

THE *Harold Lloyd* BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF MYSTERY, THRILLS AND SURPRISE



DECEMBER, 1921

20 CENTS

Discovery Takes Flesh Almost You Wait!"

May the very first week without medicine,
special foods, starving, or exercise.
Results in 48 hours.

A simple secret has been discovered by a great food specialist which enables you to eat a pound a day off your weight with perfect ease. You will have no bitter self-denials; in fact, many users say they enjoy their meals as never before.

Thousands of men and women who have tried strenuous diets, medicine and violent exercising without results have found this new scientific way a revelation. A pound or more a day from the very start is not too much to look for and with each pound you lose you will note a corresponding increase in energy and general health.

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The whole thing about this wonderful new way to reduce, which makes losing flesh a pleasure instead of a task, is a simple system of food combination discovered by Eugene Christian.

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Nothing Like It Before

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The shadow
of her former
self—result of
the new dis-
covery!

We want you to prove it yourself. We want you to see results; to see your own unnecessary flesh vanish. We want you to see why all starving medicines and strenuous exercising are unnecessary—why this new discovery gets right down to the real reason for your stoutness, and removes it by natural methods.

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The course will be sent in a plain container.

CORRECTIVE EATING SOCIETY, Inc.
Dept. W-112, 43 West 16th Street, New York

Corrective Eating Society, Inc.

Dept. W-112, 43 West 16th Street, New York

You may send me prepaid in plain container Eugene Christian's Course, "Weight Control—the Basis of Health," in 12 lessons. I will pay the postman only \$1.97 (plus postage) in full payment on arrival. If I am not satisfied with it I have the privilege of returning the course to you after a 5-day trial. It is, of course, understood that you are to refund my money if I return the course.

Name
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Street

City State

If you prefer to write a letter, copy the wording of coupon 12 a letter or on a postcard.

THE BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF MYSTERY, THRILLS AND SURPRISE

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Mrs. Garford had "almost stepped on" the body of Harriet Smith.—Page 5

The Prisoner Speaks

(A Complete Mystery Novelette)

By J. Frederic Thorne

CHAPTER I

IN the case of the State of Washington vs. Samuel Smith, charged with the murder of his wife, Hattie Smith, the prosecution has introduced witnesses who swore that:

The defendant, Samuel Smith, was violently jealous of his wife, and on numerous occasions had been heard to threaten to kill each one of several men whom he believed or imagined to have paid too great attention to the said Hattie Smith, described as a beautiful woman by all who knew her.

No direct evidence was adduced to show that he had included his wife in these threats, or coupled her name with those of the men named. This inference, however, was skilfully presented to the jury in the opening address of the prosecuting attorney. The latter further strengthened this idea by his questioning of the witnesses. Statements were elicited from more than one that the belief of the community was, as one expressed it, "that Hattie Smith had better watch her step, or that husband of hers will kill her one of these days during one of his fits of rage."

Nor had it been shown that anyone actually had seen or heard Smith threaten or quarrel with his wife. But again the impression that he had done so was conveyed by the questions asked and the answers elicited by the prosecuting attorney, who displayed great cleverness and legal ability in his handling of the case. In more than one

instance he succeeded in making very substantial mountains of solid threat out of what were, in themselves, molehills of evidence. So favorable was the impression he made, by his masterly performance of his duties, that before the case came to an end he was mentioned as a possible candidate for the governorship in the campaign then pending.

While the evidence tending to show Smith's guilt was entirely circumstantial, it was damning in its weight and directness, in the particularity of all those incriminating details that hammered home a belief which often is fully as strong as that supported by the testimony of eye-witnesses.

To secure a conviction for murder the law requires, as a primal factor, the proof of the *corpus delicti*; that is, "the body of the offense"—the fact that a human being has been murdered. This essential fact being established and evidence submitted sufficient to secure an indictment, the next step is to connect, or attempt to connect, the defendant with the crime proven. Circumstantial evidence, to secure conviction, must exclude every other hypothesis except that of guilt. Time, place, motive and means are established, or sought to be established.

All of these requirements had been met by the prosecuting attorney.

The evidence adduced by the State had set up as facts the following answers to these statutory demands:

As motive, an unreasoning and unfounded jealousy and suspicion, leading

to ungovernable rage beyond all restraint.

The opportunity and place for committing the crime without arousing an alarm, or even immediate suspicion, was provided by the fact that Samuel Smith and his wife lived in a house on the very fringe of the outskirts of the town of L——, some distance from the main route of travel, and with the house of the nearest neighbor fully a quarter of a mile away.

The time, as nearly as it could be determined by the prosecution, was "some time between the hour of 7:15 P. M. of November eleventh and the hour of 1:30 A. M. of November thirteenth," the first named being the hour when the deceased was known to have been seen alive the last time, and the latter the time when her dead body was discovered.

CHAPTER II

THE method and the proof of probable circumstance may be summed up, from the evidence presented, as follows:

On the evening of November eleventh, at or about 7:15 P. M., Samuel Smith and his wife, Hattie, were seen walking along the railroad track, going toward that part of town in which they lived, by several citizens who saw and recognized them. They appeared to be in earnest conversation. While no one overheard any of the words that passed between them, Samuel Smith was seen making "very violent gestures," "waving his hands and arms like he was mad," and "making motions as if he was hitting something." At the same time Hattie Smith seemed, according to each of several versions of her attitude and appearance, to be "depressed," "frightened," "nervous" and "acting like she was crying."

No one could be found who actually had seen either of the Smiths enter their house that evening, together or separately, but: the windows of the Smith residence were observed to be lighted as late as 2 A. M. of the morning of the twelfth, by a neighbor who was up at that hour to attend to her baby, who was ill.

Owing to the comparatively isolated location of their house the Smiths still burned oil lamps. One of these, during the investigation, was found to be burned dry, possibly or probably on the night of the eleventh-twelfth. The item of the lighted window, therefore, had considerable or no significance, as one chose to regard it.

As far as could be ascertained no one had seen either Samuel or Hattie Smith at any time on the twelfth day of the month.

On the forenoon of the thirteenth, at half-past eleven, the chairman of the Foreign Missions Society of St. Luke's Church, a Mrs. Charles Garford, who knew Mrs. Smith by sight, but not personally, called at the Smith residence for the purpose of soliciting a contribution to the missionary fund. If explanation of her subsequent actions is necessary, it is to be found in the earned reputation possessed by Mrs. Garford for being a woman of determined purpose and persistence in the work of solicitation for the benefit of various and varied funds, religious and sociological, educational and reformatory, charitable and—it was said by the unregenerate—uncharitable. When Mrs. Garford issued forth for the purpose of collecting she collected or, to use her own words, "knew the reason why."

Mrs. Garford rang the bell of the Smith residence vigorously. She never used the apologetically light pressure of the unsure petitioner, but always the determined and maintained push that

demands, rather than requests, immediate response and admission. Repeated and prolonged efforts to bring someone to the front door failed.

Thereupon Mrs. Garford, with that rigidity of body and precision of step that bespoke her augmented rather than lessened intent, not to accept subterfuge as adequate means of escape, proceeded around the house to the kitchen door, which she found to be partly open. Accepting this as evidence that Mrs. Smith was at home, and as confirmation of her suspicions that the silence was "on purpose," Mrs. Garford, after knocking once or twice on this rear door, entered the kitchen.

Here unwashed dishes on the sink drainboard aroused that measure of righteous indignation that is expressed only by the good housekeeper—who does not have to do her own work—and added both suspicion and determination. From the kitchen Mrs. Garford pursued her way into the dining-room in search of the mistress of the house and prospective contributor to the evangelization of the heathen of foreign lands. That she was an emissary and representative of Divine Providence Mrs. Garford would have been quick to acknowledge, but that she was personifying grim-mooded Fate would not have occurred to her.

Between the dining-room and living-room of the Smith house were large double doors, of the kind known as "folding," though they never are known to perform that movement, or, sometimes, any other, despite either force or persuasion. These doors were concealed, as is the custom in well-appointed houses in such towns as L——, with curtains, called "portières," of heavy material and ornate design.

Being convinced, so beyond all doubt or question that any idea to the contrary never entered her mind, that both her mission and missions justified the

invasion of another woman's home to any required limit, especially when that woman selfishly attempted to avoid the visitation—or so one would gather from Mrs. Garford's statements—she was about to draw aside these curtains and enter the front room when the toe of her shoe struck something that, her "psychic sensibilities" at once told her, she said, was a human body.

Mrs. Garford had "almost stepped on" the body of Harriet Smith, fully clothed, lying on the floor of the living-room, with the head resting on the small brass running-rail of the folding-doors, which were open for a space of about nine inches, just wide enough to permit the head to lie between them.

The condition of the body, especially that of the head, was such that it required only the momentary glance which Mrs. Garford gave it to show that Mrs. Smith was dead, and had been killed by someone who had indulged in a veritable frenzy of murder.

Omitting the gruesome details described by the coroner's physician in his testimony, it was evident that the weapon used had been both sharp and heavy, possibly, it was at first assumed, an axe. With some such weapon the head had been cut and battered out of all human semblance, and the trunk and limbs hacked and bruised in a score of places. Either the woman put up a strong and prolonged resistance, or, as seemed far more likely, the murderer had not been content with killing his victim, but indulged his anger or hatred to the limit of disfiguration.

The physician's expressed opinion was that death had been practically instantaneous, from some one of the numerous head wounds, and that life had been extinct about thirty-six hours, with the possibility that the period between the murder and the finding of the body might have been longer or

shorter by three or four hours either way.

CHAPTER III

It was only after the house and neighborhood had been searched repeatedly that the weapon which had been used was discovered. This difficulty and delay had been due, as in Poe's "Purloined Letter," to the object sought being concealed by its very obviousness. Credit must be given to the prosecuting attorney, who personally was assisting the sheriff and local police in their investigations, for finding the heavy artillery sabre. It hung in plain view above the mantelpiece of the living-room, immediately under a crayon portrait of Harriet Smith, even this work of "art" not being able to destroy her reputation for fascinating beauty.

The prosecuting attorney had been gazing fixedly at this portrait of the murdered woman, with an expression on his face that might have been inspired by a feeling of the stern retributive justice he was called upon to enforce, or, possibly only of sorrow that such awful tragedy should snuff out the life of so charming a woman. Whatever his personal emotion, it gave way to his official keenness of observation when his eye fell upon the ornament that had reverted to its original purpose, the destruction of human life. This reversion was not apparent, however, as there was nothing in its appearance, as it rested in its usual place upon the wall, to indicate that it had been disturbed since it first had been hung from the picture molding. Justice may be blind, but the prosecuting attorney, as her advocate, was not, even to the possession, it would seem, of a power of penetration not given to ordinary mortals.

When the sheriff attempted to pull

the blade from its scabbard it stuck for a moment and then came free with a jerk. It was at once apparent that the resistance was due to the blood with which it was thickly covered. It was evident that no attempt to remove this had been made by the murderer. He had been either too callous or too hurried to do more than return the sabre to its scabbard and replace it upon the wall. A closer examination also disclosed the fact that the sword was not, as is usual, dull according to army regulations, but had been sharpened to a keen, cutting edge. It was the marked curve of this blade, peculiar to old-style artillery sabres, that had been responsible for the first assumption that the wounds had been made with an axe.

The prosecuting attorney also was responsible for the further discovery, in a closet on the second floor, of a pair of low canvas shoes and a pair of heavy cotton work gloves. The ownership of these articles was acknowledged by Samuel Smith, the accused, when confronted with them during the trial. All four of these pieces of wearing apparel had been so literally soaked with blood that comment was made, by one of the deputy sheriffs, that "he must have dabbled them in it." During the trial it was stated by the prosecution, and not contradicted by the defense, that these had been worn by the murderer—the rubber-soled shoes to enable him to creep upon his victim silently, the gloves to prevent tell-tale finger marks. The failure to destroy these damning pieces of evidence was ascribed to carelessness and misplaced confidence upon the part of the prisoner in being able to prove an alibi.

Nothing further was deemed necessary by the officials to warrant the arrest of Samuel Smith on the charge of having murdered his wife. This arrest accordingly was made on the afternoon of the fourteenth of November, when

the accused was found on the edge of town farthest from his home, but walking toward it.

When apprehended Smith had not been advised of the charge laid against him until after he had been lodged in jail. While offering no resistance, he had earnestly protested against his arrest. He proclaimed both innocence and ignorance of any crime or misdemeanor that would justify it, and demanded that the accusation against him be stated immediately. Through some official misunderstanding or oversight it was not, in fact, until that evening, after dark, that he was told the reason for his arrest. It was then that the prosecuting attorney, having discovered the omission, hastened to the jail to explain in person.

Stifling his natural horror of the deed and abhorrence of the perpetrator of it, the prosecuting attorney had displayed great consideration and humanity in choosing his words and in his manner of speaking when he told Samuel Smith that his crime had been discovered; the body and incriminating evidence found. Indeed, he had been quite severely criticized by a number of the townspeople for being so "mealy-mouthed" in "confronting that Molochian monster with his heinous homicide"—the quotations being from the account published in the weekly newspaper of L—.

The prisoner had added considerably to the resentment felt against him by his manner of receiving the news and his attitude and actions during the interview in jail with the prosecutor.

At first he did not seem to realize the portent of the prosecuting attorney's opening remarks, and, the latter said in describing the incident, pretended not to comprehend that his wife was actually dead. When disgusted with the man's pretensions of ignorance, the Attorney had bluntly stated the bald fact of the mutilated condition in which

the body of Harriet Smith had been found, the prisoner had simulated overpowering shock. He staggered to the cell cot on which he fell, or sat, with his head in his hands. He remained in this attitude, silent, for over a minute, until the representative of the law impatiently ordered him to cease his mummary. Then he sprang to his feet with a single, sharp, inarticulate exclamation, and would have attacked the prosecuting attorney if it had not been for the fortunate presence of the deputy sheriff, who restrained him by force. Subsequent to this one outburst Smith had assumed and maintained that attitude of cool aloofness, apparently almost of indifference, in which he had obstinately persisted until the very end of the trial.

Later, in interviews with the police, newspaper-men and one or two privileged citizens, including the rector of St. Luke's, Smith talked freely of the affair and seemed, if anything, anxious to discuss every possible detail of the case. It was as if he was an interested onlooker, rather than the mortal most vitally concerned in the murder and the proceedings that were the outcome of that crime.

While Smith asserted his innocence and total ignorance of every thing or circumstance connected with the tragedy, except as it had been told to him, he displayed what was deemed to be a morbid, if not ghoulish, curiosity in even the most minute descriptions of every detail connected with it. He questioned and cross-questioned everyone with whom he was allowed to talk, asking them to tell him of the discovery of his wife's body, the wounds, the weapon, how it and the bloody shoes and gloves happened to be found, what was said and by whom, the exact position of the furniture in the living-room when Mrs. Garford, and later the officers, entered, the failure to observe

footprints on the ground outside the house before all chance of identifying them had been obliterated by the crowd of human flies attracted by the smell of blood, and the actions of everyone connected, however remotely, with the investigation and his own indictment.

Unlike most men in his predicament, Smith was not only willing, but eager, to talk of the crime in all its phases and consequences, not excepting his own danger of conviction and execution as the possible or probable last act of the tragedy. For this freedom of speech and openly displayed curiosity he was even more severely criticized than are those more "natural" prisoners who take refuge in sullen silence. "Hyena," "cold-blooded snake," "degenerate," "Bluebeard" (ignoring the lack of plurality of wives and crimes), and "blood-thirsty butcher" were some of the mildest of the epithets applied to the accused by the indignant residents of L—, if not of houses of glass.

The feeling of the community, which extended to the surrounding countryside, ran so high against this occupant of the county jail, which formed the basement of the courthouse, that more than once lynching was suggested and, on one occasion, nearly put into effect. On the occasion alluded to, it had only been by the fearless observance of his duty in upholding the majesty and fairness of the law, assumed, in the absence of the sheriff, by the prosecuting attorney, that the prisoner escaped summary and extra-legal execution by the mob. Suddenly appearing before the jail this mob had demanded that the man be turned over to them, with threats of storming the jail if any resistance was made to their entry and seizure of this creature who had so outraged the quiet orderliness and morality of the town's existence.

As good fortune would have it, for the honor of the county and the im-

partial administration of justice, the prosecuting attorney happened to arrive at the jail in time to appeal to the respect for law and its orderly processes of those citizens assembled. And, when the mob refused to heed his exhortations to disperse, accompanied by his solemn promise that he would see that justice was done in full measure, to follow this appeal by a threat to shoot the first man who attempted to mount the courthouse steps.

It is probable that it was more the fear that he would carry out his threat rather than respect for the law or confidence in his promise of justice being enforced that finally prevailed upon the assemblage and induced them to relinquish their purpose. The prosecuting attorney was known to be a man who would face any danger for the accomplishment of a purpose he had in mind, or to fulfil any threat or promise he made.

CHAPTER IV

SMITH's story, which was received with the sneering incredulity its weakness and implausibility deserved, briefly stated, was as follows:

On the evening of November eleventh, when he had been seen walking along the railroad track with his wife, he was telling her of a fishing trip he once had taken up the North Fork. His gestures had been those of explanation of how he had hooked so large a trout that he had been forced to use a club to finally land it. His wife, he said, had been neither frightened nor crying, as her actions had been interpreted to indicate, but, on the contrary, she had been laughing at what she conceived to be the extravagance and exaggeration of his account.

He had told her the story at that time, because he had arranged to start that same evening, of the eleventh, for

another fishing trip to the same part of the river. He did, in fact, according to his statement, leave his home less than an hour later—that is, about eight P. M.—in order that he might reach the desired location in time to start fishing by dawn of the twelfth, as he succeeded in doing.

He fished, he claimed, all that day and all day of the thirteenth. He started home the morning of the fourteenth, reaching L—— about two P. M., the time he was arrested.

He accounted for his empty hands when he returned by saying that he had stopped fishing when he did, having intended to stay at least another day, due to the fact that, while wading waist deep in the river, he had slipped on a smooth stone, fallen, and lost hold of his rod, which had been carried away by the stream. The creel of fish he already had caught, his hat, book of flies and other tackle also had been lost at the same time, owing to his unexpected immersion. He had nearly lost his life as well by reason of the swiftness of the stream and the depth of the pool into which he had stumbled.

Certain dark stains on his corduroy coat and trousers he explained by stating that they were not only months old, but had been made by the blood of fish and game. Under other circumstances this might have been easily credible, since Smith was known to be an ardent sportsman. But the prosecuting attorney reported that, having sent the garments to a chemist for examination of the stains, they were found to have been due to human blood.

To the essentials outlined in the foregoing résumé there was added a large number of contributory details against Smith. None of these minor incidents was incriminating in itself, but, taken as a whole, they added considerable weight to the case for the State as assembled and presented by the prosecut-

ing attorney. They included depositions, affidavits and testimony as to actions, words and looks used by Smith on different occasions, extending over a period of several years previous to the tragedy. This history covered, in fact, almost the entire time that Smith and his wife had lived in L——, and even reverting to their residence in another State. These details, while without direct connection with the crime, were skilfully introduced by the prosecution to show that the accused was a man of violent temper, easily aroused; that he was of a suspicious as well as jealous disposition; that he was prone to imagine injuries and insults where none existed or was intended; and that he had small regard for life, animal or human.

It is true that the testimony offered as being proof of the qualities or faults in the character of the prisoner might, with equal reason and justice, be brought against any man of normal impulses and disposition, wrenched, as they were, out of the context of the years during which the alleged incidents occurred. It is more than probable that out of the life of anyone of us there could be taken disconnected circumstances, actions and speeches that, placed in series, and bound together by implication, would convict us of being potential if not actual criminals, or demonstrate that we should be placed in close confinement as hopelessly insane. In life, as in literature, context often supplies the basis or the belief of illusion created.

The only unusual feature of the trial that made its progress especially different from scores or hundreds of other trials for murder was the unique and astonishing refusal of the accused to accept legal counsel for the conduct of his defense upon so serious a charge. Despite the urgings of the Court and the insistence of the prosecuting attor-

ney, the latter making his protests on the basis of his proclaimed desire that all the rights of the defendant should be fully conserved and safeguarded, Smith insisted upon and finally succeeded in establishing his right to conduct his own case without aid from anyone, and so did conduct it.

This characteristic expression of strong individuality, or, it may have been, belief in the righteousness of his cause as he himself saw it, was not only the cause of widespread adverse comment, but also was made the occasion, by the prosecution, for further hammering home of the idea of the prisoner's obstinacy and erraticism.

The prosecuting attorney, as a good lawyer, did not fail to make capital of the additional fact that the accused declined to cross-examine the State's witnesses, or call to the stand witnesses of his own. Nor of the further innovation of the defense also allowing the entire case for the State to be presented to the jury without so much as a single objection made, exception taken, or comment on any of the proceedings during the days that the trial consumed, until the last.

Not even during the selection of the jury did Smith avail himself of his legal constitutional rights of examination or challenge. He gave every evidence of entire indifference to the personnel of the body of men who had in their hands the decision as to his innocence or guilt, his freedom or his execution. With perfunctory nods or formal expressions of acceptance he permitted the prosecuting attorney to, practically, choose his own jury, displaying a lack of interest in their personalities or possible prejudices that could not have been greater had he been no more than a mere spectator in the courtroom.

When the prosecuting attorney closed the case for the State with a truly mas-

terly summing up, it was felt by many who were in attendance at the trial that the jury would render a verdict of murder in the first degree without leaving their seats, or, at least, that they might as well do so, except for the formality of retiring for wholly unnecessary deliberation and casting of a ballot.

CHAPTER V

THIS, then, was the situation when Samuel Smith, his manner cool, his bearing confident, his voice low-pitched, but vibrant with feeling, his attitude that of deep respect for the Court and deference to the jury, rose to his feet, saying:

"May it please Your Honor, Foreman and gentlemen of the jury: It has been said that the man who pleads his own case has a fool for a client. I presume that the converse is equally true that the client has his equal in that respect for a counsellor. Possibly, long experience in courts has proven the correctness of that opinion. Right or wrong, wise or foolish, I have wilfully taken whatever risk is involved in the double disqualification for proper presentation of my claims before you.

"When the Court offered to appoint an attorney to defend me I declined for several reasons. I did not have enough money to employ a good lawyer. Emphatically, I did not want to risk my life with one of lesser ability. However earnest and industrious, any but the best might place me in additional jeopardy through his inexperience or incompetence. Nor was I willing to accept counsel paid by the State. With the inadequate fee allowed under such circumstances, even a good lawyer could not feel that deep and abiding interest which I conceive my defense both deserves and needs. Not seeking the burden in the face of the cumulative evidence that has been presented

against me, and poorly paid, he would have been apt, however conscientious he might be, to go through with this trial in a perfunctory manner. That risk would be too great for me to assume. My circumstance is perilous enough as it is. I must avoid every possible weakness. I must compel every element of strength.

"I say this with all due respect to His Honor, the Court, and the legal profession which he enlightens and advances as a member, and for which I have the highest admiration and most profound regard.

