.

"This—this is one of my—customers," quivered Mrs. Holloway when the banker glanced at the pretty Mrs. Bascom. "Speak right out in front of her if you've got anything to say; I've already told her how you tricked me into— How I lost all my—"

"You do me a grave injustice, Mrs. Holloway," murmured Skagway. "But I presume I am wasting breath to tell you again that I did not know at the time I sold the Big Mogul stock to you, that the mine was in danger of being closed down, and that—"

"That's right—wasting your breath," Mrs. Holloway broke in grimly. "What did you come for, Mr. Skagway?"

"As innocent as the transaction was on my part," said the banker. "I realize that you acted upon my advice, and, since you have come to want, I thought perhaps we could adjust matters to relieve the suspicion that you were swindled. I

thought, perhaps, if I were to offer to pay a part of your loss—as you begged me to do in your letter—you—"

The widow stared, as if she did not comprehend.

"Suppose, for example, that I would assume—well, say ten thousand dollars of the unfortunate investment."

"You're going to give me back ten thousand dollars?"

"Yes, that's what it amounts to," said Mr. Skagway.

"Let's have it quick, before you change your mind."

"In order that you will not have to feel that you are an object of charity, Mrs. Holloway, we will let it assume a strictly business basis; I will buy back your stock for ten thousand dollars."

It was Mrs. Bascom who had something to say.

"Don't you do it," she advised. "I don't trust him. If he wants to do the right thing, he'll give you the money outright; he's got some reason for wanting the stock back. It's a trick, Mrs. Holloway! he's trying to get for ten thousand dollars the stock that you paid him fifty thousand dollars for!"

Mr. Skagway shot Mrs. Bascom a spiteful look; confound the woman, he could have handled Mrs. Holloway like a child except for this interference. But he held his temper, strictly as a matter of diplomacy. In an injured tone he insisted that this was an unfair imputation of his motives, and that he only came out of pity.

"Then give her the money and let her keep the stock," Mrs. Bascom insisted shrewdly. This cornered Mr. Skagway, and he tried a bluff.

"All right," he blustered; "just for that I'll give you nothing!"

"You take my advice," said Mrs.

Bascom to the widow, "and catch the first train for Keysville. You'll find that there's something in the wind—that your stock has suddenly become valuable again. I'll pay your expenses."

This called the banker's bluff. For a moment he considered matters. He didn't know whether or not Mr. Clackworthy's plan for reopening the mine was feasible, and he didn't care. Mr. Clackworthy, a very rich man, believed in the scheme and was determined to control the Big Mogul. He had to have the stock, and Mr. Skagway had not the slightest doubt in the world that he would pay one hundred thousand dollars for it under pressure; the man could well afford to pay that price when it was considered that he had got most of the eight hundred shares he had acquired, at twenty-five dollars a share. Even if he paid one hundred thousand dollars a share for the remaining three hundred shares, it would give him control of a five-hundred-thousand-dollar company for the total investment of one hundred and twenty thousand dollars.

"All right," he snarled, "I'll give you what you paid for the stock—fifty thousand dollars. Get out the shares; and I'll write you a check."

"Guess again!" said Mrs. Bascom, who seemed to have taken charge. "Your price is seventy-five thousand dollars—isn't it Mrs. Holloway?" And Mrs. Holloway agreed.

**M**R. CLACKWORTHY and the Early Bird were home again. The master confidence man was in a highly exuberant mood, as he made a few figures on a pad of paper.

"A highly pleasing adventure, James," he chuckled. "Mrs. Holloway has back every penny of the money she never expected to see

again, we have twenty-five thousand dollars for our share, from which there remains to be deducted an expense of six thousand eight hundred and forty dollars."

"What!" gasped the Early Bird. "Y'ain't tryin' to tell me, boss, that we got rid of that much kale in a slow burg like Keysville. What'dja do with that much jack?"

"We paid five hundred to Hooperwaite, the mining engineer, and spent three hundred dollars on hotel accommodations and incidental expenses; added to that is a five-thousand-five-hundred-and-forty - dollar check that I sent to the government in payment on my income tax, and that brings the total to——"

"Income tax!" gulped the Early Bird. "Five thousand—boss, it ain't possible! You'd have to have the income from a million bucks to owe Uncle Samuel that much long green!"

"Exactly," laughed Mr. Clackworthy. "The amount actually due the government from me was two hundred dollars and I overpaid them five thousand three hundred and forty dollars."

"You got the old bean doin' a merry-go-round. I don't getcha—I don't getcha a-tall."

"The credit for the splendid idea belongs to you, James; it came to me when I saw you going through the agony of making out your return. I had not the capital to make an impression of great wealth upon Mr. Skagway, so I got him to help me make out my return. From the figures I gave him, Mr. Skagway concluded that I was surely a very rich man."

"It was the one way that I could win his confidence. Trot out the bottle, James, and we'll toast a blessing to the income tax that we've profaned with our hatred in the past."

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# DIAMOND MADNESS

By EDWARD P. MEYNELL

**I**T was on the third night of his vigil at the peephole that "Clink" Webster was rewarded by getting a good look at the face of his neighbor—the furtive man in the next room. And in the same instant he saw what it was that the fellow had in his hand, studying and gloating over, night after night.

Clink slid forward on the stool he had placed before the peephole. His figure stiffened, and his hands came up toward his collar as if he had difficulty in getting enough breath. He had followed his intuitions in this matter—and now, with the narrow, colorless face with the cleft lip of the man next door turned toward him, he realized how big a fish he had hooked. In that first moment it was the face of Hugh Stoval who had stolen the Toppingham diamond, rather than the diamond itself that caught and held the "Pathfinder's" attention.

Clink Webster had noticed the man next door as he noticed most other things, at first instinctively and without purpose. Clink had been born inquisitive. That was one of the things that made him a success in his profession, for a good pathfinder must have all his senses alert all the time. He can never tell when he will stumble across a lead that will take him, eventually and by the circuitous routes he learns to

follow, to the fattest of prizes. Of course his best pickings are apt to be around the cabarets patronized by wealthy, middle-aged women—the sort of women who go in for "bohemianism" and cubistic art. There a clever spy will spot many a victim for the gang of "lifters" he chances to be working with. Clink habitually patronized these places and also the opera and all theatrical functions featured on the society page. And wherever he went, he was eternally curious. The trait was both innate and cultivated.