"I have studied for the law myself, but, possibly fortunately for any clients I might have had, I failed to pass the necessary examination for admission to the Bar. Therefore, if I am guilty of technical errors in the conduct of my defense, or overstep the bounds of my rights or propriety, I trust that His Honor will bear with and correct me, in so far as his position on the bench permits. I hope also that you gentlemen will be lenient in your judgment of my mistakes due to ignorance. Other consideration, except that for truth and justice, I neither ask nor desire.

"No one can know this case better than I, because no one else has or can have the same vital interest in understanding its essentials or the significance of its details. I am not, as a lawyer would be, interested in winning it for the protection of my client, my own reputation and my earned fees. I literally am pleading for both my life and my liberty. And more. I am fighting for the vindication of my honor and standing amongst my fellowmen.

"I am accused, gentlemen of the jury, of a most horrible crime. A crime for which, were I guilty, mere hanging would be wholly inadequate punishment. Had I committed this abhorrent act, then the ancient rack and wheel, or tearing asunder by wild horses, would

be more nearly fitting as expiation. But no expiation is possible in this world for such a deed. Nothing the law can inflict, nothing that I could suffer, would serve to lighten the darkness of such a crime by the depth of a shadow.

"I say this soberly and with full realization of what it means should you gentlemen believe me guilty and so render your verdict. I say to you seriously that, were I in your place, and believed me guilty of this crime, I would, the law permitting, wreak some such terrible vengeance upon so base and despicable a wretch as the man who had so stained his hands and soul.

"I am not guilty. I thank God I can look you in the face and say that. I am not guilty as charged, and expect to prove my innocence to you beyond the peradventure of a doubt.

"You have heard the testimony of the witnesses for the prosecution. I am not blaming them for what they have said. I consider them honest men and women, laboring under a most awful and mistaken conception of the truth. I think they testified according to their understanding and belief. But I know that misunderstanding to be contrary to the facts. I know that belief is based on their inability to know those facts. The facts have not been presented to them, either before or during this trial. The facts have not been laid before you, gentlemen of the jury. Even I do not know all of them, much as I know. Only one man does. I mean that he shall tell.

"I shall not, however, cross-examine these well-meaning but deluded witnesses who have done their best, and worst, to convict me. I am not sufficiently skilful in the ways and art of the clever advocate to do so successfully. I have no desire to impugn their motives or question their intent. There is a marked distinction, which I want

to preserve, between discrediting the testimony and discrediting the witness. I shall allow their testimony to stand without other question than that with which I challenge the entirety of the indictment against me.

"You will have noticed also, since your attention has been called to it by the learned counsellor for the State, that I took no exceptions, in either the technical legal sense or the literal, to anything that was said by any of these witnesses, or by the prosecuting attorney. Statements have been made in the guise of evidence that I do not think are admissible according to legal procedure. But I do not care to argue that point, or take any advantage of it. The truth shall prevail. I have no intention or desire to appeal this case to a higher court, either State or Federal. If you find me guilty as charged, the only court to which I shall carry my appeal is that Higher One, before which we all must appear sooner or later to answer for our conduct here below.

"I have, in fact, no longer any incentive to live or cling to this existence. Merely to die would be a welcome release from the abyss of sorrow in which I am steeped. My wife made life a joy and a blessing. Without her to share it, the balance is of neither worth nor moment. But, for her sake rather than for my own, I am not content to go hence by a shameful route and branded as a criminal.

"Before that Higher Court I shall have no fear of a possible verdict of guilty, for there only the truth shall be known. I am not afraid of the truth. Nor am I afraid of that same truth in this Court, but only of its being undiscovered or misunderstood.

"I cannot know what impression has been made upon your minds by the testimony to which you have listened. Being men of common sense and actuated by emotions common to all of us,

I cannot see how, at this time, you can be anything but most violently prejudiced against me. Everything, so far, has been conceived, planned and presented with the sole idea of creating such a prejudice in your minds.

"Understand me clearly—I am not criticizing or blaming the prosecuting attorney for anything he has done or said here in this courtroom. Both you and I must presume that he is an honorable man, and performing his sworn duty as he sees that duty. We have heard no word or evidence to the contrary. He, we should have every reason to suppose, honestly and impartially believes me guilty of the crime of murder as charged. If that were not so he could not, as an upright man and a trusted officer of the law, have brought that charge against me. If he did not so believe in my guilt 'to the exclusion of every other reasonable hypothesis' any reputable attorney, any decent man, would have refused to conduct this case on behalf, and in the name, of the people whose public servant he is.

"I have, as I said, been placed before you in the most unfavorable light possible. I have been made to appear as a being less than human and more brutish than the brutes. I have been painted in colors that would make a wolf blush and a hyena hide his head in shame, that would cause a snake to shun my society and a tiger to shudder at my ferocity.

"Yet I not only hope, I expect to change all this, to remove this prejudice now in your minds, to wash away this stain that reveals me in such loathsome guise. I intend to convince you of my innocence and show you that I have been most abominably and cruelly misjudged and misnamed—whether by accident or design remains to be seen. And I shall do this, not by an array of witnesses in rebuttal of those who already have appeared upon the stand,

but by a single one upon whose testimony, reluctant though it will be, I shall rest my defense. Nor is this witness even a friend of mine. Rather he is my dearest enemy. His fondest wish would be my undoing. If to desire a man's death were enough I should be rotting in my grave long before this charge had been brought against me and you would never have been called to the solemn duty of judging me.

"Your honor, I respectfully pray that Randolph Raggan be sworn and placed upon the stand as a witness in this case."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the witness called by the defense had been sworn and taken his seat on the stand, not without a murmur of surprise and questioning comment rippling over the crowd that packed the room, and after the usual preliminary questions, Smith proceeded to examine him as follows:

"You are too well known, Mr. Raggan, to make it necessary for me to put the usual questions regarding your identity, place of residence and occupation, except for the purposes of court record. The jury is tired, as we all are, and will appreciate, I hope, my desire to shorten the remaining part of their labors as much as possible. To that end I promise to be brief, to limit my questions to essential points only, and, if at all possible, to omit any summing up for the defense upon the completion of your examination. If you will be equally brief and to the point in replying to my questions I do not think that this case need take many more minutes.

"Did you, Mr. Raggan, know the deceased, Harriet Smith?"

"Yes."

"How well—to what degree did your acquaintance or friendship extend?"

"Very slight. A casual acquaintance only."

"You had spoken to her?"

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Oh, once or twice, possibly three or four at the most."

"On what subject or subjects?"

"I cannot remember. Nothing more than the ordinary civilities of chance meetings."

"Where were these meetings?"

"On the street, in stores, where I might meet anyone."

"You never met, talked with her alone?"

"Never."

"You are positive?"

"Absolutely."

"Did you ever call at the home of Harriet Smith to talk with her?"

"No."

"Or for any other purpose?"

"No."

"Have you ever been inside the Smith residence, except in your official capacity, at the time of the investigation of the murder of Harriet Smith?"

"No."

"When and where did you last see the deceased?"

"I saw her body at the undertak—"

"Never mind that. When did you last see her alive?"

"Alive? Let me see. I cannot say with any degree of certainty. I do not recall having seen her for several weeks, possibly a month or more, prior to her—death."

"You are sure that you did not talk with her at any time immediately preceding or on the date of November eleventh?"

"I did not."

"Did you at any time carry on a correspondence with the deceased Harriet Smith, wife of Samuel Smith, the defendant in this case?"

"No."

"Did you ever receive letters from her?"

"No."

"Not a single letter?"

"No."

"Did you ever write letters to her?"

"No."

"Not even one?"

"Not even one."

"Your eyesight is good, Mr. Raggan?"

"Yes, reasonably so."

"You do not have to use glasses to read?"

"No."

"Nor to distinguish and identify ordinary objects at the normal distance for reasonably good eyesight?"

"No. I enjoy normal vision."

"I show you these notes that I have been making. Can you, at this distance, distinguish the handwriting sufficiently to recognize it if you were familiar with its individual characteristics?"

"What are you driving at?"

"Never mind what I am 'driving at'—just now. Answer my question, please. Can you see this writing clearly?"

"I suppose so—yes."

"Good. I now show you a letter written in an even larger and more distinct hand. Can you see the writing?"

"I ref—. Yes, I can see the writing."

"Do you recognize it?"

"How do you mean, 'recognize' it?"

"Is it the handwriting of anyone you know?"

"Possibly. I cannot be sure."

"Are your eyes troubling you at this moment, Mr. Raggan?"

"No. What of it? Of course they are not."

"I am relieved to hear that your sight is not suddenly impaired; that they have not suffered any sudden shock. I thought—but, to save time and so not weary the jury unduly, I now step closer to you and hold this letter as near

to you as I can without placing it within your reach. Now can you recognize the handwriting—sufficiently to tell the jury who, in your opinion, might have written this letter?"

"It looks familiar."

"How familiar? Whose handwriting, with which you are familiar, does it resemble?"

"It—it looks like my own."

"Ah, now we are progressing. Did you, Randolph Raggan, write this letter which I hold in my hand?"

"I don't know."

"You do not know whether you wrote a letter in a hand that 'looks like' your own? In a hand of markedly individual characteristics, such as yours?"

"I could not say that I did or did not write it—not without reading it. It might be a forgery."

"You are right, Mr. Raggan, it *might* be a forgery, but it is not, as I think you will acknowledge sooner or later. To prove a forgery, as to prove a murder, it generally is necessary to prove a motive for the crime. And I cannot conceive of anyone having any motive to *forge* the contents of this letter. So again I ask you: Did you write this letter?"

"It isn't signed with my name."

"Your eyesight, Mr. Raggan, is truly remarkable. I have not shown you the end of this letter, purposely did not do so, and yet you are able to say that it is not signed with your name. How do you know that it is not—supposing your assertion is correct?"

"I didn't sign it."

"Oh! So you recognize this letter, this particular and individual letter, with sufficient certainty to remember that you refrained from signing it?"

"Nothing of the sort! You are twisting my meaning!"

"If I am it is without intent, and I beg your pardon. But you have not replied to my question."

"Some of your questions are so involved that I cannot answer them. I don't know what you are driving at."

"That is the second time I have earned the same rebuke from you, Mr. Raggan. If you do not know what I am 'driving it'—though I think you do only too well for your own peace of mind—I will make it most clear very soon. Meanwhile I ask you again: Do you recognize this letter as having been written by you and recall the circumstance with sufficient clarity to remember that you did not sign it?"

"I don't remember anything at all about it."

"Then why did you declare, without having seen the ending, that it was without signature?"

"I guessed it wasn't."

"On what previous knowledge did you base that 'guess'?"

"I wouldn't be such a fool as to sign that kind of a letter."

"Another step ahead. You 'wouldn't be such a fool as to sign' such a letter as this, you say. How do you know what kind of a letter it is?"

"I can see—I can read part of it from here."

"So? We are getting on. A little more and the end of our long journey should be in sight. Will you kindly repeat to the jury that portion of the letter that you can read?"

"No."

"You refuse?"

"Of course I refuse."

"Why?"

"You have not proved that I wrote that letter."

"That is for the jury to decide, not for you or me, Mr. Raggan. But, if you did not write it, why should you refuse to read it aloud—such portion or portions as you can decipher?"

"It—the jury would receive a wrong impression."

"Because you read it, or because you wrote it?"

"Because they would think I wrote it."

"Why should they think you wrote it, if you swear that you did not do so? You do swear that you did not write it, don't you?"

"No."

"'No' what? Which fact is it that you are denying?"

"Both."

"You deny having written the letter and deny also that denial? I am afraid, Mr. Raggan, that the jury will fail to understand just what you are intending to swear to. Come, for the sake of the jury and brevity, I will go back to first principles and reword my question. Did you, Randolph Raggan, write this letter that I intend to offer in evidence, and which I again show you?"

"I refuse to answer."

"On what grounds?"

"Insufficient identification."

"Then it is at least possible that you might have written this letter—otherwise you would have no hesitancy in denying its authorship?"

"Anything is 'possible.'"

"You are right, Mr. Raggan, though I had thought, previous to this case, that there were certain things beyond human possibilities—such a letter as this, for instance, such a sequel as followed the writing of this letter, for another. But I will proceed to my next question. Why do you refuse to repeat aloud in this courtroom the part of this letter which you are able to read?"

"Because—because it would have a tendency to incriminate and degrade me."

"The letter—or the reading of it? But—never mind. I will not force the issue. I am more interested, and I am sure the gentlemen of the jury are likewise, to have you identify the hand-

writing of this letter as being yours. Is it or is it not?"

"I said before that it looks like mine."

"Sufficiently like your handwriting that, if it should be a forgery, as you previously suggested, it would be a very clever one?"

"Yes."

"I see that you have your fountain pen in your pocket, Mr. Raggan. May I look at it? Thank you. . . . Your Honor, I offer this pen belonging to Randolph Raggan in evidence. . . .

"This pen is your personal property, Mr. Raggan?"

"It is."

"I now ask you if this letter in question is or is not written in the same color of ink—a peculiar and unusual shade of green—as that contained in this pen?"

"I suppose so. Something like it."

"'Something like it' is not sufficiently definite, Mr. Raggan. You do not happen to be color blind, do you?"

"No. I told you before there is nothing the matter with my eyes."

"Thank you. That is one thing I wanted to establish. Then—here—I will make several marks on the margin of this letter, using the pen that is your property. Are these marks and the body of the letter written with the same color of ink?"

"Yes."

"It is a peculiar shade of ink, isn't it?"

"I don't know that it is. There must be plenty like it."

"Do you know of anyone who uses the same color of ink—habitually, as I will be able to show, if necessary, that you have?"

"No."

"Then, if the letter is written in a hand that is a facsimile of your own, and with ink that is the same as that which you use, and which no one else that you know uses habitually, and the

pen was a heavy stub as this belonging to you, and you recognized the contents sufficiently to 'guess' that you 'would not be such a fool as to sign' a letter of this kind—if these are the facts which they appear to be, will you kindly tell the jury, basing your opinion on your wealth of experience in similar cases, who could have written this letter if you did not?"

"I told you I don't know anything about it. You are conducting this examination, not I."

"Indeed! I had an impression exactly to the contrary, as to who was conducting this case, Mr. Raggan. But, if you persist in denying all knowledge of this letter or its author I now will offer it in evidence and, with the Court's permission, read it to the jury, allowing them to decide who wrote it. . . .

"This letter, gentlemen of the jury, reads, in part, as—. But before I read it I will ask the indulgence of the Court, to allow me to take the stand for a few moments, that I may state, under oath, how this letter came into my possession and some of the attendant circumstances. I am endeavoring to avoid the calling of other witnesses, though I am prepared to do so, to substantiate my testimony, if His Honor so directs. . . . I would request, Your Honor, that Randolph Raggan be instructed not to leave this courtroom, as I shall recall him to the stand when I have made my statement regarding this letter. . . .

"This letter was handed to me by Mrs. Charles Garford. She has made affidavit that she found it on the floor of the living-room of my home at the time she discovered the body of my wife, that it was partly hidden by the dress of the deceased, and that she, Mrs. Garford, thought the deceased had it in her hand when she was killed. Mrs. Garford asserts that she had allowed her curiosity to overcome her dis-

cretion to such an extent that she carried the letter home with her and read it, and then was too frightened, at first, to bring it to the attention of the authorities, as she should have done, as, from my standpoint, it is very fortunate that she did not do.

"Viewing her action from the strictly technical point of the law there can be, of course, no excuse for this suppression of vitally important evidence on the part of Mrs. Garford. But for the ultimate ends of justice she could not have done better. She should not have taken the letter in the first place. Having taken and read it she should have, as a matter of duty and right, turned it over to the Prosecuting Attorney. But again I repeat that her technical error in act and judgment was, possibly, the result of that Divine guidance upon which the just administration of the law so often must depend. 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.'

"When I was arrested and indicted for the murder of my wife—the wife whom I loved and love more than I do my hopes for present or future salvation—Mrs. Garford was moved by her conscience, she told me, to go to the rector of her church and to him confess what she both had done and refrained from doing.

"Again I will state that, if necessary, I will have both Mrs. Garford and the Reverend Mr. Sweyd come upon this stand and repeat under oath, in their own words, the facts that I now am stating as these two persons told them to me.

"Moved by his advice, Mrs. Garford consented to visit me in the county jail in company with the rector. There Mrs. Garford told me her story and, rightly or wrongly, gave me this letter which I have retained in my possession ever since. Mrs. Garford recognized the handwriting, knew the author, as

did the Reverend Mr. Sweyd, because they were intimately acquainted with both. The man who wrote this letter was—is—one of the vestrymen of St. Luke's church, and in that capacity had written many times to each of them, without failing, those times, to sign his letters.

"I now will read this letter, which, though without signature, as correctly stated by Mr. Raggan, is directed, on this envelope which contained it, to 'Mrs. Harriet Smith.' There is no other address given. Simply the name, 'Mrs. Harriet Smith.' The woman who was so brutally murdered. My wife.

"It is probable, though that can be only pure supposition, that it was delivered by hand, either that of the one who wrote it or a messenger of his. I have not been able to discover who carried it on its fateful mission. That it was written, sent and received is enough. Enough to prevent the guilty man from escaping the consequences of this and his subsequent acts. A grave lapse from his habitual caution, one of those errors which even the keenest minds make—to their undoing.

"I also will state under oath, Your Honor and gentlemen of the jury, that I have positive knowledge of the fact that this letter, while the last, was by no means the first, written to my wife by the same man. It was, in fact, only one of many that I saw with my own eyes in the possession of my wife.

"Great stress has been laid in this trial upon what has been called my 'ungovernable temper,' and my threats to do great bodily harm, to kill men who I conceived to be paying unwelcome attentions to my wife. In so far as that refers to one man, it is true. I did threaten to kill him if he continued his insulting persecution. That man was Randolph Raggan. Had I seen this last letter before I left town on the night of the eleventh of November, it

is possible, even probable, that I now would be undergoing trial for his murder instead of for the murder of the woman he so vilely wronged in thought and act.

"It has been alleged that the fishing trip which I took was a subterfuge, a 'blind.' In one sense it was. I had brooded over the letters received by my wife from this man until my temper was getting beyond my control. I went away, ostensibly to fish, but really to wrestle with myself—to have a quiet place in which to 'take stock' of myself and the situation, to decide upon what I should do.

"Consider, gentlemen, the conflicting emotions that you would have felt had you been in my place. It is a serious matter to deliberately ponder the killing of a man. Sometimes, as in this instance, not because of the man, nor because of yourself or the penalty you may suffer, but because of the effect on innocent others. I will not inflict upon you the wearisome rounds of the conflict I fought with myself, the countless pros and cons of the silent argument there in the woods by the river. A soul in torment is not a sight for the eyes of others. Enough that I won the battle, that I started back home determined to find some other means short of killing to put an end to the persecutions of Randolph Raggan.

"I knew and know that my wife was a good woman, pure-minded almost to the point of innocence, more faithful to me and my interests than I could be myself. She bitterly resented the approaches of this man, his attempts to supplant me in her affections. But even I was not able to appreciate the full worth and strength of Harriet Smith's nobility and purity—qualities which, gentlemen, cost her her life, a price which I am sure she paid willingly rather than the one with which she could have bought her safety.

"I might dwell upon this theme for hours, contrasting the whiteness of the woman with the blackness of the man—but I must hasten to my conclusion, trusting to your own sentiments for that understanding which any words of mine would fail to convey.

"I imagine, gentlemen of the jury, that, knowing I was to be out of town for several days—and I have reason for my belief that he did know it—this man went to my house with the hope and intention of accomplishing one of two things—or both: The final accomplishment of his evil desires, and—or—the recovery of the letters which he had written to my wife and which he knew she had kept.

"In the latter purpose he succeeded partially, but not entirely. Not entirely because, by some intervention of providential justice, he overlooked, or was prevented by some means from securing, this one and the most important of all those letters. I say 'the most important.' I had read the others before I left home. They contained no threats. This one undoubtedly was delivered the evening of the eleventh, and that delivery closely followed by the writer in person. No one now alive, except the man himself, can know all the circumstances that preceded and took place during that clandestine call. But that he murdered my wife, arranged the 'evidence' that he planned would convict me of his own crime, and has done everything in his power since then to sacrifice my life on the same satanic altar upon which he slew her—of this I am as sure as if I had been his shadow.

"This, then, gentlemen of the jury, is the letter in which Randolph Raggan has written his own indictment in advance of his final crime:

"'Most Beautiful of Women'—it begins, and that is the only worthy statement in it—I have learned that S. is

to be away on a fishing trip for several days. When such an opportunity is offered us, why throw it away needlessly for the sake of the idle conventions of a society to which you are superior and which I despise? You cannot doubt my overpowering love for you, my passionate devotion beside which that of S. is cold, pale and perfunctory. To such a woman as you, my Queen, a husband is a drag and a worse than useless incumbrance. You deserve a lover with the fire that I bring to the altar of your worship. . . .'

"There is much more in this same strain, gentlemen, but with your permission, and since you will have the opportunity of reading it for yourselves, it is with relief that I will skip to that portion of the letter where the passion is of a different, though no more lovely kind. The concluding paragraph reads:

"I have reason to believe that you have not destroyed my previous letters to you, according to my request and instructions. When I call this evening I warn you that unless you return them

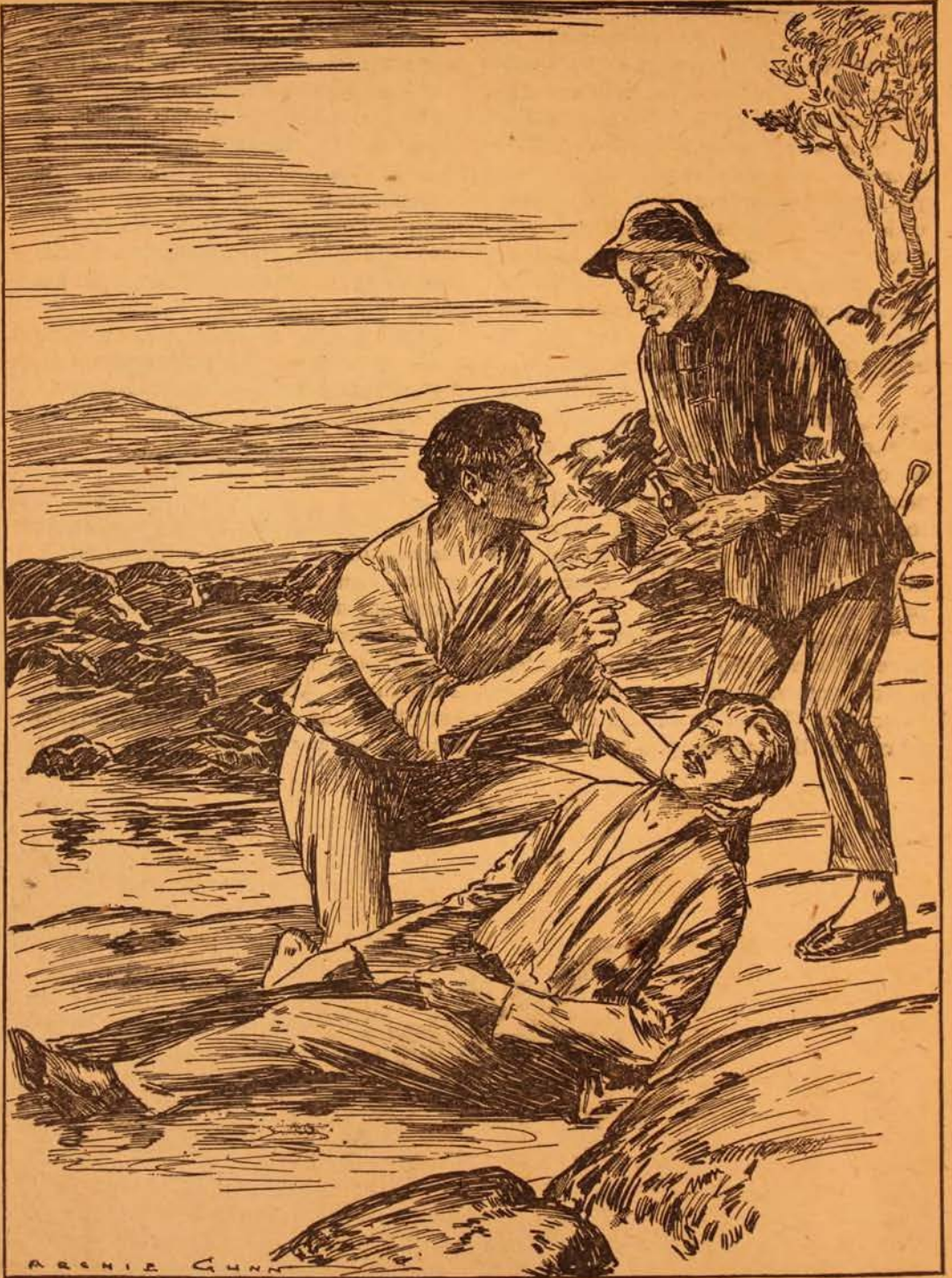
to me, or allow me to destroy them then and there, I will take whatever measures are necessary. You might as well be a good girl and make up your mind not to cause me any trouble in getting either of the things I want and am coming after. I am in the habit of having my own way and *this time I mean to do so at any cost*. So be prepared. Tonight I am going to take the best thing in this world—or you are going to get the worst.'

"I now ask, Your Honor, that the previous witness, the only one except myself that I have called to testify in my defense, be recalled—"

CHAPTER VII

THE defendant's closing remarks, in the case of the State of Washington vs. Samuel Smith, never were heard, as at that moment the almost breathless quiet of the courtroom was shattered by the loud explosion of a revolver shot and Prosecuting Attorney Randolph Ragan took the stand before a higher court to answer for his crimes.





From some place the Chink produced a bottle of alcohol.—Page 28

Ananias Ltd.

By Elizabeth Dudley

I

THERE are thousands of tons of gold locked up in God's eternal mountains which men will never see nor spend. But that fact doesn't keep them from trying. There is something about yellow metal which turns heads, transforms morals and grows devils in the soil of saints. Merely an instance of this is the case of the Hectopus mine, with which I, as a Post Office Inspector, was well acquainted for the space of a month.

I had been called into the case on a complaint made by Jedidiah Quinot, of Boston, an esteemed gentleman of his community, who shed real tears, nearly wore out his glasses in polishings and blew his nose prodigiously as he told me the story of his suspicions concerning his harum-scarum nephew—one Herbert Cryder, whom he feared had not only hopelessly involved himself but disgraced the family in a gold mine speculation.

After I had called upon Cryder, a few days later, I did not blame the old gentleman for his suspicions. If there ever was an outfit which bore all the marks of a fraud it was this Hectopus mine concern. As usual, it was quartered in the most expensive office building in the city, and the boss himself was twice as hard to see as the President of the United States. Inside the usual railing, with a boy at the gate, were a dozen stenographers copying names out of telephone directories or pages out of books—anything to keep them busy.

In a room opening off that was Dick Garrity, one of the shrewdest mine swindlers in America, with his name brazenly on the door and the title of "General Manager." In the front office—when I finally got there—was the most impressive and expensive set of mahogany office furniture I have ever seen, and behind the big desk in the center of the room a clean-cut chap of about thirty, bronzed, smiling, devil-may-care and a most disarming way of waving a visitor to a chair and forcing him to take two cigars at once.

And this was Herbert Cryder, a disgrace to his family, a worry to his old friends, suspected by the Government of being a thief, facing the world and Atlanta prison not only with a smile but with a laugh that refused to stay bottled.

I had met many crooks but this was a new type, so new that I am afraid I made a poor job of my role as a prospective investor. As to that I do not know to this day whether he really suspected my errand or whether it was only a part of his plan when he laughed at my proposal to invest a few thousand dollars in the stock of the Hectopus Mining and Exploration Co., slapped me on the back and literally pushed me out into the hall with a third cigar clutched in my hand.

Whatever he thought, he had left me no recourse but to go back to old Jedidiah with such information as I had been able to pick up on the outside, and the two of us spent the evening going over the cards we held

in our hands and speculating on what the young scapegrace held in his.

That he was the most brazen young swindler outside a penitentiary, I was convinced. Jedidiah did not have to tell me that. Those girls in his outer office—twelve of them busy when there was not work enough for two—were the plainest sort of bait for the unwary. Dick Garrity, I knew, would be lost with an honest concern; he knew so much about mining that he wouldn't accept a gold piece in change at a bank. Then that mahogany office; it was far too gorgeous to be true. And as a crowning piece of effrontery, on the wall just behind Cryder's chair, was a picture—a painting at that—of an Indian spearing a fish from a little platform above a raging torrent. I had not noticed what kind of fish it was, but to me it looked like a sucker and I gasped almost aloud as I grasped the daring nerve of the laughing man who had placed it there.

Herbert Cryder, I had found out, came of one of the best families in New England. Mixed in his blood somewhere must have been a strong element of the old-time whalers or sea captains of some sort because even as a boy he had been a daring, adventurous young devil. The more conservative expressed the opinion that it was God's mercy that his parents were dead, and even those who were still on good terms with him socially threw up their hands when his name was mentioned in casual conversation.

Old Jedidiah had told me the young man had a long police record, and I wasted a whole day before I found out that this consisted of a score of arrests for crimes ranging from the theft of a barber's striped pole to an unproved charge of driving an automobile while intoxicated.

I must have shown my disgust at such evidence because Quinot went to great pains to explain to me that his nephew was such a skilful liar that it had been impossible to convict him of numerous grave offenses of which he had undoubtedly been guilty, but I could not pin him down to just what these were.

Young Cryder, it seemed, according to Jedidiah, was absolutely untrustworthy where facts were concerned and a lover of mischief to such an extent that serious trouble had always been predicted for him.

"Why, do you know," said the old man, "that scapegrace disappeared two years or so ago for six months and came back with a most remarkable tale about elephant shooting in East Africa. At my own expense I cabled to Nairobi and found he had never been there. Then what did he do? He produced two of the finest elephant tusks you ever saw and the foot of one of the beasts mounted as a humidior. Furthermore, he had the impudence to present the humidior to me—to me who had exposed him. There it is on the mantel. In my own club he met and talked for two hours with a man who had spent years in East Africa without making a single slip."

"Maybe he *was* there," I ventured.

"He certainly was not," Jedidiah replied with some heat. "After I had been laughed at to such an extent that I did not dare visit my club, I investigated still further. He had spent those six months in Paris. He bought the elephant trophies by cable in London after I had questioned his story, and he spent a month reading every book on Africa and elephant hunting he could find.

"He isn't any mere fibber, Mr. Guernsey. When he sets out to tell a lie, he makes a thorough job of it."

With the picture of that wonderful office fresh in my mind, I was of the opinion that there was much strength in Jedidiah's opinion.

The Hectopus Mining and Exploration Co., it seemed, was in somewhat the same category as the elephant trophies. The story of the mine had followed another of the young man's more or less regular but mysterious absences. This time he had not told where he had been, but lent an air of mystery to his recent experiences. For three or four weeks after his reappearance at home he had gone about clad in laced boots and wearing a tourist-style Stetson, khaki riding breeches and a Norfolk jacket. His face was bronzed, his hands calloused and he had cultivated a drawl that might have been acquired in Georgia, Arizona or the Blue Ridge mountains. To all inquiries as to where he had been, he had replied by placing a finger to his lips, glancing furtively about and whispering the one word—"Gold."

According to Quinot, his nephew had followed up this bit of play-acting with a lie as elaborate as the elephant story. But with this difference—he had commercialized his mendacity. In the case of the elephant he had reached his climax by the gift of the humidor trophy to his indignant uncle; in the present episode he had gone to the length of selling for money stock in a gold mine which did not exist.

"Why?" had been about the third question I asked when I started the investigation.

The answer was simple enough. Herbert Cryder was "broke." One cannot go on forever playing practical jokes which involve such expenses as a pair of elephant tusks and the like indefinitely unless one is a multimillionaire. And this our

young friend was not. He had inherited about \$150,000 from his father and apparently started out to spend it on a million dollar scale. Just before he vanished on the trip that preceded the gold mine story, he was known to be playing heavily in the market and the result had evidently been disastrous. He had admitted as much—talked about it quite openly, in fact—and the news was common gossip.

There was a further motive which Jedidiah explained to me at length and which sounded perfectly logical after I had induced him to talk. He did not want to tell me anything about it at first, saying it was purely a family matter.

It seemed that Cryder was in line for another fortune—a big one this time, amounting to about three-quarters of a million. This was the estate of a childless old uncle of whom he had once been the favorite but in whose "black book" his escapades had enrolled him time and again. If Cryder could tide matters over until the death of this uncle, Quinot demonstrated, and at the same time appear to have settled down as a solid business man, he would be fixed for life. It all sounded simple enough to me. The old uncle was apparently already on his death bed, with stocks of the Hectopus in his vaults, and all Cryder had to guard against was a speedy exposure.

II

To those of us who knew these facts it was plain that behind his laughing mask young Cryder was nothing less than a desperate adventurer, staking his wits and his nerve against time and fate in a game for the fortune of old Ezekiel Cryder.

It had been about a year, I learned,

since Cryder had appeared at home in his Wild West outfit and mysteriously whispered about gold. At first his friends had merely laughed among themselves at what they called "Herb's latest," but finally Cryder had begun to scatter a few nuggets around as souvenir gifts in the form of scarf pins, cuff links and one thing and another, and he even tried to pay for a round of drinks out of a "poke" of gold dust. Raised quite a row, it seems, because they didn't have gold scales at the cashier's desk to weigh it, like they do in a new mining camp.

Pretty soon his friends were demanding to buy shares in the mine. Cryder had laughed at them, just like he laughed at me, but they kept at him and persuaded him—as they thought—to form a company and issue stock. He sold it cheap enough—ten dollars for a \$100 share—but apparently he had sold quite a lot—nobody knew then just how much.

He had pretended that he wanted to keep it a close corporation—so that he could have full control himself, he said—and wouldn't sell to anyone except close friends and relatives. Old Ezekiel bought quite a block and even Jedidiah bought some. He had an honest young lawyer as "general counsel," and almost at the start declared a dividend of ten per cent.

The stock certificates were beautifully engraved and the prospectus was a work of art. I read it through three times before I discovered that it was all generalities and that nowhere in it was the mine definitely located. It was some place that the book described as the "El Dorado of the Munificent West," and that's no place to buy a railroad ticket to.

It was after the dividend that he hired Garrity and the ten extra stenographers and opened the ma-

hogany offices. Several of his friends got pinched in the market about that time and sold their stock to strangers. These began calling for information and reports and things, and young Cryder did not laugh as much as he used to, folks said. Something was really worrying him. In another week Jedidiah Quinot, among others, became suspicious and he would have carried the tale to old Ezekiel had not the physicians forbidden him to see the sick man. As a result of this, he had appealed to the Department and I was put on the case.

Of course I could have gone straight to Cryder, showed my credentials and demanded his books, the location of the mine and all the rest of the information I wanted, but Cryder was supposedly a citizen of some importance in that community—no common crook—and besides that there kept buzzing in the back of my mind a lingering suspicion of Jedidiah Quinot, the chief complainant in the case. While he seemed to be all broken up over the matter, nevertheless I had found out that in case old Ezekiel Cryder disinherited his nephew, his fortune would go to Quinot's son.

So, instead of declaring myself to Herbert Cryder, I called on his "general manager," Mr. Richard Garrity. Dick was not exactly pleased to see me when I ran across him in the lobby of his hotel, but he was quite willing to renew our acquaintance and talk at length. Garrity had been wondering for some time why I did not send him to the penitentiary and seemed to think it was because I had use for him outside. The fact was I did not have the evidence but he thought I had and I was willing to let him hold that belief. It certainly helped in this case.

"Where's the mine?" echoed Gar-

rity in response to my first pointed question. "There isn't any mine. I don't sabe the game myself and I don't ask too many questions but I know that. Why, I wrote that prospectus myself and it's a dandy, if I do say it. I'm drawing down good money as a coach for the young man because he's never even seen a gold mine. Outside of that he don't need any help from me. Why, Guernsey, this Cryder is such a magnificent liar that he makes me ashamed of myself. Sometimes when he's talking for effect I can just see that old Hectopus mine, with men shoveling out gold, big mountains all around and the thriving city that's springing up there in the wilderness. Honest, it is a pretty picture that forms while he's talking."

"But the samples," I asked. "Where does he get his samples—his nuggets and gold dust, and so on?"

"Oh, those things," Garrity answered with a laugh. "Why, he bought those nugget pins and cuff buttons in Seattle. They're quite common out there—made out of Alaskan gold. I bought the gold dust right here in town, and to make it look proper I sent West for some black sand that the gold is usually found in a placer diggings. That's easy enough to find but there isn't usually more than a trace of gold in it. All I did was mix some dust and small nuggets in with the sand and we had the raw product 'fresh from the Hectopus,' as Cryder says."

"It's been funny, Guernsey," he concluded. "It's been good fun and good pay too, but I suppose it's all over now. Say, isn't there any chance to save the young fellow from going to the pen? He's a helluva good scout."

Garrity really seemed to be in earnest about this end of the matter

and I was puzzled. Sentiment was a new quality in Dick.

"But why did he do it?" I asked. "What's behind it all?"

"Broke, they say," said Garrity. "But damned if I know really what it is all about. He seems to have plenty of money. That dividend was his own idea, and he paid out over \$10,000 in cash on it without turning a hair. For a guy who's broke, he's about the nerviest gambler I've ever struck because we did not need to pay that dividend a-tall. 'I just want to show them how good this mine really is,' he says to me, with a twinkle in his eye. And all I could do was just set there and stare at him with my mouth open."

"Why, if this was my deal, Guernsey, and I had this guy for a 'dummy' president, I could clean up a hundred thousand here in a month and beat it for Russia or Bones Airts or some place where even you couldn't get me. But this Cryder fellow—why, he seems to get all het up every time anybody tries to buy some stock and spends more time telling the suckers he's already landed what a great mine it is, than he does figuring out where the money for the next dividend is coming from."

"Is he going to pay another?" I asked, startled, for this was news to me.

"He sure is. It's already announced for October—that's six weeks from now, and I happen to know that there isn't money enough in our account to more than half meet it."

"Then you—think—" I ventured.

"Look here, Guernsey," said Garrity, reaching over and laying his hand on my knee. "I've come clean on this and I'll go further. I know some other things that you'd like to know—things that would help you a lot in Washington. Isn't there some

chance for Cryder? Can't we make him see that he's in over his head and get a settlement before it's too late. I can't—I just can't see that boy go over the road."

There it was again—Dick Garrity with sentiment in his soul—the unknown quantity heretofore in that old swindler. Herbert Cryder, I decided, must be a regular fellow, and with the determination to visit him in the morning in my proper guise, I went to bed.

But in the morning Cryder had disappeared. Garrity was waiting for me, white of face, at the foot of the elevator shaft with the news. He had found a note on his desk, he said, instructing him to keep the office open as usual, and inclosing a check for \$3,000 for expenses while he was gone.

"Where did he say he was going?" I demanded.

Garrity sighed as he produced the note.

"To visit the mine," he said, and added plaintively: "Do you suppose the boy's lost his mind entirely. You know and I know, Guernsey, there's no more Hectopus mine than that elm over there in the park is a plum tree."

III

I WAS rather glad of the change. The new development gave me a chance to get out into the open. Trailing men across wide stretches always was more in my line than trailing plots through the pages of ledgers and letter files. Dick helped me, both because he was afraid of me and anxious to save his boss from something he could not understand—and before noon I was aboard a train and speeding for Montreal.

No, I did not have any thought

that he had fled to Canada to escape from me. He had no idea who I was and also, Canada is no safe refuge for evil-doing Americans. Maybe it was once, but not in my time. I had no notion why he had gone there except a suspicion that he might have a confederate on the other side of the border who would provide the funds for the October dividend.

But that wasn't it. Cryder stayed in Montreal just long enough to catch the limited for the West Coast. The news of that rather staggered me and I missed the next train after him raising money enough to follow. You know we are not supposed to go outside the United States without a lot of red tape being unwound, but this Cryder fellow had sort of got my goat and I borrowed some coin from some Canadian officers I knew and went ahead with just a few cards of introduction from them instead of new credentials from Washington. We have to do that occasionally. If we make good, we are praised; if we get into a jam, we get fired.

Cryder was an easy man to follow on this trip, and I had plenty of leisure to enjoy my journey across the continent. I don't mean that the young fellow was leaving any broad trail of empty bottles and twenty dollar tips along the right of way of the Canadian Pacific, but he was making himself known to every one he met and his scintillating personality was one to be remembered. All along I found that he had talked nothing but mines and mining and that he had made a trip up into Edmonton to look into the Fort Norman reports of gold and oil along the Mackenzie.

I almost missed him there and had to double back from Banff before I picked up his trail. I lost it again after I passed Field, B. C., on my second dash for the coast, and had to

come back—carefully this time—before I found he had left the main highway at a little town called Hope, perched between the mountains and the Fraser River Canyon and struck off into the hills.

There is still gold along the Fraser. On the sand bars that ridge the rushing torrent every half mile or so, Chinamen can still be seen washing the sands of the river and turning "color" with almost every pan. But the best of them average only about two dollars a day and white men merely laugh as they pass them by. It doesn't pay for grub, hardship and loneliness. But this was a great country once. Back in the 50's Hope was a great outfitting point for a stampede of Americans who had failed to find fortunes at the first few turns of a shovel in the California rush, and chased the rainbow a thousand miles northward rather than return East empty handed.

There certainly is gold in the Fraser. Everyone could see that. But the tossing, heaving, rushing waters knew nothing of its value. Only on the sandbars could it be found and the rambunctious river tore these down over night and erected new ones every morning. Every miner knows that gold in rivers is washed down from the hills and for seventy years prospectors have been seeking the "mother lode" of the Fraser deposits.

Ten thousand hopeful men have crossed the hills from Hope to seek this treasure house of Nature. Herbert Cryder, I soon found out, had been the ten-thousand-and-first.

There was no concealment about his journey. He was easier to follow than a new yellow freight car. The guides who had taken him into the hills were already back in Hope when I arrived there, and perfectly

willing to repeat their thirty-six hour journey with no questions asked. In fact, they volunteered the information that Cryder had bought an abandoned claim without even looking at it, and taken a crew of six men—fully equipped with grub and tools for placer work in with him. The head man of the pack train tapped his forehead and winked solemnly as he told me about it, but beyond that he was non-communicative. As for me, I walked down to the river and looked at the waters as they rushed through the canyon on their way to the sea, the snow-capped mountains from which the flood had tumbled and the ruined little town which still clung to its post between the railroad and the torrent, and pinched myself to retain the idea that I was an officer of the United States Government in pursuit of a criminal.

They had told me there was but one trail across the hills to Cryder's claim, but apparently they did not know Cryder. Because, when we arrived at his camp, he was not there. "Gone back to the Fraser to spear salmon," a disgusted Irish laborer informed me as he took a fresh grip on his shovel.

It was dusk then and I was tired out from unaccustomed pony travel over the rough trail. I was glad enough to accept the foreman's offer of supper and a bed in his tent and put off any further investigation until morning. Tired as I was, the foreman and I talked together well into the night and long after he had begun snoring I lay awake thinking over the things he had told me. I could not believe them. As nearly as I dared I had called the man a liar and accused him of being in league with Cryder. He had refused to talk at all until I had shown him my American credentials—worthless in British Co-

lumbia, but he did not know that. Then I found myself facing again that strange loyalty and sentimentality in this rough mine-workman that I had found in Dick Garrity, soft-palmed swindler.

Could Cryder's swindle be as far-reaching as this, I wondered. Could he possibly have enlisted and coached this man in three days and then brazenly left him here alone. I knew that Cryder had never been in the district before. I knew that McGuire, the foreman, was a native of Hope. I knew that all Cryder had done in the camp was to take a few snapshots after the men he had brought in had started digging and put up a sign he had had painted in Hope. The sign was non-committal. It was merely a white board with black lettering planted against the face of a huge cliff. "Hectopus Mine," was all it said.

Two days later I was again walking the brink of the Fraser River Canyon. I was waiting for Cryder—reported somewhere in the neighborhood—and for a train. A hundred feet below me the same river boiled and swirled. It might have been the same water I had first seen, turning a corner and returning, so eternal was the tumult. It seemed as though the Fraser were composed of liquid hills and valleys, so firmly did the currents force the water into fantastic moulds.

Turning a bend in the stream in a longer cast for views, I finally came upon a spectacle that was strangely familiar. Far down below me was a tiny platform made of driftwood on driftwood piles, and upon it perched an Indian with a long spear. His lance darted once into the tumbling water and was withdrawn with a huge fish squirming on its point. A salmon, I knew, and with the knowl-

edge came recollection. This was a picture almost the same as the painting over Cryder's desk. I had wronged the man from the start. Not suckers but game fish; that was his ideal.

Even as I looked, another figure clambered to the little platform—Cryder himself. I could see the Indian shake his head and motion him back with his hand, but Cryder climbed on and strode out upon the platform. It showed he was new to the country. The little perch was safe enough for the Indian, but under the second man's two hundred pounds it buckled, swayed, collapsed, and both were thrown into the torrent, fifty yards above me.

I have said that I knew at the start that Cryder was no ordinary crook. I have told about the strange sentimentality of Garrity and McGuire. I have said nothing about my own feelings. I doubt if I had analyzed them myself. But I held my breath as I saw him fall and, almost before I knew it, had peeled my coat and plunged into the Fraser after him. I am a rather strong swimmer or I would not be alive to tell this today. The Indian helped me a little at first but Cryder had got a bump on the head and was a drag on both of us. Next minute the Indian was crashed against a rock and only managed to struggle ashore. I finally landed Cryder a mile down the canyon where the current, rather than I, washed us on a sandbar where a Chinaman was stolidly panning out gold.

From some place the Chink produced a bottle of alcohol, or gin, I don't know which, and finally Cryder opened his eyes. He did not remember ever having seen me before and was a little "woozy," I suppose.

"How do you feel, Cryder?" I asked.

"You know my name?" he asked. "Who are you?"

"Guernsey's my name," I said. "United States Post Office Inspector."

"What are you doing way up here?"

"I've been following you for a month or so."

Cryder sighed and closed his eyes again.

"Oh, hell," he said, finally. "All that fuss. I'll pay out all right. There's two hundred thousand in the bank. I'm not broke. I made a fortune in that stock deal and told everybody I was broke. Please let me go on with it. I must get back with these pictures of the mine and drive old Jedidiah out of his club again. It'll only cost me about twenty thousand more and it's well worth it. I've spent so much time on it and it's such a grand yarn."