It had been unavoidable that he should keep a watchful eye upon the tenants of the quiet boarding house where he went while the police searched for him in connection with a recent piece of business. Clink noticed that the man next door wasn't working, for he was in all day and most of the night. He kept track and satisfied himself that his neighbor received no letters. There were no phone calls for him except once, and, on that occasion, Clink heard him creaking about the room muttering to himself for nearly half a minute before he took the receiver off the hook and answered the call. Evidently some one had called the wrong number, but Clink Webster began to feel his hunch waxing strong and robust at the hesitation the other fellow had displayed in replying, and in the restless creak of

his steps after he had hung up the receiver. Obviously he had had a fright.

Drilling that tiny peephole had been the simplest thing in the world for the Pathfinder. Seated at it now, with the heavy darkness of his own room closed comfortably down about him, he studied for another long moment the face of the harelippped man. There could be no question about it—Hugh Stoval's picture had been in the papers often enough. But abruptly the attention of the spy shifted. Stoval had turned toward him and had twisted his cupped hand under the droplight.

Clink Webster caught his breath, and his bared teeth came together as if he were trying to bite off a thong. He raised one clammy hand to his forehead. He had read descriptions of the great diamond Stoval had stolen from his employer, Major Toppingham, but at the sight of that blazing cascade of rainbow colors he felt himself turning faint. Ordinarily, precious stones were just so much stock-in-trade for Clink—toys in which rich people invested and displayed unwisely, so that the Pathfinder and his strong-arm friends could live more or less at ease. But now—already, in that first moment, he felt the lure of the lambent thing which had brought so many men to death.

Clink got up presently, his movements as soundless as those of a moth. He crossed to his closet and pulled on his cap. Then he let himself out into the hall and went along it to the automatic elevator. Three minutes later he was in the street, and half an hour after that he had located the man he was looking for—"Duke" Harwood, a stone-getter whose fund of information on all matters pertaining to criminal activities for ten years back would have

enabled him to write a very readable history of crookdom. The Duke was a real "hundred-per-cent man." He worked alone and took all the profits, although on one or two occasions he had handled a job spotted by Clink Webster and had paid the finder the ten-per-cent commission commonly allowed in the profession.

**T**O-NIGHT Duke Harwood sat at a corner table in a little side-street restaurant where he often dined. Clink pulled out the chair opposite him and sat down with an elaborate show of casualness.

"How's tricks, old-timer?" he inquired. "I just happened to see you sitting here feeding the old face, and I thought I'd drop in and pass the time of day. Know anything interesting?"

Harwood shook his round head. His rather prominent gray eyes rested for a moment on the face of the Pathfinder.

"Knowing things is more in your line than mine, kid," he replied. "I'm a workingman, I am. I don't get paid for knowing."

Clink lowered the lid of his left eye. "Sure—you don't even know your way around town. Well, I been holing up for a couple of weeks. The bulls got after me pretty strong. This is the first time I've been out. I got so bored sleeping twelve hours a day that I made up my mind to take a chance. Guess I'll be rambling. There's no sense in tempting fate beyond certain limits.

He stood up, paused to light a cigarette, then added as if by afterthought: "Who was the bird that got away with that sparkler a while back—harelippped fellow—secretary to some big guy, according to the papers?"

"His name was Stoval," Duke Har-

wood replied without pausing in his attack upon the plate of ham and eggs before him. "He lifted this rock from old man Toppingham, the automobile king. It was a Wesselton stone, a white fancy, and the finest diamond turned out from that chimney. Major Toppingham is said to have paid a quarter of a million for it. He's offering a hundred grand for its return and no questions asked. There's a report around that the old man has taken to his bed and won't eat nor talk. Gone kind of loony over the loss of his pet diamond."

"I'd like to get a spot on a rock like that," Clink Webster commented. "But that 'hundred grand and no questions asked' is the bunk. There's always a hook in that kind of bait."

"Not this time. Toppingham's new secretary has put the business in charge of Gamberwell's detective agency, and they've sent an S O S out by underground. All a man has got to do is to grab this rock and take it to Bill Gamberwell and he'll get the money. Of course it's a felony to handle it that way, but you know how much that amounts to. It was Gamberwell that handled that string of matched pearls for Betty Brady, the actress. Twenty-five grand and no questions asked—and Bill paid the money, because I took the pearls there myself and know. He's known as a fixer, and he knows his job!"

The Duke had handed out this information from the side of his big mouth with hardly a glance toward Clink Webster. Now, however, he looked fully and suddenly at the man standing before him.

"You get a spot on that diamond, my son!" said he. "Then you come and tell Uncle Harwood about it, and he'll see that you get a nice slice of

the pickings. It's as safe and sure as stock in the Bank of England, and so I'm telling you!"

Clink nodded and left the restaurant. He felt too shaken to continue the conversation, even if he had not already learned all that he wanted to know. On his way back to his room he passed along the street flanking the Gamberwell agency. It was on the second floor of a flatiron building, and one of its entrances was by a dark and sinister-looking flight of stairs. Clink felt his breath burning his nostrils. He seemed to see himself mounting those stairs with the diamonds, and coming down them with one hundred thousand dollars in his pocket. One hundred thousand!

His nerves steadied after a time, but his breathing was still rapid and shallow. His hands were wet with cold perspiration. He clenched and unclenched them as he hurried along the street. One hundred grand—with that for a stake he could again go abroad. He wouldn't have to pull anything over there. He could live in ease the rest of his life. There was only one difficulty—could he handle the thing by himself? Clink Webster's reliance in the past had always been on his pliable and resourceful mind rather than on strong-arm methods. But here was a chance ready-made, if he could possibly summon the courage to utilize it.

THE Pathfinder returned to his room and let himself cautiously in. His light feet made no sound as he crossed to the peephole and seated himself. His first glance showed him the back of the man with the harelip—Hugh Stoval, the diamond thief. Presently Stoval turned so that his profile was visible. He held his hand

at an angle under the light. The silly fool seemed to put all his time staring at his loot, Clink told himself. That was poor business. Never get anywhere that way.

The thought was never completed. Clink had just caught his breath at a flash of the prismatic colors from the cupped palm of the thief when out of the darkness there descended upon his shoulder an iron hand. He had heard no one enter the room, but some one was standing above him. Clink straightened soundlessly to his feet and strove to free himself. A whisper was in his ear.

"Stand still! I come along to find out what it was all about! You little shrimp, I knowed you was trying to put something over on me. Stand still, will you?"