I shook him by the shoulder.

"But it's not like you to deceive people in this manner," I shouted in his ear.

"Don't you worry about that," he

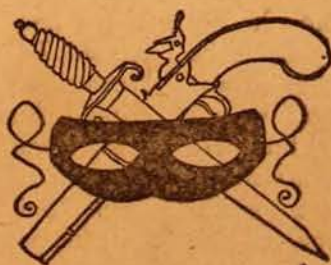
answered. "Jedidiah is only waiting to steal the pennies off Uncle Zeke's eyes. I just wanted to get that old double-crosser so good he wouldn't dare hold his head up. I wanted to show everybody who was the better business man—me or him. I guess I've done it. I've done something nobody ever did before. I've sold stock in a mine that never existed, paid dividends on it, made them want to emigrate out here, and now I've provided them with a spot to emigrate to. The big joke will come when Jedidiah gets out here and tries to find the gold."

I thought he had fainted in earnest, when his voice trailed off in a whisper at the close. But he rallied again and opened his eyes with a faint but whimsical smile.

"Cryder," I shouted. "There is gold in the Hectopus. McGuire has found a pocket that is worth a quarter of a million dollars if it is worth a cent. Do you hear me?"

The smile on his face broadened, then was replaced by a frown.

"Hell," he muttered. "All that time wasted. And it was such a perfectly beautiful lie."



The Weeping Killer

By Harry M. Sutherland

FOR Moriarity it had been almost as hard to walk from the condemned cell to freedom by way of the main entrance as it would have been to take that other walk through the little door that leads to the electric chair. He had suffered all that a man can suffer who faces a horrid death. The last of a once iron nerve had been put into the task of dressing himself in his execution garments and when the order for a new trial had been read to him, the once powerful gang leader had silently crumpled in a heap on the floor.

He was all in—through—done for as surely as the electric chair could have finished him. Never again would he be able to hold a gun in his hand to take his place as the undisputed king of his world. They would not let him. He might try it but he knew they would find him out.

No man could hold his position, he told himself time after time, who had been through what he had endured. Try as he did to hide it, he knew that his old slaves and subjects had seen him tremble during the ridiculously easy second trial of his case. Even the assurances of his lawyers that it was "all fixed," that his acquittal was a "sure thing," could not sustain him. He could not keep his hands from shaking and the muscles of his face from working. The brazen effrontery of his stare, the menace of his squared shoulders, was gone. He had stammered as he told his prepared lie on the witness stand and he knew that his old henchmen were shaking their heads

behind his back as they accompanied him in a sort of damp jubilation from the courtroom and back to the old rendezvous.

What a farce it had been when, after the first rounds of drinks had been drunk to his return, Jeff Hardy had in formal argot surrendered his place as regent and formally handed him his old pistol as a token of renewed leadership of the gang. Leader? Why, he knew and they knew and he knew they knew he knew that he was not fit to be even an apprentice in that company of blood and steel. Every night for a week after that he could see in the darkness above his bed the sneer in the smile on Hardy's face as he "surrendered" the leadership which he had already found so sweet. Surrendered it? No wonder Jeff had sneered at the very idea.

Moriarity had been a real leader of men. Guided into the realms of some great manufacturing enterprise, politics or finance he would have been as great as he had become in the world of violence and crime. Instead of the master of the men who work in steel or coal or gold, Fate had decreed that he should become the master of men who deal in crime. And just as disaster overtakes great leaders in great industry, so had disaster overtaken him on the night when "Sailor" Bradley had dared dispute his pre-eminence and met the death the code demanded.

No one in the underworld doubted who had killed Bradley. Moriarity was alive the next morning and Bradley was dead. That was evidence enough. But

there was considerable surprise when the leader of the "Woodchucks" was sentenced to death for murder. Every resource was assembled to prevent his execution and obtain his freedom and these weapons had triumphed. They had brought back their leader but found they had only a weakling in his stead.

Why, there had been tears in his eyes when the verdict of his acquittal was read in court. Twice he had been seen faltering in his step as he came from the loft building in which the "Woodchucks" had their clubroom. He started at the slightest sound of anything like a pistol shot. And—worst of all—he refused to carry a gun.

That was the situation during two weeks following the old leader's return. Then, on a Sunday morning, Terence Moriarity, bright-eyed, square of shoulder, spring in his step and a smile on his face, had gleefully pummeled two new members of the gang who accidentally blocked his path, hurled a bottle through a clubroom window and undisputedly resumed his sway.

The night before, as all of the world that mattered to him well knew, Jeff Hardy had screamed Moriarity's name as he died and the old leader had automatically been crowned anew.

It did not matter so much to the "Woodchucks" how Hardy had died. That was a matter for the police to find out. The police did—to their own satisfaction at least—but Moriarity merely smiled at the sensation their theories caused. He still refused to carry a gun but he still led the "Woodchucks," more feared and respected than he ever was and with confidence that his path of glory need not lead a man of intelligence again to the death house.

Jeff Hardy's body had been found at the bottom of the elevator shaft in the old loft building in which his gang occupied a portion of an upper floor. Without doubt he had fallen or been

hurled six stories to the concrete pit below. That he had not committed suicide was certain. There was no reason why he should in the first place and in the second place two reliable witnesses swore they had heard him cry "Damn you, Moriarity," as he fell.

Moriarity had been arrested, of course, but released almost at once, because policemen as well as eminently respectable citizens had seen him a block away from the building at the same time that Hardy's scream was heard by the night watchman and elevator man of the building.

It had taken some time to drag Hardy's body from the pit and identify it. This caused a delay, but even at that the police admitted they probably would have been unable to make out a case against the old leader no matter how rapidly they worked.

Captain Bush, who knows probably as much about gangsters and gang politics as any police officer in the city, had ordered the arrest of Moriarity as soon as he heard of Hardy's death. He did that even before he knew that the old leader was the last man seen with the new chieftain. He was also the one who recommended the discharge of the prisoner the next morning.

"There are more ways than one of killing a cat," Captain Bush remarked philosophically to some of his newspaper friends, "and the law doesn't keep up with all of them."

"But you admit Hardy was alone when he fell down the elevator shaft," persisted one of his questioners. "Why do you think he was killed?"

"He was killed as surely as Terence is again king of the Woodchucks," replied the police veteran. "He was killed because Moriarity had lost his nerve. He was killed in the way he was because of the long nights Moriarity had spent in the death house, by a man who knew that if Hardy was killed by a shot

he would walk through the little door instead of the big one on his second trip from his cell. He was killed by a man with brains and that imagination which had made him a tamed slayer.

"I know what happened as surely as I know I am sitting here, but there would be no use in going into court with it.

"Hardy had openly challenged the old leader's authority. Everybody knows that. Even the boys on the street were mocking Moriarity. He had wept in court. He had been seen twice walking unsteadily out of the building, wiping his eyes with his handkerchief and seeming to be half blinded by tears. Once the elevator man had to help him to the street. Everybody in the district knew about it. He was in pitiful terror at the thought of the time when Hardy would pull a gun on him and challenge him to fight it out. He knew that when that time came he would either have to go back to the death house, be killed by Hardy or disappear. There wasn't much choice. One was as bad as another for him. So, like the man of brains he is, he discarded all three of the obvious alternatives and found a fourth way out of the meeting he knew would have to come.

"It came last Saturday night. The two of them were alone in the club-room. Not a man in the gang would have dared to stick his nose inside the door. They knew there would be no question about who their leader was before morning and there wasn't one of them within a mile of the place.

"The elevator man and the night watchman both heard them quarreling. They didn't hear the words, but we don't need them. Hardy taunted Mori-

arity to try to make him pull a gun. He had two—one his own and another for Moriarity in case he had none of his own. This second gun was loaded with blanks.

"There were two flasks in the room. One had gin in it and was still half full. The other was broken on the floor when Moriarity dropped it as Hardy pulled his gun and called upon him to fight.

"After dropping the flask, Moriarity walked out of the room and down the stairs, wiping the tears from his eyes as he had been seen doing twice before. The watchman saw him. The elevator man was on the top floor with his car. Moriarity had sent him there to put a new bolt on the roof scuttle. He swears the door at the club floor was closed when he went up—but elevator men always say that. Anyway the light was burning in the hall. That's all he knows until he heard Hardy scream."

"But how, then, did Moriarity kill him?" a reporter asked as the captain relighted his cigar.

"Ever hear of this new tear gas?" the policeman questioned. "That's what was in the other flask."

"But wouldn't it blind Moriarity, too?"

"It did. But he had experimented until he could find his way out of the building in spite of it. The effect wears off in a few minutes and by the time he had reached the corner he was merely crying a few tears and had his alibi all made to order. Meanwhile Hardy was blundering about until he found the elevator door and fell to his death.

"An act of Providence, I suppose the law might call it, but it was really the act of a damned clever devil."



The Finishing Touch

By Charles S. Wolfe

I

A HASTY survey assured Ridgely that he was alone on the star-lit country road. With a sigh of satisfaction, he plunged swiftly into the brush which skirted the roadside. There he paused, alert, until his straining ears convinced him that his movements had been unobserved. Then he made himself comfortable for his brief vigil.

Crouching there, he reviewed minutely his actions so far, and his plans for what was to come. There was yet time, if he had erred, if there was a flaw, to withdraw quietly. It was merely a matter of waiting for another night. To be confronted with the damage wrought by an overlooked trifle when it was too late would be agonizing. And his very confidence disquieted him, made him feel that there was something amiss.

Yet he could find no weak link in his carefully forged chain. His left hand, dropping into his coat pocket, found the bottle of cyanide of potassium solution securely corked and ready to assume its role. His automatic weighed heavily in the other pocket, well oiled and loaded. The light mask which now covered the upper half of his face was really of no importance; just an extra precaution which discounted the possible, but highly improbable, intrusion of some pedestrian.

The cyanide, he felt sure, no one would be able to trace. Several weeks before he had stolen a couple of small lumps—quite enough for his purpose—

from the private laboratory of a friend who rode the hobby of chemistry. Few people knew of the existence of the little attic laboratory; fewer still were aware of his acquaintance with its owner, and the man himself was ignorant of the fact that his supply had been levied on.

Since the deadly stuff had been dissolved and bottled, and the bottle scrupulously cleaned, he had taken pains to avoid touching it bare handed. Right now his left hand was gloved with rubber. There would be no finger-prints to damn him.

Footprints need give him no concern. The roadway was dry and reasonably hard. The discoverers of the corpse would quickly obliterate any slight clues of a definite nature that he might thus leave. The keenest of sleuths could examine the scene of his crime to their hearts' content. They would learn nothing.

He had made no attempt to establish an alibi. And in this, he was satisfied, he had acted wisely. The business of trying to demonstrate that you were where you were not is, usually, a dangerous undertaking. It involves either the employment of confederates or the use of complicated subterfuges which must either function with precision or turn into veritable boomerangs. The collapsing alibi is too often the royal road to the electric chair. Ridgely knew that there was just one person who could be relied on to be forever silent on this night's work—himself. Better to take the chance of the authorities being unable to prove that he was on the spot at the time than

to assume the burden of proving that he was not.

And, anyway, most of the precautions he had taken were no doubt unnecessary. They represented merely his forethought in forestalling unlooked for disaster before it occurred. The chances were that the case would be looked on as just what it seemed on the surface—suicide. There would probably be little more than a perfunctory inquiry, an inquest at which every fact produced would seem to demonstrate conclusively that the man took his own life. Ridgely prided himself that the idea of killing a man by forcing him to kill himself was a master stroke.

A man found dead on the road, dead from the effects of poison, and with the bottle containing that poison clutched tightly in his stiffened hand, is obviously a suicide. There is no reason to suspect foul play unless someone is known to have a strong motive for putting the unfortunate one out of the way. And, to the best of Ridgely's knowledge and belief, Maury hadn't an enemy in the world—save himself.

And, thanks to his consistent and flawless dissimulation, his secret was his own. Outwardly he had been quite friendly with Maury. Not too friendly—just enough so to be counted really indifferent. In the rare event of murder being suspected and a murderer sought for, there would be no reason for alarm.

One other only might possibly connect him with the night's events. Maury's wife! Jean Maury and Ridgely shared a rather guilty secret. She could assign to him a motive. But here again he was confident that perfect technique had practically nullified the danger of aroused suspicion. By guarding every word, by well planned and controlled actions, he had assured her belief that he—like herself—was a harmless flirt. Not once had she been

permitted to glimpse the terrible passion that was his; never had she been allowed to plumb the depths of his crafty and daring nature. He was safe on that score. Under the pretence of carefully guarding her reputation he had concealed their affair from outsiders, and to her herself he had made the matter seem trivial.

There was one circumstance, however, that might cause comment. And as he thought of it, Ridgely grinned. While it was true that no one, apparently, had a motive for slaying Maury, it was equally true that the man had no apparent motive for killing himself. Happy, care-free, comfortably wealthy and well satisfied with life, people might wonder that he should court death.

Ridgely grinned. For it was to this, to his mind, the weakest point of his whole coup, that he had devoted the most thought, expended the greatest effort. He had supplied the motive! Here was the artistic triumph of the whole thing. Here was the finishing touch.

For the suspicions of the authorities would be allayed before they were aroused. During the three months that he had known the Maurys he had quietly, unobtrusively collected specimens of John Maury's handwriting. And by diligent practice he had enabled himself to imitate the man's scrawl so perfectly that he had no fear of the fraud being detected. Not only the writing itself had he studied minutely, but the style, the tricks of speech. Beyond doubt, the missive he had evolved with so much care would pass unquestioned as the dead man's own work.

He drew forth an envelope, and by the light of his electric torch scrutinized with pride and satisfaction the letter he had written. The envelope was addressed to Mrs. John Maury:

My Dear Jean:

I am sorry, terribly sorry, for the notoriety

this thing will cause. I realize that you will be shocked. I am asking your forgiveness. For four years I have suffered in silence, Jean, for our marriage was a bitter mistake. I did not love you. I realized it when it was too late. I've done my best to conceal the fact from you, but I know I could not go on living a lie much longer. I am taking the easiest way out. It is only just that I should suffer for my own sin.

John.

As he replaced the letter in its envelope, Ridgely chuckled. He would place this missive in the man's pocket after he had fallen, and there was the motive all ready to satisfy the most critical. Scandal-loving eyes scanning Maury's past for sensational disclosures of his implied double life would not dwell too closely on the method of his taking off. Furnish—

He stiffened. The soft thud of moving feet on the hard road reached his ears, growing steadily louder. He knew it was Maury. The moment had come!

II

RIDGELY's hand closed resolutely over his automatic. Maury, he knew, was unarmed. He slipped soundlessly to the very edge of the copse and waited until the approaching form was only a few feet from his ambush. Then he sprang out, weapon leveled, barring the way.

There was a startled oath as Maury caught sight of the ominous figure before him. Ridgely's gruff command to throw up his hands was instantly obeyed. The surprise was complete.

"Don't speak"—Ridgely rather hoped that his disguised voice would completely mask his identity, but it didn't matter, really—"do as you're told. You are going to sleep for an hour or so while I clean you and make my getaway."

"Really," Maury was regaining his nerve, "I haven't enough about me to make it worth your while—"

"Shut up!" Ridgely's command was curt, as he advanced toward his victim, the deadly bottle in his gloved left hand. He extended it toward Maury.

"Drink it," he growled, determinedly.

Maury lowered one arm and took the bottle hesitatingly. "What is it?" he asked, falteringly.

"Chloral hydrate, if you must know," responded Ridgely, in tones of well-feigned sulkiness. "Enough to put you out for a couple of hours. Knockout drops. Take your choice. Drink it, and go out for a couple of hours, or—" he waved the automatic suggestively, "go out for keeps."

"Look here," began Maury, "I'll promise—"

"Drink it!" Ridgely snapped, savagely.

Without further parley Maury raised the bottle to his lips. It was only an instant, really, but to Ridgely, waiting anxiously, it seemed hours before the body crumpled to the roadway. Then, swiftly, he went to his victim, pocketing his automatic. His gloved hand inserted the letter into Maury's pocket, he noted that the bottle was tightly gripped in the dead man's hand, and noiselessly he stole away from the place.

A short cut through a little woodland brought him out onto a main road. Without haste he wended his way toward the summer hotel. He was jubilant. Maury was out of his way. He had only to wait the proper moment to increase the ardor of his courting. He felt that the widow would lend an attentive ear.

He passed no one on the road. Everything was coming his way. As he gained his room unobserved he was whistling softly. Not a pang of remorse came to sear his conscience. Ridgely wasn't that kind. He turned in and slept like a top.

He was awakened by a sharp knock-

ing on the room door. Bright sunlight was streaming in through the thinly curtained windows. A hasty glance at the clock told him that it was after ten. The knocking continued insistently.

He sprang out of bed and reached for his bathrobe.

"Just a minute!" he called, as he hurriedly pulled a comb through his tousled hair.

An instant later, fairly presentable, he was gazing inquiringly at the tall young man who had pushed in through the partly opened door.

Even before the other had introduced himself, Ridgely knew that his caller was a detective. Something must have gone wrong, he thought, and his mind went racing swiftly over the details of the evening before, seeking to find and forestall the consequences of a slip. He was not panicky.

His visitor was speaking. "John Maury was found dead on the road late last night, Mr. Ridgely."

Ridgely carefully side-stepped a possible trap. "An accident?" he asked, in perfectly done surprise and concern.

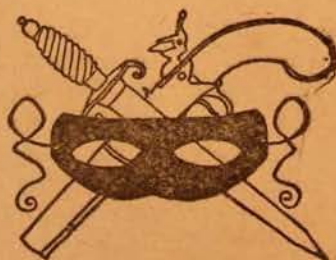
"No," replied the other. "He was murdered."

Ridgely concealed his dismay. How in the devil had they reached that conclusion so soon in the face of his carefully prepared evidence to the contrary?

"Murdered!" he echoed, blankly. "How? By whom?"

The tall young man sat down, watching Ridgely narrowly. His right hand had dropped carelessly into his pocket. He leaned forward slightly, and spoke swiftly.

"By you, Mr. Ridgely," he replied, evenly. "No. Don't interrupt. You set a very pretty stage, my friend, and you have been careful—careful to a fault. It was your little finishing touch that betrayed you. That, and a woman's vanity. Mrs. Maury is a very beautiful woman with a very plain name. It has been her little failing to hide that fact. Her name is not Jean, Ridgely, it's Jane. And Maury never called her anything else in private. When she saw that letter you so cleverly left she knew Maury had never written it despite the excellent forgery. For he hated the name Jean as much as she disliked Jane. She is a big enough woman to admit her own shortcomings, and—. Shall I read the warrant?"



The Trap Thief

By Hy. S. Watson and Asa Steele

I

"THE low-down sneaking thief!" Jack Ramsey's wrath hissed on his lips as he flung the steel traps to the ground. Of thirty, all but two had been stolen.

Wrinkles of perplexity seamed his face as he sprawled on a great rock in the wilderness, munched his lunch and stared at a distant hilltop.

Jack Ramsey's blue-gray eyes did not lack shrewdness. With his tawny hair, long face and lean jaw, they were combined in a type of youth not easily deceived. He concluded that the thief had followed him the night before through brush, fern and swamp and taken each trap as soon as he had moved on to the next one.

But why steal them? The thief had a grudge against him? He had come from the neighboring town of Honesdale, where he had lost his job in a mill, and was trapping here till he got other work. Being a stranger in the neighborhood, he could have no enemies. Perhaps, his traps had been stolen by a some hobo—

The thought brought Jack upstanding. Tossing the crumbs of his lunch to a scolding squirrel, he set off at a brisk pace northward.

The confidence of his advance proved that no part of this strange place was unfamiliar to him. Yet few domains of equal size set up so many barriers against a close acquaintance. In some distant age a great glacier, crushing and combing the mountains to the north as it advanced, had here found a conqueror in hot sunshine. As

the ice field melted, vast masses of granite boulders, pebbles and gravel buried in the frozen depths were cast into hummocks resembling little mountains, or piled in driftways or stacks like playing cards or ears of corn, in indescribable confusion. Thus was formed this utterly barren, haphazard place some five miles square, now honeycombed with swamps or covered, where the rocks permitted, by bush or forest.

Around this land passed modern highways. Aeroplanes soared overhead. Toward it, thriving New Jersey towns were crowding close. Thirty-five miles away, as the crow flies, stood the City Hall of New York, the world's greatest metropolis. Yet the hardships that must be faced while penetrating this natural fortress caused it to remain almost unknown and shunned by men.

Jack Ramsey recalled having seen, while hunting in previous years, a deserted cabin built by lumbermen on a rocky knoll near the northern end of the wilderness. Here might live the tramps who were helping themselves to his traps. He would call them to time.

His visit to the cabin was one of surprises. From the crooked chimney curled smoke that intrigued his nostrils with odors of sassafras and newly made coffee. Crumbling woodwork had been replaced and the windows reglazed and hung with curtains of snowy whiteness. Flowers were blooming in a border along a wall.

The door was opened by an upstanding, buxom girl, sweet and wholesome as the sunshine that had tanned her

cheeks and bare forearms. At sight of him, her eyes brightened.

"A drink of water, please?"

"Sure thing! Bring fresh water, Jimmie."

The man addressed was sitting in a corner shaping a billet of wood with a hunting knife. When he raised his pale, bearded face Ramsey recognized Jimmie Willets, a half-wit whom he had met in the wilderness.

"Jimmie's my policeman while Dad's away," the girl volunteered. "There's just my father and me, and for me to be here alone all day while he's at work—I just couldn't! Oh! I forgot! I'm Mary Gage—"

"I'm Jack Ramsey, from Honesdale."

While Jimmie Willets brought the water and Jack drank of the cool, sweet draft, the young trapper fell into chat with the girl like an old friend. Jack sensed a warm and gracious womanhood and the invitation of one hungry for companionship, while the girl, with that instinctive wisdom as old as womankind, whetted his interest by urging him to talk about himself.

"It's a great life I lead here!" he enthused. "Even the winds blow sweet and clean! I can breathe free, dream free and hope free! This is the American's heritage! It's his when the mystery of blue distances gets into his heart—"

"My! With all those fine thoughts you should have a more romantic name," she teased, an appraising common sense behind her laughter. "It makes me think of Buffalo Bill and Leatherstocking, and savage men hunting wild beasts—I have it! Hereafter, I'll call you 'Lean Jaw'!"

He felt the sting of her raillery as he laughed with her. Yet he would not have had it otherwise, longed for it again.

"Truly, though," he went on, "in a desert like this you might almost expect to see Indians— Oh! Don't be fright-

ened. You folks and I are the only people here. I've had no company but the skunk, stray mink and what-not that are caught in my traps. Yet I don't get lonely, do you?"

"Oh, no!"

Was she interested in hunting? Jack thought she might explore the wilderness with him and see his traps.

"Then you're the man whose traps were stolen?" she asked quickly, as if the words had escaped her unawares.

"You know about that?"

She went to a dresser and took from it five new steel traps, which she flung on a table at Ramsey's elbow.

"They're mine!" he cried. "Stolen last night!"

"I found them on the road to Honesdale," she replied.