It was Duke. He seated himself deliberately at the peephole and adjusted his eye to it. For a time he sat humped forward, silent and intent. Then he stood up and again laid a crushing grip on his companion's shoulder.

"You come with me!" he commanded in a sibilant whisper.

He led his unwilling companion to the door, through which it had been a simple matter for a prowler as experienced as Duke Harwood to make his way without attracting attention. They were in the hall.

"Come along," Duke said in a stealthy growl. "We got to talk this business over!"

There was an ice-cream parlor with curtained boxes around the corner, and here the two crooks betook themselves. Clink Webster was dismayed but also a little comforted. He wouldn't have to worry about the violent end of the business now. He would insist on getting more than his usual ten per cent.

"You got a crust!" Duke growled as he thrust a spoon into the nut

sundae he had ordered. "Trying to hog this business for yourself, was you? Well, you wasn't smooth enough. Now let's see—how early does this egg hit the hay?"

"He'll be asleep by midnight. He never fails."

"That door is bolted on his side. I don't want to make no row till I get in—I'll use a strip of celluloid to open her up with. Then I'll go through and if he makes any fuss I'll croak him. Have to use a black-jack—a gun would sound like Big Bertha in that sleepy old house. You get your ten per cent—"

"Look here, Duke, I didn't turn this job over to you! I was going to handle it myself. I don't need your help."

"You handle it? Since when did you get to be a lifter, kid? There wasn't a chance. You'd have muffed it, and let that rock get away. But don't whine—I'll do the right thing by you. Now let's see. I'll go through and get the rock—and then you and me'll leave. You can't stay on there. Of course, Stoval ain't in shape to make no holler, but you can't tell. Sure, and if he puts up a fight I'll bust him one he won't forget. You stick close behind me, in case I need you. I ain't had time to work this job out right, and something may slip up. Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. All right, we'll head back. It's a quarter past eleven."

SOON after twelve the heavy breathing of the diamond thief came distinctly to them through the chinks of that inner door. Duke drew from a pocket a tough strip of celluloid with which in less than five minutes he had worked open the bolt. He applied a few drops of oil to the hinges and waited for them to soak in. After

that he opened the door and stepped into the room beyond.

This was the first time Clink Webster had taken part in a burglary, and he felt disagreeable thrills traveling up and down his backbone. He kept close to Duke, however—so close that when the prowler stooped stealthily over the sleeping form of the man in the alcove bed, Clink could hear the latter's breath alter in rhythm, and then could hear it merge into silence.

Next instant Duke's proposed victim sat up. Clink saw his white-garbed figure suddenly swing forward into a sitting posture. One arm darted toward the pillow.

"Oh, you would, would you?" Harwood snarled.

He brought his blackjack up and down with brisk efficiency. Clink heard the dull thud of the weapon and saw Stoval sag back on his pillow, helpless.

"Turn on the light—no need of us fumbling here now that he's tended to!" Duke said confidently. "The wall switch is by the door—I felt it as we came in."

Clink carried out this command in a sort of sleep-walking dream. Things were happening too fast for his comprehension. With the drop-light over the little reading table turned on, he saw Harwood fumble about under the pillow and haul out first an automatic pistol and then something else—something in a leather case. The hinged cover was turned back and Clink again caught that blaze of riotous colors—red and green and blue—flashing filaments that held him like the red eye of a cobra. He stood with his lips parted, watching Duke cross to the table and seat himself at it. Harwood had the big diamond in his hand.

Duke Harwood's face was white

and stiff, his breathing as shallow and rapid as that of a sleeping baby. His hard eyes shone with a glassy glitter, and Clink could see the rigid muscles of his jaw and the swelling veins of his neck. The prowler sat tipped steeply forward in the chair by the table, his elbows resting upon the latter now, the Toppingham diamond in one slack palm.

"Sit down!" Harwood snarled, turning for an instant upon his companion. His voice was vibrant with some strange emotion. He stared at Clink, and his eyes were those of a madman.

Presently he began to talk to himself. "I never believed it before—I've heard about diamonds that had life in them, but it was all apple sauce to me. I've seen some big ones and some good ones—stones that were worth as much as a city. But this—this *devil*!—there's life in it, I'll swear. Something that can think and see and feel. There's a tingle going up my arm. Why didn't this poor boob sell the rock when he had a chance? Ah, but how could he? Sell it—and they say old Toppingham is gone into his dotage since he lost it. I ain't blaming him none. It would be like losing eyesight to lose it. Sell it—give it back for a hundred grand? It's not to be thought of. *Argh!*"

The monologue terminated in a growl, and Clink could see Harwood's teeth bared.

THE Pathfinder was alarmed. "Look here, Duke!" he pleaded. "Don't you go getting batty about that rock—it's part mine and I want the money for it. I ain't no millionaire. I can't afford to—"

"Shut up!" snarled the man at the table. "You was going to have it all for yourself, wasn't you? Well,

that's what I'm going to do. You don't get a look in, kid—and if you don't like that, I'll do for you same as I done for Stoval. This stone is mine—*mine!*"

Clink's face was contorted with anguish. He saw all the riches he had been promising himself slipping through his fingers. Then he noticed that Duke Harwood was again sitting with his head thrust hypnotically forward, staring into the blazing eye of the great diamond. His lips were moving, but no sound came from them—and his blackjack was right there on the table beside his elbow!

A strange unrest was stirring in the soul of the Pathfinder. Something like a fever tingled in his hands and face and limbs. He stiffened in his chair, then got slowly to his feet. The lure of the diamond seemed to be drawing him toward the center of the room. His eyes were fixed upon it, but he saw from the corners of them that Duke Harwood was not heeding his change of posture. And that blackjack was where Clink could reach it!

He took a step forward and another. The room was strangely silent; palpitatingly so. The silence seemed a positive rather than a negative thing. It danced and eddied like sound. Clink slipped forward, an inch at a time. He was close to Harwood's elbow. One swift dart of his hand now—

Clink Webster thought in that first second that he himself was shot. The roar of the gun filled the room and sent its still air swirling in great billows. He heard Duke Harwood cry out in a strangling voice, saw him leap erect and then stumble backward, saw the white-garbed figure of Stoval projecting itself from the bed toward the table. The diamond thief had had another gun

hidden somewhere, and he had come out of his trance now to make good use of it.

But some nimble devil of daring and desire was in Clink Webster's brain and blood to-night. He gripped the blackjack and struck a swinging blow with it at the light. In the same instant the fingers of his left hand closed over the diamond, and he was running through the darkness toward the door of his own room.