"But that's five miles away! You've been down there so early in the day?"

"The thief must have dropped them on his way to town."

Swiftly a veil of mistrust had been drawn between them. He was seeking an answer to his doubts with a look as bold as hers had been a moment since. She turned away, a crimson glow mounting to her temples. In the lengthening silence, Jack had no alternative but to thank the girl and go.

"She'd have no reason to steal my traps," said Jack to himself as he followed the trail southward. "If she had, she wouldn't confess it by returning them to me!"

"Blind as a bat!" Mary Gage remarked to Jimmie Willets, as she watched Ramsey go. "He won't guess our secret till he falls head first into it."

II

JACK lingered over his traps that evening till it was almost dark, watching for the return of the thief. There being no sign of one, he finally made his way to his camp.

In a swamp near the middle of the wilderness lay a low mass of rock covered with woodland. On this island Jack had set up a shelter of poles, canvas and spruce boughs and stored his food and equipment. A dry, winding path across the swamp had ends which he had cunningly concealed from casual eyes.

In the darkness, he wrapped himself in his blankets and stretched himself on a heap of spruce twigs to sleep. How long he lay thus he could not tell. Suddenly he found himself wide awake, staring at a light shining across the swamp.

Beyond the causeway boulders were piled fifty feet high in ragged confusion, ending abruptly in a flattened top. Jack had named it the Bag of Bones. On the summit, out of reach of plundering lumbermen, rose a stately ash, its boughs flung wide.

It was among the leaves of this ash tree that the rays of light were shining. Any natural source for them was discounted by the fact that the light rose from below. So great was its power that the leaves and branches over which it strayed were stamped with the brilliant vividness of sunshine.

Ramsey stumbled toward the causeway. Before he reached it, the light had vanished. He stared into the darkness to make sure, then kicked himself for his stupidity. A searchlight in the bowels of the earth was too grotesque for belief. He returned to his bed, certain he had been dreaming.

Through the mist of the early morning he made a round of his traps. Of the thirty, on this day eighteen were missing! Ramsey's eyes grew hard. He began a thorough combing of the wilderness, searching for traces of the thief.

Finally he found footprints beside a brook. They had been made by a short, broad shoe on the soles of which had been fastened strips of iron in the form

of a double cross, to obtain a firmer foothold on uncertain ground.

With dogged patience, Ramsey traced these footprints through woodland, gully, swamp and meadow. They led toward the road to Honesdale. He had nearly reached this road when the footprints were merged with the ruts of a heavy automobile. The car had been driven several times into a deserted lumber trail, turned and taken out again.

Suddenly he saw that which made him conceal himself in a heap of boulders and stare cautiously through a screen of laurel toward the highway.

A man had jumped out of a big, high-powered car and scurried into the neighboring forest. The car passed on as the stranger mounted a hillock and climbed a pine tree to the topmost branches.

In a few minutes the car came back. A whistle sounded from the lookout in the pine tree. The automobile was turned into the trail and stopped in the old tracks. Two men leaped from the tonneau. One of them was carrying several packages. While the chauffeur turned the car, these passengers walked quickly to a large stone and, by their united strength, turned it over as if it were hinged and balanced. One of the men took a small package from the cavity beneath; the other deposited in it the parcels he was carrying. The stone was lowered into place and a moment later the men were in the automobile.

One of the passengers whistled. No answer from the pine tree. A motorcycle came into view on the main road. The men in the car exchanged glances, whispering, and one of them shook his head.

A low whistle from the pine tree assured them that the way was clear. The automobile shot out of the lumber trail into the highroad and disappeared, as the lookout descended from the pine tree and walked away in the opposite direction.

Hastening from cover, Jack struggled to move the flat stone. It might have been bed rock so sturdily did it resist his strength. He recalled that it had required the efforts of both passengers from the automobile to shift its balance, so he could not hope to stir it unassisted. The hollow beneath and the parcels it contained preserved their secret. But he resolved to return and watch again.

III

THE second theft of traps had crippled Jack's enterprise, so with his store of skins he went to Honesdale, sold the pelts and refitted, turning a balance of cash over to his mother. After supper, he strolled downtown to the cigar store of his friend, Bert Walton.

As he passed the hotel, he did not notice two men on the verandah, who were regarding him closely.

"That's him!" whispered one of them to his burly companion.

"That kid?"

"Sure thing. Knows more about that stretch of woods than anyone 'round here."

"Doesn't look as if he stood in with crooks."

"Don't believe he does, unless Gage's girl has hypnotized him. You'd better find out about that. Go to it! Say you want to hunt— You know."

So it came that when the big burly man strolled into Walton's cigar store, nodded to Bert like an old customer and bought a costly cigar, the proprietor introduced him to Jack Ramsey. The stranger came from New York and went by the name of Cox. Could Ramsey take him hunting? When Jack saw the color of his money—a twenty-dollar bill—a bargain was struck. Early the next morning Cox hired a flivver and in it they rattled northward.

Reaching the wilderness, Jack found a familiar trail and they plunged into

it, stopping the flivver in a grassy gully.

"What d'ye know about that!" cried Cox, pointing to long furrows in the sod.

"They're automobile tracks."

"It has been here often—a big, bang-up, classy city car!"

Jack told him of the mysterious visit of the automobilists, the lookout in the pine tree and the balanced stone.

"Let's have a look at that stone," suggested Cox.

With their united strength they moved the slab. Under it was a cavity three feet square and of half that depth. It was empty.

The stone replaced, Cox insisted that they go back to the main road and find another entrance to the forest. No complaints would make him alter the plan or did he offer an explanation as they drove to a new parking place, a mile further up the road.

Ramsey began to think that he had a queer bird on his hands. As the hours passed, the opinion was confirmed by Cox's impatience, his half-interest in the hunting and his curiosity and questions in no way connected with their sport.

Perhaps the boy's impatience arose from the fact that his own thoughts were not on hunting. In the quivering, golden-purple haze of Indian summer came dreams, dancing lightly or touching reverently things which another held intimate. In his mind's eye he was watching the sunlight as it filtered through the golden-brown hair of Mary Gage and painted her cheek in wonderful colors like the heart of the rose; again he saw her dimples come and go—

"Say, sonny, when I see a kid like you," Cox finally remarked, "absent-minded and dreaming of hither and yon, so to speak, I know it means just one thing. Who's the girl?"

"Aw—Mr. Cox—I—"

"Come 'long! Who is she?"

Point by point, Cox learned Mary

Gage's name, where she lived, of her family and surroundings.

"Sounds good to me," was his comment. "Let's give her the once over."

Although Jack feared the blunders the rough-neck might make with Mary, his anxiety proved to be groundless when they reached the cabin. Cox was as decent as could be, even though Mary Gage received him with visible mistrust. Toward Jack, she acted as an old friend who had suddenly become silent—silent and watchful.

"Some girl all right, sonny," Cox commented when they were out of earshot of the cabin. "I suppose she'd only have to ask it and you'd cut off your right hand, or rob a bank, or go to the electric chair for her sake?"

"She hasn't asked anything like that."

"What if she should now?"

"Oh— I'll cross that bridge when I come to it."

Jack did not see the appraising look with which his companion regarded him. Cox nodded in approval as they trudged on.

The visitor had insisted that they go to Jack's camp. When they reached the rocky island in the swamp, he shared in cooking their lunch with the joy of a schoolboy playing hookey.

"This is real roughing it!" he declared. "Certainly a queer place, though. Looks as if Nature got tired or went nutty when she came to this job. That bunch of rocks across the swamp, now— Some giant's kid might have piled 'em up for a playhouse—"

"I call that the Bag of Bones," replied Jack with a laugh.

"Not a bad name, either." Cox buried his face in his coffee mug.

For a moment, Jack was tempted to tell of the mysterious light which he had seen on the summit of the Bag of Bones. Then the impulse passed. The incident was too fantastic, too much like

a dream for the boy to trust his senses and vouch for its truth.

Their meal ended; Cox decided to return at once to Honesdale. They had crossed the swamp and were passing the southern side of the Bag of Bones when he came to a sudden halt.

"Say, sonny," he drawled, "do you get it? That funny smell?"

"I sure do." A volatile odor filled Jack's nostrils.

"What d'ye suppose makes it?"

"It smells like ether."

"Right! Now who d'ye suppose uses ether in among them rocks?" he asked with a laugh. "Hardly a place I'd look for a chorus girl cleaning her gloves!"

Cox parted with Jack curtly. His thoughts seemed to be on other things. Watching the flivver recede along the highway, the boy suspected that his visitor had not come to the forest merely to hunt. What other purpose could he have had? Ramsey had not found an answer to the riddle when, after setting his new traps, he made his way through the twilight to his camp.

Approaching the rocky island, he saw at once that something unusual had happened there. A rapid survey confirmed his fears. His camp, so far as malice could accomplish it, had been destroyed!

Jack's lean jaws snapped. The fighting blood of his Yankee ancestors surged to his face. He snatched up his gun and crouched beside the causeway to watch under the stars.

IV

INTO the rebuilding of his camp the next day, Ramsey put much of his defiance. Every pole that he cut, every nail driven had in it hatred for his unknown enemies. The supplies he had brought from Honesdale in Cox's flivver and cached near the highway assured his comfort. He prepared for a siege.

Also he determined to protect his

traps. Two forked hickory saplings, near a secluded trail which the thief must follow, suggested a means. In the forks he wedged his gun tightly, pointing it upward to cover the trail and bracing the barrel and butt with stakes crossed near the tops. The weapon adjusted and loaded, he fastened a stout cord to the trigger and passed it among the saplings so that it was stretched tightly across the trail. Thus the thief could not press against the cord without firing a charge of buckshot into himself.

Ramsey slept that night in a thicket near his man-trap. In the early morning a crash awakened him. The bark of his gun! The boy broke from cover into the trail and shouted at a vague, crouching figure near the gun. At sight of Jack, the man gave a leap and disappeared in the neighboring woodland.

Came the patter of footsteps on the soft earth; the light steps of one running. Ramsey drew back into the shadow of the wood, alert on his toes as a panther gathered to spring if occasion demands.

It was not the fellow whom he had seen at first, but apparently his accomplice; the flying body tensely bent, the arms outflung in an extremity of effort. In a moment the fugitive was upon him—

"Stop—"

Jack's outflung hand arrested the flight of Mary Gage! The girl sank at his feet, panting from exhaustion.

"You know now—I'm the trap thief!" she gasped presently.

"I'm not accusing you," he replied, helping her to her feet.

"Don't be polite! You're not blind!" An outflung hand brushing the tangled hair from her eyes served as well to sweep aside the amenities. "I didn't believe you'd set a gun to catch us. Since you did, it would have been better if I had been shot. I'm the guilty one and in my right mind, not a poor half-wit—"

"You mean Jimmie Willets was shot?"

"Yes! But don't worry about Jimmie. Our friends will give him the best of care."

"I don't see— Why did you and he go out, night after night, to steal my traps?"

For a moment she seemed to be groping for an excuse, then turned to him with a childlike frankness.

"I know you won't believe me, Lean Jaw, but I'm telling the truth when I say I don't know why we must steal your traps. We took them because—we were asked to do so. You should know, perhaps, that we're very poor—stony broke. We came here last spring from Long Island, where Dad's truck farm went to smash and left us in debt. Dad was offered this job of his and much more money than he'd ever earned before. He told me a few days ago that his job and our money would be lost unless you were driven out of here. He asked me to take your traps—"

"I interfered with his plans— Is that it?"

"Dad told me that the kick came from his bosses. Oh! Don't be huffy about it! I like you, Lean Jaw— Like you as well as any fellow I know. I like you so well that I say—first, last and all the time—don't butt into this. Give up trapping and go back to Honesdale. You can't fight these people single handed. They're too strong, too many and have too much money back of them! I've been jollyng Dad by telling him you're discouraged and about to quit. I can hardly say that now that you're fighting back and Jimmie Willets is hurt. But it's not too late for you to get out—"

"You would have me go?" he asked tensely.

"I'd have you near me—" She cut short his words of tenderness and added in her businesslike way: "But you don't know yet the secret of Dad's bosses."



Jack's outflung hand arrested the flight of Mary Gage.—Page 42

If you should stumble on it someday, then 'Good-bye, Lean Jaw'—"

"These men you speak of? They're here, in the wilderness?"

"Sure they are! Is there a better place to work secretly within a hundred miles of New York?"

"What are they doing? You must have a hint of it; must have learned something—"

"I told Dad I wouldn't ask and I haven't," she evaded.

"Perhaps I know more than you, Mary. With what I've learned and you suspect, we may piece out the truth." He told her of the strong light and the odor of ether near the Bag of Bones, the footprints with their curious ridges, the big automobile, the outlook in the pine tree and the balanced stone.

"You're wise!" she observed cryptically. "Oh! Lean Jaw! I beg of you—Go at once! After what you've learned—"

"He knows too much, eh?"

They turned quickly at the sound of the voice behind them.

"Dad!"

Jack saw a big man in jumpers, red with rage, his chin aggressive.

"If you've told him our secrets, Mary, I'll—I'll just about kill you!" Gage threatened, shaking a wrathful finger at his daughter. With a quick turn, he confronted Ramsey: "You get out of here! I won't have you 'round—"

"I've as much right here as you—"

"If you don't go, I won't answer for your life—"

Jack glanced toward Mary. There was a helplessness, a wordless appeal in her lax hands and drooping shoulders. Her eyes were raised to his with a message that decided him.

"I'll stay!" he announced.

"Then look out for trouble!"

"Same to you, Mr. Gage— Much trouble!"

Thus he left them.

V

BEFORE another day had passed, Ramsey realized that Gage's threat had not been an idle one. Go where he would, he was followed by enemies. Behind him the rustle of dead leaves and the breaking of twigs underfoot told of the passage of living things heavier than the denizens of the forest. Once he had a glimpse of a man with a black beard who, when he realized that he was seen, quickly disappeared in a heap of rocks.

As Ramsey crossed the causeway to his camp that evening, came an underbreath, caught-in-the-throat cough and a bullet glanced off a tree overhead and went winging its way into the swamp. Another and another followed, humming baleful tunes as they were deflected. From the shelter of a rock, Ramsey realized that his assailants were using a silencer on their gun and were shooting wild. In all, he counted twenty bullets. A return fire would have betrayed his position in the darkness and made it a target. In silence he crouched low.

Suddenly he saw the sharp, bright gleam of an electric flashlight. It disclosed the outlines of two men moving toward him across the causeway—

In an instant the light was gone. But Ramsey's eyes had marked his target. His gun spat fire. A startled, muttered curse told him that his bullet had reached its mark. Again his gun barked. He heard his assailants floundering in mud and water as they retreated. The combatants settled themselves for a term of vigilant waiting.

Jack realized that the encircling swamp made his island camp a prison as well as a refuge. His assailants knew this too and were keeping the only exit, along the causeway, covered. Ramsey's back was to the wall!

That he should admit defeat and re-

turn to Honesdale was unthinkable. The plight of Mary Gage prevented. He would risk his life with these unseen foes, without fear or hesitation, to insure her safety. With this conviction came the overwhelming certainty of all she meant to him. Life without her would hereafter be a leaden thing, halting and incomplete. For her he was here!

He must see Mary and confront her father, the only one of his enemies whom he knew. He must go at once! But how? His wits, sharpened by the contest, devised a means of escape from the island prison.

While building his new camp, he had salvaged some planks from an abandoned saw mill. Noiselessly feeling his way toward them, he chose two of the larger ones and crossed to the opposite side of the island. Here he slowly crawled forward on the planks, relaying them from hummock to hummock above the mud and stagnant water. It was slow, uncertain work, but he finally reached the further shore and started northward.

He approached Gage's cabin with the utmost caution. Two windows, bright with light, stared at him as if enraged. Creeping close to one of them, which was partly open, his back against the wall and face hidden by the shadows of a vine, he could see a section of the interior and hear the murmur of low-pitched voices.

One was that of the skulking fellow with the black beard.

"Take it from me— They're on!" he declared. "Someone has played the yellow dog! They have been told all about us; details they could only get by living here and being one of our bunch—"

"And because you think I'm the yellow dog, you won't pay my wages— That it?" snapped Gage.

"Hold on— We would have finished

the job and been out of here last week except for this blunder. The fresh kid comes along and learns enough here to put Cox wise. So we stand to lose much more than we owe you. Your girl has queered the deal—"

"Indeed!—Indeed I told Jack nothing!" Mary pleaded. "He was wide-awake, learned things for himself—"

"She did as you said, didn't she?" protested Gage. "Tried to drive Ramsey away—she and Jimmie—till he put his gun on her. No, I worked hard for my money and intend to get it!"

"When you've earned it! That's my last word!" snapped the other. "Now if you could get Ramsey—"

"What d'ye want?" asked Gage slowly. "You'd have me rid ourselves of the boy by cold-blooded murder?"

"If it means your money, our safety—"

"Murder!" whispered the girl; then her voice shrilled in protest: "You shan't harm him—I'll prevent that! I won't keep secrets any longer for a crook like you!— No, not even for my father! I'll find this man, Cox! I'll tell him everything!"

"From the way the girl talks," sneered the visitor, "I'd say she wants to marry this Jack Ramsey—"

"Yes! I would marry him—" The impulsive words died breathlessly. Her eyes opened wide as she stared at the window. For Jack, unable to control his eagerness, had thrust forward to hear her reply. In paralyzing fear at sight of him, she sat as one entranced.

Gage's mocking laugh had drawn attention from the girl. The bearded man watched him as he crossed to a shelf, filled his pipe and lighted it. In that brief moment, Jack's face disappeared; Mary's body relaxed.

"You realize, Gage," came the visitor's even tones, "that after what your daughter has just said, we can't let her go free till our job is done?"

"Hum! Keep her prisoner? Where? She's safe enough here."

"No, Cox knows of this cabin—thanks to Ramsey. It's the first place he'll come. We must keep her in the workshop—"

"No! No! I won't go!" cried the girl.

"You'll do as I say, Mary—"

"Not even for you, Dad!"

"You go to the workshop!"

"Then I'll get word to Jack! He'll have to know only a little, will guess the rest." Her voice rose high that Jack might hear; beyond the window, he heeded; "I'll say—*Lean Jaw: Under the ash tree on the rocks, lift the hollow stump*—"

An oath, the girl's muffled cry— Silence!

Ramsey could endure no more. Like a tiger, he moved swiftly and softly to the door. He flung it open, stood before them!

"Jack—" In the girl's agony she sank, weeping, before him.

The three men confronted each other silently. The boy was now a tiger biding his time to kill. Gage's fists opened and closed, ready to strike.

"The tail of the yellow dog," murmured he of the black beard, as his fingers sought a shining weapon in his coat.

"Mary! You must come with me!" Jack commanded.

"Must? I like that!" Gage's laughter was savage with menace.

"You mean more to me than I can tell you, Mary!" the boy pleaded. "The thought of you a prisoner, at the mercy of these beasts—I can't bear it! Come! I'll take you to my mother—"

"I prayed that you might escape them!" sobbed the girl. "I prayed that you'd not come here, that you'd be kept safe till my need was great—"

"Your need is great now! I heard them— They'd hold you prisoner—"

What more, who can tell? How can you be safe with these crooks—"

"I'm her father!" thundered Gage.

"I've seen what you can do; you and your gang!" Jack sneered. "Robbing me, wrecking my camp, trying to murder me tonight with a muffled gun! Come, Mary!"

The girl rose unsteadily. She studied Jack's face, then stared at her father—Freedom and tenderness in the boy's waiting arms; or, with the other, restraint, worse—

She moved toward Jack. Gage's outstretched arm restrained her.

"Ramsey's going another way," remarked the bearded one. "He thought he was cunning enough to queer our job. So he's got to pay—"

His weapon flashed from a pocket. He raised it deliberately and fired.

The world seemed to go to pieces in a vast upheaval as Ramsey sank down, down to oblivion—

VI

"BRACE up! Take a nip of this! It's bootleg, but the real stuff."

Ramsey felt the sting of the liquor in his throat, radiating warmth throughout his body. He tried to shake off the evil dream, but could not. After untold effort he opened his eyes. He was lying in the tonneau of a touring car. Cox bent over him, regarding him anxiously.

"Lucky he only ripped open your scalp," he said. "Half an inch lower and it would have been the end of you. Pull yourself together, sonny."

"Mary—" gasped the boy.

"Show me where she is and we'll get the whole outfit."

"She's a prisoner, in the cabin—"

"I guess not! We got there just too late. The bunch had flown the coop. Threw you out at the roadside. Thought they could shift the blame or hide their

trail, maybe. Feel better now? Good. Let's go!"

With this, Cox started the car and they sped swiftly southward, along a smooth highway. The sense of time and distance came to the wounded boy vaguely, but presently the white glare of the road gave place to cool arches of trees and the car stopped.

A glimpse of the balanced stone, now raised on end, aroused Ramsey to realities. They were in the old lumber trail. Two other cars were parked in the gully and a half dozen men lounged around them. Two of them were handcuffed. A third came forward to Cox.

"We dodged the lookout and got them as they came in," he reported.

"What had they with them?"

"Groceries, paper and ether."

"You've been up to the Bag of Bones?"

"Yes, sir. No signs of them anywhere."

The Bag of Bones! The words aroused Jack like the lash of a whip. There he and Cox had smelled the ether; there Jack had seen the flashing light—In a rush of words the boy told of his night vision, the glow in the ash tree on the rocks.

"Surest thing you know, sonny," Cox exploded. "They needed that light for the fine points in their job."

Jack was groping for other facts which evaded him. Then, clear as a trumpet, came Mary Gage's words:

"Lean Jaw: Under the ash tree on the rocks, lift the hollow stump."

"You say you can get no trace of them?" he cried.

"Right."

"Then I can! Help me! We'll go to the Bag of Bones."

"You're knocked out, sonny—"

"I must! She is there."

"Brady! Grosman!" Cox called. "Help the boy!"

They lifted Jack from the car, two

men carrying him between them on arms and hands doubly crossed. Jack doggedly insisting, Cox hiding his anxiety in muttered curses, the carriers swaying and stumbling with their burden, they made their way along the trail.

Near the Bag of Bones two of Cox's men were on guard. Between them, handcuffed, was the man with the black beard.

"Good work!" Cox commented. "Watch him close. He faces a murder charge. No sign of the others?"

"No, sir."

"Hoist me to the top of those rocks," Jack insisted.

"You ain't going up there, sonny?"

"It's the only way I can find out!"

Lifting and shoving, they raised Jack over the boulders. At last they stood on the level summit. Jack glanced at the ash tree, then studied the ground beneath it.

"See! There! The hollow stump! Two of you lift it!"

"Say, boy, you've gone nutty—"

"Lift that hollow stump!"

Cox's men laid hands on the large stump, the roots of which seemed to be deeply embedded in the earth. As they tugged at the rotting wood, the stump and a section of soil and rock came away in ragged angles, like a piece from a picture puzzle, disclosing the entrance to a cave thus camouflaged on a trap door by a master hand.

"All of you! Down! Quick!" Cox ordered.

A rush to the opening, the tumble of men down a ladder, shouts and the impact of a struggle in the darkness below, a pistol shot, a woman's scream—It happened too quickly to be measured by time.

Swiftly as it came, however, the fight was not ended before Ramsey was on the ladder, dropping into the shadows.

He found Mary, benumbed with terror, crouching in a corner of the cavern. Raising her in his arms, he comforted and revived her. Mary sobbed out her story with arms around his neck.

"Say, sonny, let's go," Cox finally intervened. "Thanks to you, I've made the neatest round-up in my fourteen years of Government service— Crooks, printing press, copper plates, engravers' tools—the whole outfit. Have a look at this—" He extended a crisp twenty-dollar bill—"the neatest take-off you'll see in a blue moon."

"Mary—Miss Gage wants to go to my mother's in Honesdale."

"Hum— She's one of the gang."

"I didn't know what they were doing here— Indeed!" cried the girl.

"She's right there!" It was Gage who spoke, scowling on them from the knot of prisoners.

"Surely you won't punish her!" Jack insisted. "Why, Mr. Cox, she deserves all the credit for this. She told me how to find the trapdoor to this cave."

"Oh!" Cox reflected in doubt. "We might let her stay with your mother till we need her in court—"

One of Cox's men put in a decisive word. As he left his post as a guard for the prisoners and came forward, Jack saw that his left hand was covered with bandages.

"They're right, Boss," he said. "I'm sure you're safe in letting her go. Miss Mary knew nothing of what was doing here. If she had been one of the gang and had known about it, I would have found it out, being with her all the time—"

"Why Jimmie Willets!" cried the girl.

"Present!" he replied with a grin. "Barring my whiskers and the other camouflage."

"Then you're not half-witted?"

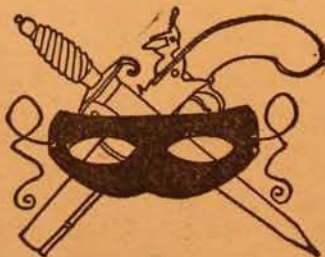
"Not to notice it, Miss Mary."

"And you hanging around our cabin all the time; helping me steal the traps—"

"Got to do crazy things in my job, Miss Mary."

"Oh, Jimmie!"

"I'll take your word for it, Willets," Cox remarked. "Sonny, will you and Miss Gage accept our thanks and apologies? You'd better hustle along now with your elopement."



The Mystery of the One-Legged Man

By J. B. Hawley

I

NEWSPAPER readers will recall the series of brutal and seemingly senseless murders that occurred in England and were attributed to a criminal whom some clever writer dubbed Peg-Leg because after each of his appearances he left conclusive evidence in the form of footprints that he was minus his right leg and wore in its place an old-fashioned wooden affair ending in a round steel ferrule.

I have said that these murders were seemingly senseless affairs, and that must have been the opinion of everyone who considered that they were committed without any apparent motive. From none of his victims was anything stolen and in the history of their lives there were no passages to denote the existence of an enemy who might kill in a spirit of revenge for a real or fancied grievance.

The first of these horrible crimes occurred in York. The victim was a certain John Elder, manufacturer of buttons, a highly respectable citizen.

On the night of his death, Elder had retired to his study to write some letters. As the evening was warm he had opened the French window, and according to the testimony of his butler who was the last of his household to see him alive, had dragged forward a small table and

placed it just in the window's opening. He had seated himself beside this table and begun to write when the servant left the room.

At about eleven o'clock this same servant had heard a cry coming from the study. He had hurried to see if anything were wrong with his master and had found him lying beside the table with a knife wound gaping in his chest. Outside the French window, the police had found unmistakable footprints of a one-legged man. These they followed across the lawn until they came to the road where they became blurred and finally lost in the medley of other prints on this much-traveled thoroughfare.

Of course the detectives rounded up every one-legged man in York and questioned them closely. But all had unquestionable alibis, and as the police were unable to discover or invent a means of tracing the criminal, they eventually dropped the case.

Peg-Leg's second victim was a little higher on the social scale. No lover of English sport will ever forget the name of Sir Roger Bascom. Nor will the many unfortunate souls whom he helped in their need be more backward in cherishing his memory. As in the case of John Elder, Bascom was killed between the hours of eleven and midnight. And on the grounds of his estate in Sussex were found another series of the

footprints of a one-legged man. Because of his prominence, the police put forth their best efforts to run down his murderer. But these went as unrewarded as had those of their colleagues in York.

These two murders happened within three months of each other. Then for over a year Peg-Leg was not heard from again. His next appearance was in London where on Hempstead Heath he stabbed Professor Thomas Belding, the noted authority on Eastern religions.

Now I come to the last of Peg-Leg's activities. His final murder occurred here in Camberwell and robbed me of one of my dearest friends.

The Reverend Frank Parkington was a bachelor, and with young Harry Fellows, his curate, lived in the old stone vicarage just behind the church of St. Annes. He was in all particulars the finest man I have ever known, a brilliant preacher, a good friend, an ardent worker in his chosen field.

His home was a rendezvous for a few of us who over a convivial pipe liked to discuss those matters of the day that interested us. On the night of his death we had gathered at his request to meet Captain Charles Wonderly, the Indian explorer who was his guest. We found this fellow Wonderly a very interesting talker. He had traveled far and seen much and knew how to picture in words what he had seen. With his descriptions and anecdotes he held us interested until well toward midnight.

I remember that I arrived home at about twelve-fifteen. I retired immediately. But I did not go to sleep at once as my mind was still full of the Captain Wonderly's stories. Just as I was dozing off I heard the church

clock strike two and at the same instant there came a violent ringing at my door-bell.

I found Harry Fellows awaiting me on my door-step.

"Come! Come quickly!" he said in a voice hoarse from excitement. "Dr. Parkington is dead—murdered!"

"Murdered! Good heavens, man, are you mad!" I shouted, staring into his face that showed pale and haggard in the feeble light of my hall lamp.

For answer he reached out and shook me roughly by the shoulder.

"Will you come," he said fiercely, "or shall I have to carry you?"

Had I not immediately shown signs of obeying his demand, I really believe the young giant would have picked me up and carried me just as I was in pajamas and slippers. His love for Parkington who had been more than a father to him was a strong thing, and at that moment his grief made him less than reasonable.

In less than ten minutes we were on the road to the vicarage. As we hurried through the still night, Fellows briefly told me what had happened.

II

AFTER his guests had left, Parkington and Captain Wonderly, who was staying for the night, went to their rooms. Because he had some work to finish, Fellows had remained down stairs. At about one-fifteen he was just finishing his writing when he was startled and frightened by the sound of a blood-curdling moan followed by the sound of someone choking. As soon as he had pulled himself together, he ran upstairs and instinct guided him to Parkington's room. He knocked at the door and when there was no answer he pushed it open and entered the bedroom.

There on his knees beside the bed

he found Parkington dead. A knife or some long, sharp instrument had been driven into his back.

"What did you do then?" I asked.

"Called Rodgers, the servant, and sent him off for the police."

"You didn't rouse Wonderly?"

"No. In the excitement I forgot all about the fellow."

We entered the vicarage and raced up the stairs to Parkington's room. There we found Chief Constable Smithers in charge, and with him a quiet looking man whom he introduced as Inspector Grant of Scotland Yard, "down for a bit of a holiday, sir, and stopping with me."

But for the moment I paid but little attention to Smithers and his friend. I was too greatly upset by the sight of the body I could make out lying beside the bed. My natural sorrow at Parkington's death was added to by the awfulness of the way in which he had been taken from us. I went over and stood beside his body and looking down on it swore that I would find his murderer and see that he paid for his crime.

Then I turned to Smithers for his report.

"Squire," he began gravely, "what I have to tell you will probably surprise you. You have heard of the notorious Peg-Leg. Well, sir, there is every indication that this is another of his fiendish crimes."

Both Fellows and myself stared in amazement. Smithers continued.

"Yes, sir, I know that it sounds impossible but nevertheless it seems to be a fact. Inspector Grant here who worked on both the Bascom case and that of Professor Belding, will bear me out when I say that all the clues we have been able to find point in that direction."

Inspector Grant nodded his head.

Smithers crossed the room and

stood midway between the bed and an open window that looked out on poor Parkington's lawn.

He pointed downward at the carpet.

"See here, sir. Those little round marks—and here—and here—leading right to the window, sir. And plenty more of them on the ground below accompanied by the print of one shoe which does not show on this carpet."

"And those marks—" I began.

"They're from a wooden leg," Smithers finished.

"But see here," Fellows cried from beside the window. "How did the beggar get in the house. No man with a wooden leg could climb up here."

Smithers shook his head.

"No good, sir. It's really a very easy job. You have the hooks that hold the drain pipe all the way. Both Grant and I tried it and had no trouble at all."

"Have you tried to follow the trail?" I asked.

"Lor' bless you, yes, sir. We did that at once. But it leads nowhere. The prints are lost on the stone road less than a hundred feet down the highway."

We were all bending over those horrible indentations in the carpet when a sound at our backs caused us to look up. In the doorway clad in his pajamas was Captain Wonderly rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"I say, you chaps," he said, "what's up?"

Then he caught sight of Parkington's body and started forward.

"Good heavens! Parkington!" he exclaimed. "What's wrong with him? Is he hurt?"

"Dead," I answered briefly.

In a dazed sort of way Wonderly turned his eyes from one to another

of us. At last they rested on Smithers, and guided by the constable's uniform, addressed him as the officer of the law.

"Have you got the man that did this?"

"Not yet," Smithers replied. "And now, sir, I'll trouble you to tell me who you are and what you know of this business."

Wonderly indicated Fellows and me.

"These gentlemen know me," he said. "My name's Wonderly. I was a friend of Dr. Parkington. As for what I know of this business—unfortunately I can't help you a bit."

"You were staying in the house?"

Wonderly looked down significantly at his night clothes.

"I certainly was," he answered, "in that room across the hall."

"And you heard nothing? No sound?"

An expression of sorrow—almost of shame passed over Wonderly's face.

"If I only had," he replied quietly, "I'll wager Parkington would be alive now. You see, gentlemen, some years ago I lost the hearing in my right ear. This deficiency doesn't bother me ordinarily but if I happen to go to sleep on my left ear as I did tonight, I'm as deaf as a post."

At my suggestion we went downstairs and seated ourselves in the library, leaving the murder chamber and its ghastly inhabitant untouched to await the offices of the coroner. But hardly had we taken our chairs when Fellows jumped to his feet, exclaiming:

"This sitting around when Dr. Parkington's murderer is making good his escape is too much for me. I'm going to have a look around."

I put out my hand to stop him but at a signal from Smithers let it fall.

"Let him go," he said after Fellows had left the room. "It won't do any

good but it won't do any harm and it may ease the poor lad to be doing something."

"Of course you have sent out a general alarm," I asked Smithers a minute later.

He nodded.

"Of course, sir. Any one-legged man seen hereabouts will find his way to the police station."

Then we began a careful consideration of the crime, each man suggesting that which he thought might help toward clearing it up and bringing the criminal to justice.

In this consultation, I conceived a great admiration for Captain Wonderly. The man had an exceedingly keen mind. In competition with Smithers and Inspector Grant, both old hands in the pursuit of criminals, he showed up wonderfully. No point escaped him and several times he set the others right in the development of a theory or in the statement of facts. Then and there, I said to myself, that could I persuade Wonderly to give up his time to seeking the murderer of my friend, I might hope for some results.

I was about to put the suggestion to him when we were all startled by the sound of quick footsteps on the stairs and along the hall. An instant later the library door swung wide and the huge bulk of Fellows filled the aperture.

I caught my breath in amazement as I saw the expression on his face. His eyes were wild with excitement and about his lips were lines of grim determination.

Without a word to the detectives or me, he crossed the room to Wonderly and bending over him whispered *in his right ear*.

A look of utter amazement came into Wonderly's eyes. This was quickly followed by fear which in turn changed to a sort of blind rage. He strove to

rise, but Fellows's hand was about his throat and held him tightly to his chair.

Then very slowly, Fellows brought his other hand from behind his back. In it was a long knife and some queer contrivance whose purpose I could not make out. He threw these things on the table in front of Wonderly.

"Smithers," he said in a cold, hard voice, "I want you to arrest this man for the murder of John Elder, Sir Roger Bascom, Professor Belding and Dr. Parkinson."

III

WHAT happened then happened so quickly that we others had not the time to pull ourselves together and go to Fellows's aid. There was a brief struggle between Fellows and Wonderly, a cry from the latter, the tinkle of broken glass on the floor and then suddenly Wonderly's body went limp in Fellows's hands.

"Poison," Fellows muttered, bending over the body of his late antagonist. "The beggar had it in the pocket of his dressing-gown."

He picked up a rug from the floor and threw it over the body in front of him.

Now we all crowded around Fellows and burst into a babel of questions. He raised one hand to silence us and with the other pointed at the queer contrivance which with the knife lay in front of Wonderly's corpse.

"There," he said, "is the wooden leg of your Peg-Leg."

The thing was a piece of board cut in the shape of the sole of a shoe. From the bottom projected a short, round stick tipped with an iron ferrule. At the front and back were straps by which it might be fastened to a man's foot. Only a brief examination of it was needed to see how once so fastened the prints the wearer would leave be-

hind him would certainly resemble those of a one-legged man.

Smithers was the first to break the silence.

"Mr. Fellows," he said, "I must congratulate you. You have laid by the heels a man whom the best detectives in England couldn't catch. But I beg of you, sir, tell us how you did it."

Fellows sank into a chair.

"All right," he said, "it must be sometime and I suppose it might as well be now."

He drew a square, leather-bound book from his pocket.

"But first," he went on, "I want you to listen to a few extracts from Wonderly's diary. They will throw some light on the man's motives for his dastardly crimes."

Then in a low voice he read us the following:

Calcutta, November 16—Civilization again! After five years of freedom to be cooped up in this place of narrow streets and silly houses! But if it is my destiny to carry on the war among men of my own race, I must not begin by complaining.

I see none but strange faces on the streets and in the clubs. Thanks to the gods, the men who knew me have gone their ways. The fools! They despised me because my eyes sought the Light. And when, having found it, I followed it, they said that I had gone *fantee*.

How I could laugh at them now. The pretentious asses with their weak, anæmic gods, thinking they know the secrets of life. I who have stood before the altar of Siva and watched the spilling of the blood; I who have harkened to the angry voice of Kali, would bid them halt and reconsider their conceit lest the vengeance that is Asia's descend upon them.

* * *

London—The message came today, and it is to kill—kill—Kill!

* * *

My birthday, and I have begun the great work. John Elder is dead. Even now the police are searching for the one-legged man who killed him. One-legged! I wonder if the fools will ever see through my little scheme for sending them hunting the wild goose.

* * *

The good work continues. Bascom and Belding are gone the way of Elder. So may

all men go who lift their hands against the holy gods!

Fellows closed the book and threw it aside.

"A mad man!" I whispered.

"A religious fanatic of the worst type," Fellows answered. "I think I can piece his story together. He became enamored with native life and probably fell into the hands of the priests. Or perhaps a woman led him to the native shrines. And their damnable religion got into his blood and drove him mad."

Smithers scratched his head.

"But what made him kill?"

"Because his victims were the enemies of his religion. All four of them knew the evil practices of his cult; knew how his priests were holding back the people of India. With their best efforts and their money, here in England, they were fighting the battles of their dark-skinned brothers thousands of miles away."

"Now will you tell us how you found this fellow out?"

The question came from Inspector Grant. Fellows nodded and began.

"There was one thing that bothered me from the time Wonderly entered the room upstairs. And that was his explanation for not hearing Parkington's cry and the ensuing commotion which I and the rest of us must have made.

"You remember he said that he was totally deaf in the right ear. That would have been all right had I not happened to remember that I sat on his right side at dinner tonight and once spoke to him in a voice barely above a whisper in his right ear. *And he heard perfectly.*

"My first idea was that the man was a coward and had stayed in his room because he had been afraid to come out and see what all the noise was about. I held to that opinion until we had come

downstairs and I left you to wander about the garden.

"When I went outside, my first impulse was to take a lantern and examine the famous foot-prints. I did so and traced them as you did down to the stone road. Then I came back to the house and began to wander aimlessly about the other side of it.

"I ended up a few yards away from Wonderly's window. Happening to glance downward, I saw something that sent the blood racing through my veins. There on the ground before me in a soft spot on the gravel were another set of foot-prints. And these were of a man with two legs wearing shoes that seemed to correspond to the single shoe worn by the man with one leg.

"I raced around to the other side of the house and verified my suspicion. Then I went back to my find.

"I took the direction the prints pointed out and followed it slowly, my lantern close to the ground. A ways farther on I found another set of prints and so on every little while I found them until I had made a wide detour and was out on the stone road where the murderer's prints began and ended.

"At first I did not realize the significance of what I had discovered. Then it suddenly came to me that a man could easily leave the foot-prints of a one-legged man if in walking he used a stilt or some such device. Also I recalled that the new prints had begun at Wonderly's window. Then I knew why he hadn't joined us in Parkington's room sooner. It was because he was probably in hiding somewhere at the other side of the house waiting for a chance to slip back into his room after having murdered my friend and left those bewildering prints.

"I came back to the house, crept upstairs and went through his things. You know what I found and what happened after that."

Hear Not, See Not, Speak Not Evil

By Walter Deffenbaugh

I

THE opaque light through the drawn shade of the library window alone marked the location of the big house, surrounded by flower-dotted lawns. Half a mile away twinkled the few midnight lamps of the village. An occasional belated motor car flashed as a meteor through the night. A flash and a rumble from over the hill marked the passing of a trolley-car on its way to the city.

At night it was a particularly lonesome spot, but this did not seem to bother in the least Dr. Darius Y. Porter, wealthy and famous specialist in diseases of the eye, ear and throat, as he strolled leisurely homeward after dinner and bridge with a neighbor.

His eyes were turned toward the light he had left burning on his reading table as a bearing in his search for the small side gate, when another light flashed on at an upper window. He immediately located this as the chamber of old Martha, his housekeeper, who had come to him as a sort of charity patient and remained because she had proved invaluable during the progress of her cure of deafness.

"Up rather late," he mused, as he glanced upward and then halted in his tracks, because there was thrust upward as though from the bottom of a screen in a motion picture the shadow of a hand—a hand with the fingers rapidly working in the code of the deaf and dumb.

"Help! Burglars! Help!" was the message he read from the frantic fingers as they spelled out, in the code he had taught her, a message of appeal plainly destined for his eye in case he should be returning along the road.

Fumbling hurriedly along the high hedge, he found his gate and was unlatching it when, to his amazement, shadows appeared upon the curtain of the library window—and these too showed fingers working in the silent code—fingers attached to rather dim figures—figures of two, or perhaps three men—figures that waved back and forth and fingers upon arms which seemed to gesticulate as though to emphasize a soundless argument.

Porter's nerves had been steeled by years in hospitals, his muscles tautened by years of semi-retirement upon his country estate. His gate was flung open as he looked and he bounded up the gravel path to the side veranda of his home to attack these intruders with his bare hands.

His surprise attack was balked by the darkness. Running by instinct, he fell sprawling over a chair old Martha had been using for an after-dinner reverie beneath the vines that covered the porch, and chair and physician fell together in a resounding crash. He was up in a second and had his key in the lock of the side door, but already he could hear voices inside and the sound of hurried retreat.

"Quick! Beat it!" shouted one voice.

"Help me, Dan, damn you," whined another.

"Let go my coat, you — — —," he heard one say amid the noise of running feet and overturned furniture, while old Martha screamed lustily from her now opened window.

Abandoning this attack, Porter leaped from the veranda and ran to the front of the house. He was beginning to believe he could make out something moving against a sky-line formed by a rise of ground—something that looked like two running men, one almost dragging the other—when he bumped full tilt into what was undoubtedly a man, huddled in a clump of rose bushes, with his back toward him and facing the main entrance to the grounds.

The impact knocked the doctor from his feet and before he could recover, the man was running across the lawn. As Porter staggered up, a shot fanned the hair along the side of his head and, philosophically, he turned back into his open front door with his thoughts about equally divided between the screams of his housekeeper and the safety of a pearl necklace in his safe—a treasure of which he was trustee—a wedding gift for his daughter from her dead mother, when the time should come.

A shouted word up the stairs quieted the screams, but many unprofessional oaths failed to alter the scene as he looked into his library, where the door of the safe stood open, with its contents scattered about on the floor. The case in which his wife's necklace had rested undisturbed for ten years was upside down on the library table. Empty—a quick glance showed. But something crunched under his foot as he moved and sweat that the thieves had not started broke out on his forehead as he turned on more lights and retrieved the fragments of a pearl.

Standing in his tracks, then cautiously kneeling and creeping, he searched

with eyes and fingers until he had found eleven more, waving back and silencing the moaning old woman who wavered in the doorway. Twelve, that accounted for—twelve out of thirty-six. They had got twenty-four of them, then, the scoundrels, he decided. Well, he should have them back—have them if it took all his time and his life besides. He was something of a sentimentalist, this doctor, for all his calm exterior. A sentimentalist, with a touch of the masterful and stubborn.

With a sigh, he arose to his feet, took up his telephone and called the village police. He had not stopped to question Martha until then. As he thought, she knew nothing. She had been suddenly, vaguely disturbed; she had listened and heard sounds downstairs—voices that were those of strangers; then an oath and noise of a quarrel; afraid to shout, she had recalled the code of her days of deafness and acted upon an impulse to try to signal her master in case he should be coming along the road.

There was no help there. Neither was there in the weighty theories offered by the village police sergeant upon his tumultuous arrival upon the scene a few minutes later. Dr. Porter was glad when they were all gone and he was able to light his pipe and sink into his easy chair with his feet resting carefully amid the scattered contents of his safe, which still littered the floor.

Daylight, for which he had waited, came just about the time he was ready for it. He had said nothing to the village sergeant about the talking fingers, but he had spent the night thinking about them and also about the crouching figure into whose heedless back he had crashed. He had reached two conclusions, born of his long observance of defective mankind. One of the men who had robbed him was

dumb. There had been an argument and those who could had not hesitated to use their voices. Martha testified to that. Therefore there was one who could not speak, but was still determined to have his say.

The man in the bushes, he decided, was stone deaf. Sensing danger when the others took to their heels, there had been no sound to warn him of the direction of the danger. Therefore he crouched in the bushes with his eyes to the main gate, waiting for a glimpse of his peril. The sudden start of the thief, which he felt, rather than saw, as he collided with him, showed that the man had not even heard his running pursuit or his shouts calling rather foolishly upon the burglars to halt.

So far, so good, he had decided. But what of the third man—of that figure that seemed to drag behind another at his last glimpse of them. Therefore he welcomed the daylight.

The mode of entrance had been simple—a jimmy applied to one of the windows opening on the front veranda. Apparently the thieves were familiar with the house and the habits of the family, knew that his chauffeur had taken his daughter away in his car to spend the summer with relatives and that the master being out for the evening, old Martha would be alone in the mansion. Naturally, they had unlocked the front door from the inside and their escape had been equally simple.

The well-kept lawns and graveled walks and drives revealed no sign of footprints. Even in the clump of rose bushes where he had fallen there were only a few marks of knees, heels and toes to mark the brief encounter. The deaf man, apparently, had run from there straight across the lawn to the main highway and vaulted the stone wall. But the other two had run at a tangent over the rising ground beyond which lay his vegetable garden. Per-

haps there was something to be found there.