He reached it, drew it shut after him, bolted it, and thrust a chair under the knob. Then without waiting for the hubbub in the adjoining room to subside he crossed in a bound to his window and thrust it up.

TEN seconds later he was on the ground, having descended by way of the water pipe.

The Pathfinder ran along an alley for a couple of blocks, turned into a side street, and eventually made his way to a small outlying hotel where he had stayed for the night occasionally before. He asked for a court room and was shown to it. Locking his door, he barricaded it with a straight-backed chair, then examined the fastenings of the window. He pulled down the curtain and snapped on a bedside light.

The Toppingham diamond lay in his palm. He stared down at it, his face stiff, his breath hushed. Something like an electric current seemed to run up his arm and to tingle down his spinal cord and up into his brain. It was a vital current, like life itself. Clink felt a sudden fear of this glittering thing. There was a great fire inside of it—a fountain of color, cascading toward the surface and breaking in showers of colored, flashing sparks. A dozen men had gone to violent death because of this

bit of crystal. A hundred others had bartered away their souls for it. Women in silks and satins had stared into its witch light and had forgotten things they should have remembered. In its wake had flowed suicide and bankruptcy. But now as Clink Webster stared into the mysterious inner spaces of the great jewel, he told himself that it was worth it all. It was worth every risk taken.

"A hundred grand?" he muttered. "Sure—the Riviera, and a castle in Spain if I like. I wouldn't have to work over there. Just live there—like a prince."

A sudden doubt assailed him. He had taken Duke Harwood's word for the amount and terms of the reward offered. But might not Harwood have been lying? Might that not have been a trap? On the other hand, why should it have been? Duke had talked convincingly. Probably Bill Gamberwell, who had a reputation throughout crookdom as a "fixer," would pay the money. But of course it might be wisest to wait and watch.

Too dangerous, Clink told himself. While he was waiting he might be grabbed on some other charge—and searched. He fell into an ague of shivering at the idea.

"I got to find a safe place for this thing," he whispered, staring through bloodshot eyes around the room. "If it should be taken from me now I'd go dippy—like old Topingham. And Duke. He was crazy as a loon—and so was the secretary chap, Stoval—all of them just plain nuts over it. Well, I ain't no better. It's got me, too. I can't take chances on losing it!"

For a time he stared silently down at the throbbing thing in his hand. It continued to send a current of malignant life up his arm and into

his nervous system. His trembling fingers closed over it, and he turned out the light.

Clink Webster woke to find the sun shining in through the chinks beside his drawn shade. His head ached from the excitement of the night and from the bad air of the little room. He still clutched the diamond, and he put it down with reluctance while he washed and tidied himself up a bit. Then he wrapped it in a piece of newspaper and thrust it down into an inside pocket.

When he went down into the lobby and paid his bill, he fancied the clerk stared curiously at him. Clink departed hurriedly. He had thought of a place where he could hide the jewel; not in the lining of his clothes, for that would be "duck soup" for the dicks who might frisk him. On the other hand he wanted to have the diamond with him all the time.

He walked nearly half an hour before he found a cobbler's shop that was open. Clink glanced nervously into its dusky outer room. Tapping sounds came to him from somewhere at the rear, but all he could see was a grandfather's clock in one corner and an old counter, littered with shoes in pairs, evidently finished work, and some chairs. The tapping came steadily to him and there was a lettered card on the door which thrust toward him the single word, "Open!"

The Pathfinder went into the cobbler's outer room and crossed to a door leading into the shop. At a bench beside a window sat an old man with long, iron-gray whiskers, a bald head that might have been molded out of paraffin, and a leather apron. He had a child's shoe on the last in front of him and was industriously pegging it.

"I want a little job done—while I wait!" Clink said. He cleared his throat and stared doubtfully at the cobbler. The old man was eying him sidewise out of a pair of shrewd eyes. "It's a queer kind of job. I want a place fixed in my heel where I can carry something—just a small parcel. Nothing valuable, but I have to have to near me. I'll take the shoe off—"

"Sit down, young man!" the cobbler commanded. "These are school shoes I'm working at, and the young rascal they belong to will be in for them in a couple of minutes. After that, you."

He went on pegging at the new sole. Clink sat down in a chair against the wall. He noted that the shoemaker was a very old man in spite of his bright eyes and strong hands; and that the floor under his feet was worn into a deep groove, as if he had sat there pegging shoes for a long time.

The cobbler nodded. Evidently he was an observant and quick-witted old fellow.

"I've been working at this bench twenty-three years come Christmas, young man!" he said. "I've worn out a good many floors in my time. There's the morning paper, if you want to read!"

Clink picked up the paper and pretended to examine it. Presently the cobbler finished with the school shoes and handed them over to a snub-nosed boy who called for them.

"Now let's see that package you want to hide in your heel," he commanded.

Clink fished the little packet containing the diamond from his pocket and held it up. His hand shook a little in spite of himself, and his eyes rested suspiciously on the face of the old man before him. The cobbler nodded and went into the front

shop where for a moment Clink heard him moving about.

Then he came back and sat down at his bench.

"Let's have the shoe," he said. "In the heel? Yes, I've fixed such things before!"

Picking up Webster's shoe, he climped it on a last, deftly removed the top layer of the heel, and reached for a keen-edged knife.

Clink watched him, fascinated by the swift, sure movements of the blade. The cobbler cut a circular pit in the heel, drew some of the brass nails with a pair of worn pliers, and blew the leather dust from the cavity. Without looking over his shoulder at Clink he stretched out his calloused hand for the packet.

Clink felt the stuffy little room with its smell of shoemaker's wax and aging leather begin to revolve round him. He stood up for a moment and laid his hot hand on his forehead. Then he was standing at the edge of the bench. He saw the little parcel neatly deposited in the cavity prepared for it, saw the layer of untrimmed leather replaced. The old man took up his broad-faced hammer and deftly nailed it down.

"There you are, my son. A dollar. Remember that heel piece will wear through in a month or so. Good morning!"

THE Pathfinder walked slowly along the street, his mind confused, his plans in chaos. The little packet had been coned in the heel of his right shoe, and now he fancied he could feel a vibration that was almost a physical warmth tingling up through that foot and through his entire body. He was hot, and his head ached. He went into a restaurant and ate breakfast. He was asking himself what he ought to do about the diamond.