A detective might never have read the signs beyond the little hill, but to the physician they were as plain as if he had seen what had happened. Just over the brow, the slighter growth of grass had been torn as one of the men stumbled and fell. More than that, there were signs of a struggle between them and marks as though the rearward of the two was being dragged along with his toes scraping up the soil. Just beyond was a bit of cloth which proved to be the cleanly ripped off patch pocket of a cheap coat.

Beyond that the track divided. One man had run straight and true across the tilled vegetable garden to the board fence beyond and apparently made his way to the trolley line. But the other had blundered about, crashing into trees, fences and shrubbery and then run in a zigzag fashion, tumbled into a cress pond and finally crashed through a board fence and fallen sprawling in a lane.

"Crazed by fright," a trained detective might have said.

"The third man is blind," stated the doctor as he turned back to his library.

A careful search of the floor by daylight revealed no more of the pearls. A check of the remnant showed that the string had broken, scattering their matched treasures, and it seemed probable that the thieves in a hasty search had found only the largest, as though they had groped for them by the touch of their hands. Sadly, Dr. Porter placed the rifled case in his pocket, gathered up his scattered papers, locked his expertly opened safe, and started by trolley for the city.

On the way in he heard several things that interested him, but kept his own counsel. He had fully decided upon his plan, which had for its object the recovery of the pearls rather than the

punishment of the thieves. That could come later. He had formulated a plan which was based upon medical rather than detective science. He smiled grimly as he heard the gossip in the village, where the news of the robbery was not yet known. Corner loiterers were discussing the strange case of a blind man who had appeared at daybreak, scratched and bruised and with a broken cane, who told a tale of having been separated from his companion and forced to spend the night in the fields. From this rambling and conflicting gossip he managed to gain a sort of description of the man—rather a stout, unkempt kind of fellow, it seemed, wearing blue goggles and a short, heavy beard, sprinkled with gray.

There was other talk of a second stranger who had passed through the village twice on trolley cars, seemingly somewhat bewildered as to his whereabouts, who listened attentively to what was said in his hearing, but refused to answer any questions as to where he was going or wanted to go. Some said he was a foreigner who couldn't understand English; others that he was merely one of those sullen fellows who never can be sociable.

Of him, too, there were meagre descriptions—slight, about thirty, smooth-shaven, dressed in a cheap suit with one pocket ripped from the side of the coat and the back of one hand scratched as though by thorns or finger-nails.

The trail plainly led to the city, and there Dr. Porter followed it, with his eye cocked for a blind man with blue goggles and a beard. In a crowded city, he fully realized, a deaf man can hide his lack of hearing, a dumb man his inability to speak, but a blind man cannot disguise his lack of sight.

This must be a case of the blind leading the blind. If he could locate the man with the blue goggles he felt sure he could find the others and through

one of them his pearls. Determinedly he made his way to the poorer lodging-house section of the city, where his experience told him a blind man of this type, especially one separated from his pals, would be most likely to be found. Of course he might be "holed-up," but that seemed improbable. No one had seen him in the house and who would suspect a blind man of being a burglar, even though he had been seen in the vicinity of a crime?

Nevertheless the first day's search was fruitless. There were scores of blind men, but not *the* blind man—blind men of all sorts, but not one showing signs of the brand of viciousness that would lead him into safe-robbery—many blind men who were not blind, but the man he sought really was blind, he knew.

Toward evening he decided that if it were to be a long hunt he must have headquarters on the spot, and found one ready-made for him. At a free dispensary in the neighborhood he was gladly granted permission to open a private charity clinic for the treatment of those specialties in which he was famous. His explanation that he was looking for material for a series of new experiments was readily accepted and a private office, with sleeping room attached, speedily cleared for the distinguished physician. To it he brought down from his home some personal belongings, bedding and a few decorations, including two or three Chinese and Japanese bronzes that were one of his hobbies.

II

It was along about noon on the second day after that the series of events his logic demanded began to shape themselves. A tattered boy emerged from a lodging house leading an almost burly figure in beard and blue goggles, who tapped ahead of him with a long

cane. About his neck were suspended the regulation tin cup and placard reading, "Please Help the Blind." With almost a lump in his throat, Porter followed the pair across to one of the busy business streets, where the boy left his charge against the iron railing of a graveyard and darted away. Porter took up his stand nearby to await developments.

These were not long in coming. Coins for the cup were few. The figure was a trifle too burly and the expression a trifle too belligerent to awaken pity in many hearts among the hurrying throng, but finally a man appeared who deliberately halted and searched his pockets for a coin. Porter observed him carefully. He had noticed him as he crossed the street. The normal man jumps when an automobile horn honks just behind him. This man had not even started. He was a tall man, slightly stooped, smooth-shaven, with a long, pointed jaw, and when he spoke to the blind beggar it was in a low monotone which Porter could not catch, even though he edged closer in the effort.

Neither could he hear the beggar's reply—but he could read it, for the blind man answered with his fingers, with his hand held high, almost under the other's nose—answered emphatically and with warmth which swept beyond the limits of the silent code and required spoken oaths to express his feelings.

Porter's hands gripped the railing behind him as he stood tense a few yards away from the strangely quarreling pair.

"Where'd I go?" shouted the fingers. "What'd you care where I went? You left me with that damn Dummy, didn't you? You left me with him so he could ditch me. Didn't have the heart to throw down an old pal like that yourself. Where'd you go? That's what I

want to know. Where'd you go and where's my share of them pearls?"

The deaf man apparently replied at some length, but without changing his tone or position. He stood as though interested in some charitable quest, but his explanation fell upon ears as deaf as his own. It was discarded with a gesture of angry scorn.

"To hell with that tale," the fingers declaimed. "I may be blind, but I can hear and I can feel. Didn't I hear and feel you and Dummy picking them pearls up off the floor when the string broke just before the blow-off. What chance had I to find any? And you try to tell me Dummy got 'em all. Tell that to any old con and see if he'll believe you. You crossed me—the pair of you—that's what you did, Deafy. I didn't expect much different from Dummy. He's a gaycat, anyway, but you—why didn't I forgive you when you put my lamps out getting funny with that soup. I forgave you that because you was a pal and because you lost your hearing at the same time. And now you cross a blind man."

They kept it up for two or three minutes more, but there was too much at stake for Porter to risk observance by the alert deaf man, and he lost himself in the crowd until they should finish. Over his shoulder he read the blind man's parting shot.

"Don't forget it, neither," the fingers spelled. "You have Dummy here tomorrow or I'll snitch on you as sure—"

The fingers were still working as the deaf man darted away unseen and Porter turned in his tracks to follow.

He knew where the blind man lived and did not need to worry about him. Blind men usually travel neither far nor fast. So he trailed the deaf man to a small hotel half-way uptown and watched long enough to make sure he lived there before he returned to his

neglected clinic and a pipe to aid him in piecing together his new information.

Two old crooks, eh, he ruminated, when his work was done. Two old pals injured in a premature explosion while cracking a safe. Remarkable, most remarkable! And the dumb man—who is he? Where does he enter the combination? It was quite a while before the answer occurred to him, and when it did he almost chuckled at the picture presented.

"Ideal," he muttered aloud. "Ideal. An ideal combination among men so vicious they cannot even trust each other. One man can't see, another can't hear and the third can't speak. No one of them competent to act alone. The combination is ideal, but I wonder how the dumb man talks to the blind man," and puzzling over this he cast a queer glance at one of his bronzes and went to bed to wait for the promised meeting on the morrow.

It was a long, dreary wait as he paced back and forth about the blind man's post, first on one side of the street and then on the other, but finally he made out the tall form of the deaf crook crossing the street in the same careless fashion as before, to the evident distress of a slighter, shorter man, who tugged at his arm in efforts to transmit the warnings of traffic peril. The watching physician had identified Dummy even before he was close enough to show that his right-hand coat pocket was missing.

Deafy and Dummy halted before Goggles, and again the pretense of searching pockets for coins was gone through with. Apparently there was some brief word from the taller of the pair, because the blind man stiffened in anger and began to speak rapidly. Deafy lingered for a moment and then, with an impatient toss of his head, stepped away from a conversation he could not hear and glared suspiciously

at the pair from a position on the curb.

It was dangerous for Porter to attempt to overhear what the blind man was saying. Anyway, he knew from the conversation of the day before just about what it would be, but curiosity held him for a minute's risk. He wanted to see how the dumb man would reply. The finger code would be useless before sightless eyes, and he was sure the man really could not speak.

The passers-by undoubtedly noticed nothing unusual, but the expert in human disabilities saw it in a glance and scolded himself for having even puzzled over the method. It was no miracle, but most unusual, except among those long in intimate association. It was remarkable, because these men were apparently comparative strangers.

Dummy merely placed his hand over that of Goggles, who held it out for him, and pressed, tapped and squeezed in the code such as is used by Miss Helen Keller and her mentor. The physician understood at once, but was amazed at what he saw. How could these two men become adept at this intricate system with but apparently a very short opportunity for practice? Undoubtedly, the usual method of communication among the trio was by words from the deaf man to either the blind or the dumb, by words from the blind man to the dumb man and by fingers from the blind man to the deaf man, by fingers from the dumb man to the deaf man and through him to the blind man by words. Their whole association seemed built up on the necessity of the three being together when they conferred with any ease, and hence he wondered at this apparent proficiency in an unusual code.

At length, while he waited at a safe distance for the conversation to end, he recalled something in his experience which solved the problem. These men

were, undoubtedly, all ex-convicts. Among the long-term men in some prisons, he remembered, this very system had been developed among some of the most desperate as a means of secret communication where speech was forbidden and the finger code would have been instantly detected. Along the eating tables, in the workshops, or in the marching lines of prisoners a hand could grasp a hand and a brief message be exchanged among the initiated. He had heard vaguely that "outside" there was a regular school where the system was taught those who feared that some day they might have need for it, either to send or receive a message. He understood.

It was a dangerous place for a lengthy conversation between two men such as these, even under the best of circumstances, but the anger in the hearts of these two made it doubly dangerous. The deaf man watched uneasily and hovered near with one eye on his quarreling companions, and the other searching the crowd for detectives. Porter saw the dumb man throw the other's hand from him with a violent gesture, and, as the blind man raised his cane to strike, the deaf man darted forward, caught Dummy by the arm and whirled him away in the crowd with a low-voiced curse at the man in goggles.

Porter followed the pair and made sure of locating the lair of the third of his despoilers. It was in a hotel of shabby appearance and unsavory reputation far uptown that the dumb man lived. A few hours of cautious inquiries and guarded listening served to reveal something of his character. Dummy, he found, was also a professional beggar—at times, at least. He was one of those furtive individuals who seeks alms with printed cards, or with pad and pencil. Usually he pretended to be deaf as well as dumb, but

his hearing was most acute when his own character was under discussion, and his vengeful, vicious nature showed itself strongly, especially when he was in his cups, which was as often as possible. At such times he turned upon gossipers with strange, guttural noises and cries, which showed that he had well-developed vocal cords, even if they were out of control.

Dr. Porter had found his pearl thieves. But that was not the object of his quest. He wanted his pearls.

His next step had already been mapped out. The rape of his wife's necklace had hurt him far more than the threatened monetary loss. He could buy other pearls without reckoning the cost, but money would not replace these particular pearls. The mere turning over of these men to the police and seeing them sent to prison would not satisfy him. Therefore, he did not seek the police and trust to arrests and third-degree methods. Instead, he called a taxi and drove to the office of young Dr. Henry B. Robertson, who had been one of his assistants until he had hung out his own shingle a few months before and was still his devoted slave.

To Robertson, Porter quickly outlined the story. Upon two prescription blanks he wrote two names, addresses and descriptions.

"Harry," he said, "one of these men is deaf and the other dumb. Both of them are dangerous criminals, suspicious of everyone and remarkably cunning. I must have each one of them in my hands, alone, as speedily as possible. I am trusting to your wits. You must manage in some way to become acquainted with these men, introduce yourself as the specialist you are and then call me in. Don't use my name, of course. If properly approached both of these men would jump at a chance to be cured. Promise them you can do it, Harry, and I'll do the rest. I'll

allow you about a week on each case, but hurry."

III

PORTER left his eager young ex-assistant already changing to a street coat and drove to the office of a private detective agency noted for its faithfulness to its clients and its utter lack of curiosity. Here he quietly arranged to have the two men shadowed day and night, with immediate reports to him of anything unusual.

His trap was ready to be baited.

Robertson, he felt sure, would bring the deaf and dumb man to him. He had decided to handle the blind man himself, because here, he felt sure, was the weakest side of the triangle. The blind man, more helpless than either of the others, was burning with desire to avenge what he believed to have been a deliberate attempt to abandon him and cheat him out of the proceeds of the joint enterprise.

It was best, he decided, in this case to strike quickly and directly. But he did not go again to the station by the graveyard railing. Instead he loitered in the vicinity of the lodging-house until, after the evening crowds had deserted the streets, the tattered boy appeared with his charge in tow, leading homeward a bitter, cursing blind man.

"Excuse me," said Dr. Porter, resisting a temptation to seize the man by the throat and choke a confession out of him, "but I am a physician. I am making a study of blindness. Perhaps I might be able to help you, if you would let me."

"I ain't got no money to pay doctors," Goggles replied, bitterly.

"It isn't a matter of money," Porter answered. "I tell you I am studying the various forms of blindness. I have opened a clinic at the dispensary around the corner. We make no charge to those who have no money to pay."

"Could you give me back my eyes?" the blind man asked eagerly.

"Perhaps. How did you lose your sight?"

"Explosion."

"Powder factory?"

"Something like that."

"How long ago?"

"Two years, come August."

"That is most interesting. I think I can do something for you. Can you be at my clinic at 10 in the morning? Ask for me. My name is Dr. Moore."

"You think there's a chance I could see again?" the blind man asked after a full minute's study. "I could pay well, if I could get my eyes back."

"You mean you could work and earn the money then?"

"I wouldn't have to earn it. It's coming to me. I mean I could catch the—that gyped me out of my share of the—well, out of my rights."

"You'll come, then?" Porter asked, almost too eagerly he feared.

"Yes, I'll be there."

One of the quarry had smelled the bait.

Two days later young Dr. Robertson was having a similar conversation with a man to whom he talked on his fingers and who answered in a low monotone. Here, too, was a man who finally admitted a great desire to regain one of his lost senses. This man did not seek vengeance, but expressed a fear that through his disability certain enemies were plotting against him. He was intensely anxious to hear what was going on around him and promised payment for a cure—not in money, but in the form of a handsome present of jewelry.

In the course of the following week another derelict had confessed to Dr. Robertson that he might be able to raise money for a goodly reward in case his speech was restored. He had no money, he confessed, but could realize on some valuable property he owned, if he could

only talk about it like other men. Being dumb he was at a great disadvantage, and, also, he would like to tell a couple of — exactly what he thought of them in plain words. This in itself, he declared profanely, would be worth a great deal to him.

Each of the three men had stipulated that there should be no publicity about the cases. No one was to know they were under treatment. They each announced a great desire to "surprise their friends" and insisted upon arrangements for their visits at hours when they would not be seen by other patients. To these stipulations, Drs. Robertson and Porter finally agreed as a special concession, although Dr. Porter knocked what little professional dignity Dr. Robertson had been able to acquire completely out of him as he slapped him on the back in token of great and complete satisfaction.

IV

ON each of the three cases "Dr. Moore" worked patiently and painstakingly. He soon lost all fear of detection as the man whose house had been robbed. If the three crooks remembered the name of their victim, it was apparently only as "some doctor" and there were thousands of doctors. All of his expert training in his profession he applied to the work of really restoring these three men to the full use of their faculties, and all of the skill in reading human character, gleaned from his long years of practice, he devoted to extracting and piecing together their secrets. He worked as physician and psychologist combined.

Both processes were tedious, but combined required only a couple of weeks altogether after the men had fully surrendered their confidence to him and his energetic young assistant, who in the casual conversational man-

ner of the competent physician did most of the real questioning. That they learned anything like all of the truth neither of them believed for a moment. That all they did learn was true was another premise they rejected. But, trying and testing each statement gleaned, comparing and matching it to others to see if it fitted, and putting the whole "jig-saw puzzle" together, they felt that they had at least the framework of a section of the lives of these three crooks and the clue to their strange association.

As Dr. Porter had originally deduced, the three were ex-convicts. Deafy and Goggles had been friends for years and went to Sing Sing for the same burglary. At that time both men were in full possession of their senses. They had become acquainted with Dummy, sentenced for some petty crime, while in prison—attracted to him by his infirmity, which lent a sort of morbid diversion to a drab existence. Through this association they perfected their knowledge of the silent codes of which they already had a smattering, and formed a friendship with a promise of an offensive and defensive alliance when they should be again "outside."

The release of Goggles and Deafy came first, and they at once set about making up for lost time, forgetting their silent pal, victim of an attack of scarlet fever, after the manner of their kind. Goggles was a wonder with safes. He could open almost any of them, it seems, by merely listening to the click of the tumblers as he turned the knob of the combination. Deafy was supposed to be the "soup" expert—the man who used a drill and a bottle of nitroglycerine upon such boxes as resisted the skill of his companion.

They had a most prosperous time of it for a month or two, baffling the police, obtaining their fill of adventure

and lining their pockets—all three satisfactions at one time.

Dummy was released about this time and speedily hunted up his old friends. He was broke, morose, desperate and vengeful. They did not like him as a pal half so much as they thought they would back there in the big, lonely prison. Perhaps it was because Dummy did not measure up to real yegg standards. But the dumb man had declared himself in on two or three of their jobs, and thereafter it was sort of a game of hide and seek. They dodged him whenever they could and accepted him as a partner when they couldn't help it.

One night when Deafy and Goggles were working alone something had happened. The safe had resisted the skill of the silent worker and the drill and the soup had been called upon to finish the job. Just what happened neither of them knew, but there had been a roar and a blinding flash and a deaf man had dragged a blind man from a wrecked office to safety.

The pearl robbery had been of a later era—of a time after the two men had recovered as much as they could from the effects of the explosion, broken by their disaster physically and financially. To them in this condition, the dumb man had really seemed a link with the world. To one he provided ears, to the other he gave eyes. He would help a lot, they thought, at first.

But the days of big jobs seemed to be over. Dummy was still a petty thief at heart, and for a time the two real crooks had no stomach for daring adventure. In the course of their picaresque pilfering they also learned that Dummy was not a man to be trusted. Deafy had seen him cheat the blind man and, without knowing the reason, Goggles had heard the deaf man give information which sent Dummy to the workhouse for a brief bit. That was

the beginning of the disruption of what little of mutual honor had ever existed among these three thieves. Thereafter the combination conceived as a protection against society contracted into a closer and sullen trinity for protection against each other.

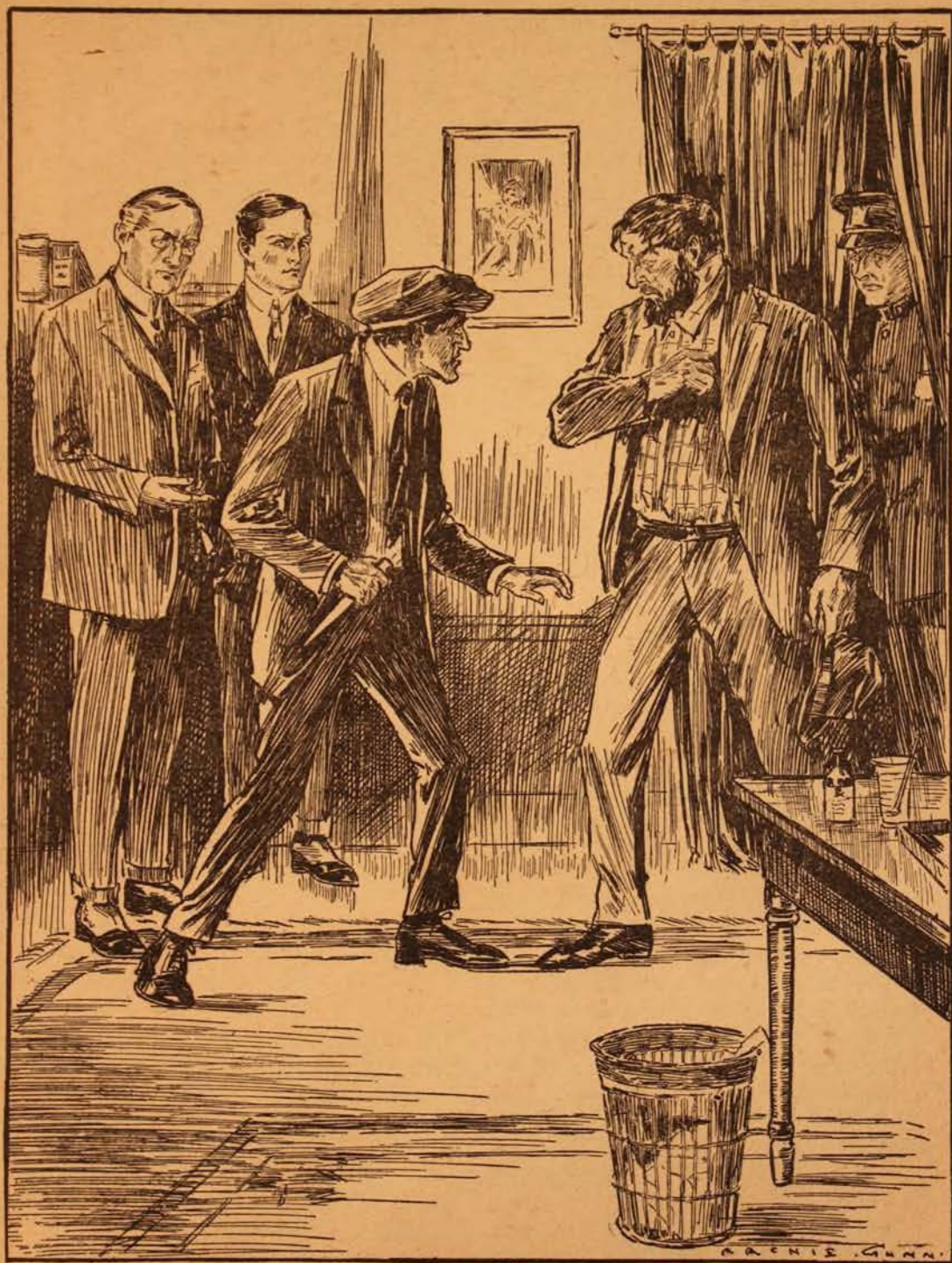
There were holes in the piecemeal story about this period—times when each of the men was strangely silent and grim about what had occurred. Something had happened. What it was neither of the physicians could find out, though they worked as skilfully with their wits as with their scalpels.

The attack upon Dr. Porter's safe was commonplace enough, save for the personalities of the burglars themselves, when the facts were known. The pearls had been located in the usual way, by a servant girl known to the dumb man, through some queer channel. She had reported the make and location of the safe, the plan of the house and the habits of the household. She had been dismissed a few days before the departure of the doctor's daughter. All would have been plain sailing but for the delay of old Martha in going to sleep.

As for the location of the stolen pearls themselves, that was not quite so easy. An inept or too direct lead or question along this line might have caused alarm which would have spoiled everything. Hating one another as these three crooks undoubtedly did, they were still subjects of the code enough to have given a warning cry if they detected danger.