"It ain't no good to me—no more than a piece of busted bottle," he realized. "No good on earth—and the money—— Say! I'm independently rich. I don't ever have to lift my hand again. All I got to do is to keep away from cards and women and booze—except maybe a little wine with my dinner. Dinner at a table on the sidewalk, with the crowds coming and going—and little stubby trees in tubs——"

But he was talking against something that struggled up for expression. The diamond would bring him all that, but to realize these things he must give up the diamond, and that he felt he couldn't do. He had never been interested in such playthings before. He had heard of the strange "diamond madness" which possesses some men, firing their blood and shriveling their brains. He had heard of men starving rather than part from a jewel. But that one of these masters of men should master him—he shook his head dazedly.

He went to a little park and seated himself in an out-of-the-way corner. The day was passing, not fast and not slowly. The tingle from his right heel had become a general warmth. He sat on and on, thinking, dreaming, picturing again the fountain of rainbow fire he had held in his hand last night. He wondered if he could get that top layer of leather off and handle the vibrant thing again.

The sun sank and cool twilight lay upon the city. Clink Webster knew that it was cool because the kiss of the night wind made his cheek tingle. But his blood simmered, and his thoughts raced furiously. He felt half mad.

He stood up in sudden alarm. This wouldn't do. He might be coming down with a fever—he would be

hurried to a hospital and his clothing taken from him. Something might go wrong. They might lose his shoes!

"*I got to sell it!*" he groaned. "I'd rather part with both eyes—but I've got to. I'm crazy. It ain't worth nothing to me. I've got to eat and drink and live. If I hang onto it I've got to pull some more business, and any time I may be speared and sent down for a long stretch. Then I'll lose my shoes sure, and the stone with them. I've got to do something while there's time. The Duke was crazy, but I shan't be. I'll go round to Gamberwell's and sound 'em out. If they'll pay the money I've got to do it, and get it over with."

Darkness had come on. Clink made his way down the street, his mind gradually steadying. He felt that he had emerged from the grip of an evil dream.

On the second story of the flat-iron building the lighted windows of Gamberwell's detective agency showed yellow and square against the obscurity of the night. Clink Webster stared up for a time, his heart in his mouth. Then he crossed over, went round to the side entrance, and peered up the stairs. With a muttered comment on the darkness, he started up them. His teeth were clenched, and he was planning just how he would word his inquiry. If it was a trap—but there was no reason why it should be. Gamberwell had done such things before. But, of course, there was a chance—and if they should arrest him and search him, the game would be up.

The Pathfinder paused at this last terrible consideration. For a moment he meditated flight. It was not yet too late for him to retreat. He had the diamond.

OUT of the darkness a dim something projected itself like a tentacle. Clink tried to evade it but felt a massive hand close over his throat. He was jerked from his feet, picked up in mighty arms, and carried downstairs. For an instant he was swung under a street lamp and had a glimpse of a face. Then he was thrust into the front seat of a car parked at the curb. The man who had grabbed him slid in beside him. The engine started easily, and they were speedily off.

"Don't move and don't holler, unless you ain't particular about living!" Duke Harwood growled. "You thought I was done for, did you? Say, I choked that dude within an inch of his grave. Then I lit matches and looked for the sparkler. It wasn't there, and neither was you. I put in the day looking for you, and to-night I come here. Of course I didn't know but what you'd already cashed in— Where's the stone, kid?"

Harwood's voice was steely and inexorable. Clink trembled. "I ain't got it!" he lied sullenly.

"Of course not. You wouldn't have, would you? Never mind talking—I'll find it quick enough presently!"

Duke Harwood conveyed his prisoner to an empty house on the dunes, with the roar of the sea coming to them from one direction and the more subdued roar of the city from the other. He shoved Clink through an unlocked door, produced a flashlight, and stood it on the floor with the lens toward the ceiling.

"Now, come across!" he snarled. "No monkey business!"

Clink stared like a hypnotized bird up into the face of his captor. His lips moved piteously, but no sound came from them.

"All right," growled Harwood. "Got to make you talk, have I? That's right in my line!"

He caught the slightly built man before him about the body and thrust one big hand against his forehead. Iron fingers clamped down over Clink Webster's temples. His head was being slowly but irresistably thrust backward. He could feel the ligaments in his neck and back straining. The pain was unbearable.

"Le' go!" he gasped. "I'll tell—it's in my heel—the right one!"

Harwood dumped him to the floor and removed his shoe. With the strong blade of a jackknife he pried at the top layer.

It came away unwillingly as if loath to part with its secret. Harwood caught it between his strong thumb and forefinger. His face, revealed by the cone of light from the flash lamp, was white and murderous. His thick lips twitched.

"Thought you was clever, didn't you?" he growled. "Here—come loose!"

He tore the flap of leather off and threw it to the floor. The little packet was in his fingers. He untwisted the wrappings.

Then he cried out in a hoarse, inarticulate bellow. Clink stared up through bulging eyes. Duke was holding something he had taken from that folded paper—something hard, but not the great, glowing jewel. Something of darkness rather than of fire.

"Shoemaker's wax!" the prowler cried out furiously. "What you trying to pull? Now talk! You can't put anything over on me!"

He dropped to his knees with the open knife in his right hand. He glared, glassy-eyed and ferocious, at the man staring hopelessly up at him.

"Talk!" he snarled again. "I'm not fooling!"

"Oh, my Lord, Duke, the stone is gone—that old devil with the whiskers switched it right under my nose! He fixed up this dummy when he went into the front room."

In a trembling voice Clink told of the visit to the cobbler's shop and of what had happened there. Duke Harwood listened in grim silence till the story was finished.

"Come on!" he said, and led the way back to the car.

THEY reached the street where Clink had gone that morning with the diamond in his pocket. Leaving the car at a corner, the two crooks cautiously approached the shop door. There was no one in sight in either direction, so they tried the latch. The shop was locked and in darkness.

Clink thrust his face close to the window and cried out. "He's gone—the clock and chairs and everything—moved out."

His mind was racing now. He caught the look of ill omen on the face of the man at his side. There was murder in the face of Duke Harwood; murder and madness. Clink's nerves were stretched to the snapping point, but desperation lent him an added bit of strength.

With a shrill yell of defiance he hurled himself upon the prowler. The big shop window crashed as Harwood was precipitated through it. He landed on his face and hands on the floor of the deserted shop. Probably he was blinded by flying

glass, for in that instant of his departure Clink Webster saw his enemy tip back upon his knees and thrust out groping hands, as if for support.

Clink ran like a rabbit. He ran like an alley rat. He ran like the March wind, blowing street litter before it. And as he ran he fancied he saw before him the old cobbler, with his whiskers and his bright eyes.

"It'll bring him to the madhouse!" Clink sobbed. "Twenty-three years he worked there—and the feeling of that stone through the paper it was wrapped in tore him loose and started him going. Mad!"

The Pathfinder paused and clasped his head. He began to laugh, hysterically, his voice high pitched and spasmodic.

"Diamonds!" he shrieked. "Millions of them—millions and millions of dollars' worth of diamonds—diamonds of blood—diamonds of fire—the Mediterranean Sea filled up chock-full with nothing but diamonds! And me sitting on top of them all!"

He was still babbling about diamonds when he reached police headquarters, in charge of a burly sergeant of detectives. They put him into a padded cell where he continued to rave on till stupor stilled him.

And after that the jail corridor resounded with the howlings of another madman—Duke Harwood, jabbering and babbling about a diamond as big as the sun, and as white and as beautiful as a woman's soul.

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# A LITTLE MATTER OF ARITHMETIC

By JOHN BAER

**T**HE door did not yield to the blows which Officer Wengler rained on it with his club. So Wengler shot his way into the room. He discovered a man hanging by a silk bath-robe cord from a hook which had been screwed into the wooden framework over a clothes-closet door. An overturned chair was on the floor beneath the hanging body.

"Suicide," said Miss Platt, a nurse, who had followed the officer into the room. "Mr. Frostman has been ill a long time and has recently been depressed and morose."

The examining physician's report was that the drop had not broken Mr. Frostman's neck, and that death had been caused by strangulation. The autopsy disclosed not a single fact to controvert the suicide theory. And yet this theory was wrong.

Ten years previous Jonas Frostman and Pierson Keely had organized and promoted a mail-order house; Frostman had provided most of the capital and Keely had "pushed" the venture and interested the rural population of the New England States in the new enterprise.

Fifty-one per cent, the control of

the stock, belonged to Frostman; Keely owned twenty-five per cent, and the other shares were scattered. It was admitted by every one that Keely had "made" the firm, and it was conceded that in the event of Frostman's death Keely was certainly the logical man to be in control. So Frostman made Keely heir to twenty-seven per cent of the shares; that would give Keely fifty-two per cent and the controlling interest.

The trouble was that Keely was unwilling to wait. He had dissipated his fortune in a carousal of gambling; his luck had been as bad as his judgment. Eventually he reached the point where he was no longer satisfied with his returns from the mail-order house. It angered him that Frostman should be in control and be drawing the greater dividends. He began envying and hating Frostman, and the hatred developed into a deep-rooted conviction that Frostman had been robbing him all along of his fair share of the profits, though the partner was wholly unconscious of it.

Then Frostman was in a railroad accident. Mr. Keely's attitude was that of a man who didn't wish his enemy any hard luck, but at the same

time would consider his recovery a calamity.

But Frostman did not die. They brought him home mangled and crushed and minus his right eye, but they brought him alive. And after ten long weeks his doctors announced they would pull him through.

So Keely felt himself cheated. He had already figured that if he drew fifty-two per cent of the firm's dividends at the end of the year, instead of twenty-five per cent, he could pay his debts and have something left over.

It was Frostman himself who started Keely's reflections on suicide. "I sometimes wish I were dead," Frostman remarked. "The pains are frequently unendurable. And I am disconsolate because of the loss of my eye."

Keely agreed heartily to himself that Frostman's suicide would certainly be a most desirable event. But though Frostman became more and more depressed, he hung on grimly and gamely till it became apparent that because of his sheer force of will he would have a long life, albeit a painful one.

Meanwhile, Keely's creditors became loud-mouthed and imperious; they worried him into the grim determination to improve his financial status regardless of consequences to himself or to any one else. Then chance presented him with an opportunity and he had not the strength to resist.

**K**EELY called one afternoon at Frostman's home at about two o'clock. Mrs. Brophy, the housekeeper, admitted him and told him that Frostman was upstairs in the room that was referred to as the "cooler."

This room was in the east wing

on the top floor of the house. It had been used as a storeroom, but some one had discovered that in the afternoons it was the coolest room in the building; so Frostman had had everything that was in it taken out and began using it as a sitting room. This arrangement was intended to be temporary, so Frostman did not go to the trouble of having it furnished. He had an old-fashioned, discarded porch set put into the room, and that was all there was in it—three reed rockers and one large straight-back chair. There was a clothes closet, which had never been used for any purpose, built into the left wall of the room. On the entire top floor there were but three other rooms; they were storerooms, and in each of them articles of great value were kept. These rooms were locked.

In the cooler Keely found Miss Platt, the nurse, reading from a magazine to Mr. Frostman. Keely volunteered to relieve Miss Platt of this duty, and he dropped into a rocker and picked up the story where Miss Platt had left off. It may have been the excessive heat that wearied Frostman, or it may have been that the yarn possessed soporific qualities; at any rate, after fifteen minutes Mr. Keely was interrupted by a snore.

Keely regarded the small, huddled, emaciated figure in the rocker; he noted the indelible lines that had been left on the face by suffering. It would be so easy to put an end to the agony.

There was a convenient silk bath robe hanging on a hook on the closet door. If that robe were drawn over Frostman's head and then pulled tightly about the neck—three, five minutes, perhaps, he might gasp a bit, or rattle, but nothing that could be heard by the two women who

were on the first floor, three flights down.

Then, if the body were hung by the bath-robe cord from a hook screwed into the framework over the closet door, it would look like suicide. The autopsy would disclose that death had been caused by strangulation; but the autopsy would be powerless to show that Frostman had been strangled before being hanged. The cord would leave the same marks as though it had caused death; the doctor would therefore have to assume that the strangulation was due to hanging.

Keely roused himself angrily out of his reverie. What was he waiting for, anyhow? An opportunity such as was in his grasp right now might never be presented again.

He went into the hall and listened. He heard no sound. He reentered the room and closed and locked the door; it had a latch lock. Then he took the bath robe from the hook on the closet door and tiptoed toward the sleeping man.

But some instinct which warns even those who sleep against danger roused Frostman. He started nervously in his chair. The movement frightened Keely into tigerlike activity. He hurled himself upon the helpless invalid and pulled the bath robe over his head. Frostman cried out feebly in a dry, terror-stricken voice; the sound scarcely carried out of the room. Keely drew the robe tightly about Frostman's neck and twisted it. The victim gasped and kicked convulsively, and that was all.

SOME half an hour later Keely and Miss Platt met in the third floor hallway. "Mr. Frostman fell asleep while I was reading to him," explained Keely, "so I slipped away."

Miss Platt went into the sewing room and began to work on a piece of embroidery. Keely stood in the doorway of the room and talked to her. He drew out the conversation, his purpose being to impress upon Miss Platt that after leaving Frostman he had been entirely calm and natural in his manner, and he also wanted as much time as possible to elapse before the body was found.

However, when the grandfather hall clock struck three, the nurse said it was time for Mr. Frostman to take his medicine. She fetched a bottle from Frostman's room on the third floor and then went upstairs to the cooler. Keely decided it would be entirely safe for him to stay; he therefore told Miss Platt that since Frostman was to be awakened anyhow, he would remain a few moments longer and chat with him.

But Miss Platt found the door to the cooler locked. Her persistent rattling on the knob brought no response. She rapped sharply on the door with her knuckles, and when that failed, too, she called out Frostman's name.

It then occurred to her suddenly that Frostman must be not asleep, but unconscious, to be oblivious to so much noise. Frightened, she called down to Mrs. Brophy, who at that moment was in the second-floor hallway, to come up and fetch a chair with her. The chair was placed against the door to the cooler and Keely clambered upon it. He looked over the transom. When he stepped down from the chair he said excitedly: "Good heavens! He's hanged himself!"

Miss Platt kept her head; Mrs. Brophy did not. While the nurse ran down to the first floor to telephone to a doctor, the housekeeper stuck her head out of a third-floor window and screamed.

Officer Wengler answered the cry. He found Mr. Keely beating ineffectually against the door to the cooler. The officer tried his club, and when that failed he shot his way in.

Mr. Frostman's body was hanging by a bath-robe cord from a hook screwed into the framework over the closet door. Beneath the swinging body lay an overturned straight-back chair.

About half an hour later headquarters sent Detective Dean to make an investigation and to ascertain that no crime had been committed.

The examining physician told Dean that there were no marks on the body save the gash around the neck made by the cord. He gave it as his opinion that Mr. Frostman had undoubtedly hanged himself. Mrs. Brophy, Miss Platt, and Mr. Keely then described their movements preceding the finding of the body. The detective's manner was desultory; he appeared merely to be asking so many formal questions, and then he made a cursory examination of the room. Mr. Frostman's bath robe was now slung over one of the rockers; the straight-back chair still lay overturned across the threshold of the open closet door.

Detective Dean's eyes drifted up to the hook which was screwed into the framework over the door; he kept his eye on the hook rather a long time. Then he looked down at the body of Mr. Frostman, which lay upon the floor. After a while he began scratching his chin. He picked up the straight-back chair, and then, abruptly, he turned to Mrs. Brophy and whispered something to her.

The housekeeper bustled downstairs; when she returned, Dean ordered every one else into the hall. This maneuver disconcerted Keely; in view of the medical testimony, he

could see no reason for the detective's persistence. However, Dean did not keep him in suspense long. After less than five minutes he asked those in the hall to come into the room again.

THERE followed a scene which sped swiftly toward a surprising and dramatic climax.

Dean himself stepped out of the room, but returned after a few seconds. Officer Wengler took a position near the door; the others in the room were Mrs. Brophy, Miss Platt, Keely, the doctor, and a nephew of Frostman who had been summoned by phone.

Detective Dean's first question was addressed to the doctor. "If some one had strangled Mr. Frostman with that bath robe and then, when Frostman was unconscious or dead, had hung him up by the cord, would the marks on the body be——"

"The marks, in that case, would be identical with the marks that are on the body now," explained the doctor. "The cord has made a gash and the gash has caused the flesh around it to become inflamed. This inflammation undoubtedly would have obliterated any traces of any other ligature that had been used before the cord."

"Then, since the medical testimony does not contradict the theory of murder, let us for the moment accept this theory and assume that Mr. Frostman was killed." Detective Dean turned to Miss Platt. "When you left this room immediately after Mr. Keely came in, was this clothes-closet door closed? Think before you answer."

"It was," said Miss Platt positively. "Just before Mr. Keely came in I hung Mr. Frostman's bath robe on the hook which was then in the closet door where the small hole is

now. The closet door was slightly ajar and I pushed it shut."

"In that case," said the detective, "the hook in the framework of the door must have been screwed in after Miss Platt left the room, for while the hook is in the framework the door cannot be closed."

Dean did not address his remarks to any one in particular; he spoke as though talking to a general audience. "Now, keeping to the assumption that Frostman was killed, let us by a process of elimination turn to discover the criminal. This room can be entered in three ways; through a window, through the hall, after one has come down from the roof, and through the hall after one has come up from a lower floor. No one can climb four stories up the side of a house. No one came through the roof trapdoor, because the padlock on it is still locked and has not been disturbed. No one came from a lower floor, because such a person would have been seen by Mr. Keely, who was standing in the doorway of the sewing room, which is directly on the third floor stairway landing.

"It is therefore apparent that if Mr. Frostman was killed, Mr. Keely must be the murderer! He was alone with him for about forty minutes."

"Mr. Dean, if this is an accusation," said Keely angrily, "may I remind you that the libel laws—"

"I know the laws, thank you. And now that I have shown that if a crime was committed, Mr. Keely must be guilty, I shall no longer assume, but prove it was actually murder!

"Mr. Frostman did not—could not have hanged himself!

"You will notice that, because of the emphatic and peculiar curve of the arms of the rockers in this room, it is impossible for a man to stand

on the arms or for one rocker to be placed on top of another. And this straight-back chair cannot be placed on top of any of the rockers because of the arms. Also, no rocker can be placed on the straight-back chair because the rockers are slightly wider.

"And there was no other object of any kind in this room that Mr. Frostman could have placed on any of the chairs. Also, Mr. Frostman did not fetch such an object from another room, as the rooms on this floor are locked, and had Mr. Frostman gone downstairs Mr. Keely would have seen him."

Detective Dean took a tape measure out of his pocket. "This tape is what I sent Mrs. Brophy out of the room for. We now come to a little problem in arithmetic.

"Mr. Frostman is five feet four inches tall. On his toes, he could add three—we'll be generous and call it four inches to his height. His reach above his head is sixteen inches. On his toes, then, he can reach a point seven feet above the floor.

"The seats of all the chairs in this room are eighteen inches high. And I have just shown that it was absolutely impossible for Mr. Frostman to stand on anything except the seat of one of these chairs. Adding eighteen inches to seven feet we get a total of eight and one half feet. That was the ultimate limit of Mr. Frostman's reach."

Dean took out a pair of handcuffs and stepped toward Keely. "I do not believe," he said, "that Mr. Frostman climbed up the side of the wall. I am going to leave it to Mr. Keely to explain to a jury how a man whose ultimate reach is eight and one half feet can screw a hook into a framework which is nine feet above the floor!"

Mr. Keely glared about him in a

bewildered manner. Then he realized that in overlooking the mathematical absurdity of his scheme he had committed a fatal blunder. Mechanically he held out his hands.

"You are over six feet tall, Mr. Keely," commented the detective. "Add four inches when you get on your toes and a reach of at least

twenty inches and you can easily reach nine and one half feet when you are standing on an eighteen-inch chair. The fact that it was not at all difficult for you to screw a hook into a framework that was nine feet above the floor made you ignore the factor of height and reach altogether. Come, let's go!"

## COUNTERFEITERS

FEDERAL investigators have issued a warning of a flood of counterfeit ten-dollar bills separately and distinctively numbered. Alan G. Straight, head of the New York secret service, arrested Dominick Pagliocca in his home in the Bronx, New York, after discovering counterfeit notes in his home. The prisoner was merely charged with possessing counterfeit bills, but the United States district attorney considers the prisoner one of the most important figures in counterfeiting work. The notes seized in his home were similar to those confiscated in Brooklyn a short time before. Both were made from a 277 plate and each bore a separate serial number, indicating that the makers had perfected a numbering machine.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of the Best Detective Magazine, published monthly, at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1933.

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared George C. Smith, Jr., who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is Vice President of the Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers of Best Detective Magazine, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Frank B. Blackwell, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

GEORGE C. SMITH, Jr., Vice President, Of Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 31st day of March, 1933. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 32, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1934.)

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## THE JURY BOX

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**L**ADIES and Gentlemen of the Jury: At the present time there is considerable agitation for compulsory general finger printing. But the American people, strongly individualistic, instinctively resent the idea. They object to being "herded." Besides finger printing savors of criminality.

In your judicial capacity you have convicted many a criminal on finger-print evidence. The telltale imprint of fingers on a goblet, a pane of glass, or any polished surface has definitely served the ends of justice thousands of times. From this it can be readily understood that as a general measure of identification it is invaluable. It is the only possible means of establishing identity beyond any question. The system is in use in both the army and navy. Immediately upon enlistment the finger prints are taken and sent to Washington for filing. These records have made possible the capture of many a deserter, but, more important still, they have been of incalculable service in identifying the dead and wounded on battlefields. If all ships finger printed their entire passenger lists it would be a comparatively easy matter to check up the victims in case of accident, as well as serving to prevent criminals from traveling undiscovered from continent to continent.

Amnesia—lapse or loss of memory—strikes frequently without warning. Many a victim is never restored to family and friends. Sorrow and anxiety are the inevitable result. It can be easily seen that in such cases finger printing could afford an inestimable service. If the general population were "printed," such cases could be readily cleared up and the patient restored to his home.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, in the first case to come before you on the next calendar, you will consider the problem of an amnesia sufferer who has become the victim of unscrupulous adventurers.

**J**UDGED by his speech, the man was most certainly a college-bred product—probably a professor of some sort in a university. Judged by his appearance, he was just a hobo. He would have passed for a hobo anywhere. He looked as if he might have just crawled over a penitentiary wall. However, closer study showed that the criminal attributes were merely superficial. In spite of dirt and grime, the hands were those of an aristocrat. The skull was of the finest Nordic type—the skull of a thinker, a man of dominating personality. Men with skulls like that were never criminals. He offered T. Ashley, special investigator, a precious problem. Yet he solved it

## Without Publicity

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

**I**N the strange circles in which he moved, Bart McConnell had two aliases—"Little Red Riding Hood" and "Softy." The latter he had earned by virtue of his refusing ever to carry a gun. It was Bart's boast that he always played a winning game; what he wanted he took, but that he never harmed a fly in taking it.

But you can't play a dangerous game safe. No matter how well you know your deck, some day there is bound to turn up

## The Trick Card

By CHARLOTTE DOCKSTADER

**T**WO thousand dollars! Lost! By youth and inexperience to Roxbury Averhill! As a leopard does not change his spots, so Roxbury Averhill, beginning as a crook, was still a crook fifteen years later. "Youth and inexperience" never forgave him, though, incidentally, he had learned his first lesson in the gentle art of gathering in greenbacks.

Revenge is sweet, nor does it become less so with the passage of time. So when opportunity rang the doorbell,

## Clackworthy Coddles a Contract

By CHRISTOPHER B. BOOTH

**S**USPECTS! Three of them. All clever and brainy men. Could the police possibly pick the guilty man? But every crime has its clues. Only a criminal rating one-hundred-per-cent perfect in theory and performance could fail to leave some evidence of his presence, and humanity is not one-hundred-per-cent perfect in any way. Moreover, one of the suspects had

## A Maggot in the Brain

By PAUL ELLSWORTH TRIEM

**V**ANITY was Luke Faberman's outstanding characteristic; he was inordinately proud of his ability as a "sash," which in underworld parlance is a man who specializes in removing barriers. Luke's job, ordinarily, in affairs of any size, was to provide entry to the building about to be plundered. Teamed with an expert cracksman, the combination was hard to beat.

But sometimes it occurs that a job isn't big enough to admit two sharing the profits, so, against his better judgment Luke helps when

## Simon Trapp Pays a Doctor's Bill

By ROY HINDS

BDM-9

# This Night I Live!

THE thunder of hoofbeats came nearer and nearer! Sadi Hafiz swung out from the saddle and caught the terrified girl in his arms.

"This night I live!" he cried hoarsely.

Sadi Hafiz was jubilant. At last he had within his grasp the beautiful English girl for whose possession men had fought and even committed murder!

Who was this girl reared in luxury, the idol of her father—the darling of London society? What was she doing in the desert tent of Sadi Hafiz? What was to be her fate?

And that hideous beggar who was to play such an active part in that desert drama—who was he? Sadi Hafiz did not know—nor the girl—no more than you do now.

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