So the pearls themselves were still somewhat in the realm of deductive facts, although Porter felt certain of his ground. He felt sure that the blind man had none, the deaf man a few, and the dumb man the bulk of them. So certain was he of his ground that he sprang his trap on that basis.

The two private detectives, a police



Dummy whipped out a knife and sprang for Goggles.—Page 67

lieutenant of detectives and a stenographer were concealed in Dr. Robertson's offices that night. The two physicians had brazenly broken their promise of secrecy to their three patients. Each had been ordered to report at a fixed time, and so firm now was their faith in the wonder-working specialists that they obeyed without doubt or question.

V

THE deaf man was the first to arrive. As he entered the room, Dr. Porter was seated at a table toying with the remnant of his dead wife's necklace. The sight of it startled the thief, but he recovered himself and took a seat in front of the doctor. Porter laid aside the pearls and turned to the man with his best professional air.

"How are you feeling, Mason?" he asked.

Deafy cupped one hand at his right ear as the doctor spoke, but answered the question readily.

"Fine, sir," he answered, with a grin, "but hearing a whole lot better, thanks to you."

"That's good, but you needn't thank me. There's usually a good reason for anything a physician does. Very often he profits even more than the patient. All you have to do now is to take care of yourself and lead a regular life. I think it would be best for you to keep out of the open air."

With a queer smile, Porter again picked his pearls.

Deafy hesitated a moment, then coughed apologetically.

"You seem interested in pearls," he said finally.

"Why, yes, rather," Porter replied. "This is a small string belonging to a friend of mine who left them with me to see if I could find some others to match them."

Again the thief hesitated and stammered a bit when he spoke.

"You remember, Doctor," he said, "I told you I should like to make you a little present of jewelry if I was cured. It's funny, but it's some old pearls I've had a long time I was going to give you. Here they are, if you will take them. Maybe they'd match those of your friend's"; and he laid six of the Porter treasures on the table.

The doctor's hands trembled as he picked them up and examined them, but he managed to make some expression of thanks while he quickly strung them into their places with the others. He started to speak, but the doorbell rang, and with an injunction to Deafy to remain where he was he stepped into an adjoining room and closed the door.

It was the dumb man this time who was the opposite figure in a scene much like the one just enacted—a dumb man voluble in his thanks for the miracle of his cure. He, too, spoke for payment.

"Why, yes," said Dr. Porter finally. "I believe you did say something to Dr. Robertson about paying a fee in case a cure would enable you to realize upon some valuable property you hold. What sort of property is it, if I may ask? Perhaps I might assist you."

"Well, you see, sir, it's some pearls," the dumb man said. "These here pearls. I can't talk very good yet from being so long out of practice. So if you could take these and get me the money on them I'd be only too glad to divide with you," and he laid eighteen of the Porter pearls on the table.

"It's a strange thing," said the physician, "but I do know just where to place these pearls. We'll talk about the division of profit later."

Before the amazed eyes of the thief, he drew the growing necklace from his pocket and began to replace the missing half of it.

"What—where—how—" spluttered Dummy. Then the door opened and Dr. Robertson ushered Deafy into the room.

For a second the two men glared at each other, too amazed to speak. Then a frown gathered like a storm on the brows of Deafy and he advanced threateningly toward the table upon which lay the pearls.

"You snitch," he growled, struggling to raise his voice beyond its usual monotone. "Doc, this sneak here stole these pearls. I bought part of them from him and I—"

"You lie," screamed Dummy. "You stole them yourself out at that doctor's house!"

"Don't you believe him, Doc," growled Deafy, and then the two fell back in amazement, silenced by the discovery that one was talking and the other hearing what was said.

The door opened again. This time the young physician led into the room a bulky man with a beard and bandaged eyes, at whom the other two stared, not so much in surprise as in threatening understanding. Between the two—the once deaf and the once dumb—there passed a look which offered and accepted a new defensive alliance of two against one.

"Mr. Clark," said Dr. Porter, "there seems to be a difference of opinion here. Do you know these two gentlemen?"

At the question, Goggles lifted the bandage from his eyes, blinked a little at the light, then opened his mouth in consternation at the two men he saw glowering at him. Before he could speak his new-found eyes caught the pearls the physician was still stringing.

"Know them!" he shouted. "Yes, I know the crooks—the double thieves. They stole these pearls and then they stole them from me—stole the share of a poor, helpless blind man. But I can see

now and I'll see you in prison again."

Dummy whipped out a knife and sprang for Goggles, but before he could reach him curtains parted and he was seized by the police lieutenant, while the room seemed to fill with men.

"The game's up," growled Deafy. "But he's in it too. He opened Doc Porter's safe himself."

"So you'd snitch on an old pal as well as rob him, would you?" cried Goggles. "And you, Dummy, you little rat that I tried to be a friend to. You'd knife me, would you? Well, I'll tell, and I'll tell good. They may send me back to stir, but you'll go to the chair. Hold him, you fellows. You've got the man that killed the grocer in that burglary last winter."

"Shut up, you fool," called Deafy.

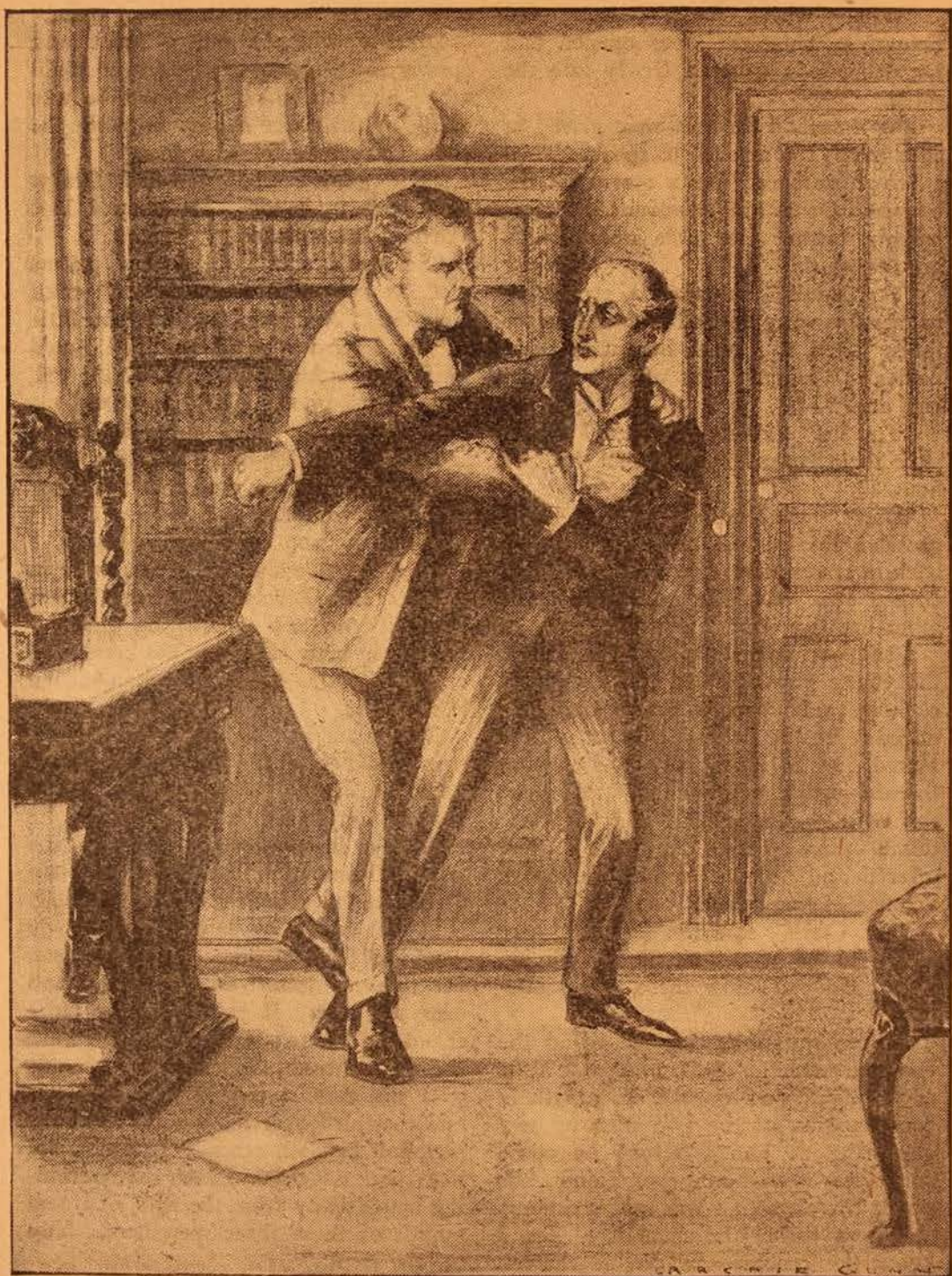
"No, I won't shut up. You were in it too. But I wasn't. I wasn't and I've got you two where you belong."

The big body sagged at the knees and crumpled on the floor as the man sobbed hysterically.

Dr. Porter had finished stringing his pearls and held the restored necklace up to the light. With a sigh of satisfaction he placed it in the case he took from his pocket and laid it on the table. Turning, he pointed to a piece of bronze that stood on the mantel shelf.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I wish you would all look at this. It has a lesson for thieves, detectives, physicians and everyone else. It is a Japanese piece called the 'Sacred Monkeys.' There are three of them. One holds his hands over his ears, a second over his eyes and the third over his mouth. The inscription beneath reads, 'Hear not, see not, speak not evil.' I took the restraining hands away from the ears, eyes and mouth of these three men here. You see the result."

Dr. Porter picked up his jewel case from the table, lighted a cigarette and walked from the room.



68 *He sidestepped me as I rushed and grabbed me from behind.—Page 72*

Fear

By Pettersen Marzoni

I

HARTLEY BRENTWOOD, of Barnes, Brentwood and Company, was found in his apartment at 6 o'clock in the morning with a bullet wound in his head and a half-smoked cigarette in his fingers.

"Yes, I killed him," John Barnes, senior member of the firm, told Inspector Thorne, of the police department, three hours later when that officer found him at his country place. "I am ready to go with you."

The tragedy had shocked the world of finance and society. Barnes and Brentwood were the only members of the firm of Barnes, Brentwood and Company, bankers, which controlled the destinies of half the country's industries. For fifteen years they had been business associates and leaders in finance.

Barnes had made no attempt to avoid arrest—none even to hide his crime. An elevator boy had seen him leave Brentwood's apartment late the night before. The shot apparently had not been heard, because Brentwood's body had not been discovered until that morning by his valet.

"Why did you do it?" Thorne asked the banker the usual question, but he did it with unusual interest. He had been searching for a motive on his way out, but he could vision none.

They were on the train then, returning to New York. Barnes offered to use one of his cars for the short ride, but Thorne was afraid to take a chance in spite of his apparent submission.

Before Barnes answered, he looked

toward the gleam of metal under his sleeves where the handcuffs showed.

"Would you mind holding a cigar for me, Inspector?"

Thorne looked at him a moment, then leaned over and unlocked the cuffs.

"It's a long story," Barnes began, with a sigh of relief as he drew deep on his cigar.

II

FIFTEEN years ago my firm was Landis and Barnes. We were bankers and brokers of the old school. At least Landis was. Conservative, more conservative than there was any need for. We had a safe business, but there was nothing in it. When I had started in as a clerk for old man Landis my one ambition had been to get in the firm. He was a leader then and he looked like he had a grip on the world. But when I did arrive I saw it was only a beginning.

Landis wasn't really old physically, but his ideas were old. Younger men all around him had passed him in the race for money. He really didn't care an awful lot about making money. I liked him but I had to get ahead. It was just born in me. However, he controlled the business and poohpoohed every real idea I brought to him.

We went right on making money his way, but it wasn't my way. I knew it was the time to cut loose for big things and I started planning on them. I couldn't leave Landis, because I needed his help for a while.

Just about that time Brentwood came to work for me. I had insisted on a

private secretary. Landis never could see the need of one. I even had trouble persuading him to hire enough stenographers. He wasn't tight—he just couldn't see the need of them. But I insisted on the secretary idea. I needed one; it wasn't a question of style; so Brentwood came in with me from the main office.

You know what he looked like recently. Then he was only about 25, and he was handsome. He had played football at college—fenced, too, I believe. He showed the results of both in his size and manner. He was one of those men who look like statues or models for clothes advertisements. I believe that was one reason I took him. I didn't go to college myself. Didn't have time—had to make money.

Brentwood was always well-dressed. He wasn't making much, but I believe he had a small income from some money an aunt had left him. Besides that I hadn't heard then of any vices he had. Of course, he took a drink now and then and he smoked, but no one ever called him a spendthrift. He had a social position—I didn't—and he went places then I couldn't get in. I never wanted to. Don't get the idea I was jealous about that.

I got everything in the world I wanted, even if I did have to pay for them. I wanted money, because money was power and power was my dream. I have both. At least I had them until last night.

Whatever had made me bring Brentwood into my office as private secretary, he justified my choice before he had been with me a week. He started right in taking minor details off my hands. I had more time for getting some of my big plans straightened out.

But the size of my plans didn't help me any. Landis was a fool. If we made six per cent he was satisfied. If we made eight he thought we were

beginning to speculate, and if we made ten, which happened as often as he let me have my way, he thought it was illegal. I wonder what the old man would say if he had lived until now.

I wasn't going to be tied down to a rock like that, and by the time Brentwood had been with me a year I had too much time on my hands to stand it any longer. Then I hit on the scheme.

I would have preferred to do it with Landis. He had been good to me, but what I had in mind I couldn't even talk to him about. He would have fixed it so I couldn't get in with anyone else. I needed his money and other things he had. They made the thing possible so I went after someone else.

Even though Landis wouldn't listen, other firms had been getting a line on me. Whenever the firm put over anything big they all I knew I did it.

You remember Old Tom King. Crooked as a snake, but he knew how to make money. I had met him at lunch once or twice, but he had kept track of me, I knew, from things he said. He never ate anything but crackers and milk. He saw me order the same one day, so he took more interest in me. I thought he would.

When I decided it was time to put over my scheme, I picked out King for the second man. It took two of us. I knew he would be the best I could find and he would be willing to do it, too. But I had to tie him up some way. I had made up my mind that I would double-cross Landis if I had to, but I was going to protect myself.

I went to King's house one night and told him my plan. Not all of it, just enough for him to see that it would work if properly handled. He wanted to know everything, but I wouldn't tell him unless he consented to sign an agreement to put the thing through.

That agreement was a risky thing, because what we were going to do would

put us both in jail, if we were found out. He objected to putting his name to anything, but I convinced him of the big possibilities, and he said he would sign.

You couldn't take a single chance with King, so I went to my office that night to get the agreement ready. I knew how to use the typewriter, so I wrote it out. I made a carbon copy for myself.

It was not eight o'clock the next morning when I reached my office. I was so anxious to get the deal started and through with I hadn't slept any, and I wanted to be down where things were going to happen. I was surprised to hear the typewriter clicking when I let myself in, and there was Brentwood. I wondered what had brought him down so early, and he offered a pile of letters as a reason, so I felt satisfied.

By nine o'clock King had signed the agreement, and when the market opened we started to work. You remember when C & Q broke about 50 points. King and I made a fortune, but it broke Landis. He lost his head when he saw the market slipping, because most of his money had been tied up in C & Q. He tried to hold it up, but we had our plans worked out too well. We sold short and I delivered Landis's stock until we could cover. We did all right.

Landis lost his nerve with his money and shot himself. I was sorry, because I had liked him and he had a wife and a boy. But he had no business in the game anyway. I was glad he hadn't connected me with the break. No one else did either.

About six months after Landis was dead I took over the business as Barnes and Company. I saved a little money out of the wreck for Mrs. Landis and she was comfortable. She was a fine woman and my little girl Lucia played and went to dancing school with her boy.

Everything started out fine for me. Landis's conservative reputation helped me out then on account of the time we had been together and I had plenty of money to back up anything I started. I had every chance in the world.

Then this hound Brentwood began. I had put him in charge of one of the departments in the new firm and he was making good. He had been there about three months when he came up to my house one night. He had been there before, at formal dinners once or twice when my wife had thought it necessary to entertain, but there had never been any friendship between us.

This night he asked for me and came into the library. I was feeling pretty good. I had put over a fair-sized deal that day and dinner had been comfortable. We didn't have any guests.

I was surprised at the visit, but I didn't let on. I offered him a drink and a cigar. He refused the cigar and lighted one of his own cigarettes. Always had 'em made for him, he told me. He didn't waste any remarks about the weather or my health.

"When are you thinking of increasing the firm, Mr. Barnes?" he began.

That surprised me. Nothing I had ever said to him had indicated any intention of taking in any partners. I didn't need any. All I needed was money and room. I had had two partners and I didn't want any more. Landis was dead and King, too, had died about a month before. Apoplexy, I believe.

At first I started to bawl him out, but I thought better of it. Maybe he was trying to lead up to some idea with a joke. I had been with Landis too long and saw how much a man could lose by not listening to ideas.

"Do you want to buy in?" I asked him. If he did have any scheme I was ready to listen to it in the hope it was worth while.

He seemed to be surprised. He knew

I had a temper. He had been in my office for a year. I guess he was all set for a fight right away. But he smiled and went on:

"Not buy exactly, but I think it can be arranged to suit us both."

"Like hell, you do!" I yelled.

I was more than surprised. I thought he must have gone crazy, but I didn't like his smile. He didn't say anything, just sat there and smiled at me.

He didn't look like a crazy man, and I began to wonder. All the time he had been with me he had been perfectly sane and he had never tried to joke. He was efficient and always on the job. What had happened to make him start out like he had was a mystery to me.

"What do you mean? Have you been drinking or dreaming?" I tried to keep myself in hand, because at the back of my brain something had started to stir. Men with brains don't usually have crazy schemes, and I knew he hadn't been drinking and he wasn't the sort to dream without something to base it on.

I began to think of reasons for him getting up the nerve to say what he did. It took nerve and something else. I had never let him in on anything, and outside of the deal with King there hadn't been anything that could really cause trouble. And that King deal was safe. I had written the only papers in the thing myself. After the deal was over King and I had taken care to burn them.

But he had to have some reason, and I was losing my temper again. All the while he just sat.

"Listen, Brentwood," I told him then, "I don't know what you are talking about, but the only satisfactory arrangement you can reach with me is to be ready to find another job by the first of the month. You are leaving us then."

"I am afraid you are wrong, Mr. Barnes," and he reached into his pocket.

He brought out a leather case and

from it he took something and unfolded it very carefully.

I couldn't make out what it was at first. It was black, about the size of a letter sheet, then I saw it was a piece of carbon paper.

Even then I didn't get on right away.

"Did you ever see this before?" and he held it up for me to see.

The marks of the typewriter stood out. I couldn't read them but I knew what it was. I remembered the morning of my deal with King and Brentwood being down at the office early. When I wrote the agreement with King I forgot all about the carbon paper. I really didn't realize until then that the carbon would carry any record. I must have just dumped it into the wastebasket when I finished.

Brentwood was watching me, and he must have known what I was thinking.

"What is it anyway?" and I tried to keep my voice what it had been before. But I was beginning to get nervous. I had been learning things about Brentwood ever since he began the conversation.

"Do you want me to read it to you, Mr. Barnes?"

As he asked the question he smiled again. I had stood all of that smile I was going to. It must have made me lose my head. I couldn't take a chance on that thing coming out with Landis not yet dead a year. I had to have that piece of carbon.

He sidestepped me as I rushed and grabbed me from behind. I told you he had played football.

"There is no need for excitement, Barnes," he dropped the "Mr." then. "You can't get this away from me without killing me. You had better listen to reason."

I saw I couldn't manhandle him. I never have been a strong man, and his grip on my wrists was like iron.

"Well, say what you've got to say,"

I managed to control my temper long enough to get it out.

"Suppose we outline a few possibilities first," he began. "There isn't a chance of convicting you of anything by this piece of carbon paper by itself. The district attorney couldn't use it as evidence without something to back it up. But what happened to C & Q about nine months ago everyone knows. This little piece of paper tells what was going to happen before it ever did. It also mentions the matter of Landis's stock. Old King may be dead, but he still has a grip on you.

"I don't want to take this to the district attorney. I wouldn't have to, as far as that goes. Public opinion would be enough, if I made this public. It would be an unpleasant scandal and it might be hard for me to get located profitably after having been so intimately connected with you. Besides there isn't anything one-tenth so good as what you can give me. For a twenty per cent interest in the firm I will tuck this little piece of paper away in a safe deposit vault and the world will move merrily on."

He had turned me loose and we were sitting facing each other. I believe then was the first time I had ever had a good look at his eyes. They were close together and there was a kind of murky green fire playing around way down deep. His whole face was different.

There wasn't anything to it. I argued with him about how the district attorney would laugh at his romantic idea of using a piece of carbon paper, but he had me scared and he knew it. Then I agreed to his plan with an amendment that he burn the paper:

He laughed then, and it was a long way from a chuckle. He must be laughing like that now, knowing what is going to happen to me.

"Burn it, and let you get me like you did Landis," he wanted to know. "I

know you, Barnes, and there is nothing you wouldn't do to make money. My proposition is made and it goes. You can take it or leave it."

I took another look at that face, and I agreed. He smiled then and drew out a little pile of papers from his pocket. One was articles of agreement for the partnership, providing for the change of the firm name. The others were notices for the papers of the change. I signed them all and then I wondered how he had happened to look for the carbon. I hated to ask him, but I had to know.

"You have a bad habit of leaving things around," he told me when I did ask. "Besides that I have been with you long enough to see your crooked brain work. I saw you make a play at Old King one day at lunch. You remember, the day you had crackers and milk. I knew you usually had roast beef and all the vegetables you could find on the menu, finishing up with pie.

"I saw you meet him other times, and I knew that you were discussing trouble for someone. You may not remember, but I helped you check over the securities in the Landis safe deposit box one day. Then I began to watch you. I knew something was coming, and that you would make a fortune. I wasn't going to be left out.

"The night before you went up to King's house you did a little figuring on your scheme. You burned some of the papers, I found the ashes, but you must have crumpled up one of them without thinking about it. I don't mind telling you I found it in your wastebasket. I had discovered a search of that basket every night was usually worth while.

"I heard you call Mrs. Barnes and tell her you were not coming home for dinner, and I followed you until I saw you safely in King's house. When I came down next morning I met the night watchman leaving and he re-

marked that you must be trying to check me up, because you had been down to the office the night before using the typewriter. You see I had a pretty clear trail."

The cigar I smoked that night was the last comfortable one I have had until this. There hasn't been a moment, until last night, that I haven't thought about that piece of carbon paper. And don't think Brentwood let me forget about it either.

He didn't mention it for a year. Then he came in and remarked that he thought he was growing more valuable as a member of the firm. I wasn't quite cowed then and I let myself go for a minute, but he brought me up sharp. Oh, he had me, all right. I agreed.

The next time came about two years later. He asked me up to his apartment to dinner that night. I went, and he asked for another five per cent. There wasn't any argument at all.

Don't think that Brentwood wasn't making good. He had a genius for finance. He never had a scheme that failed. Of course, we didn't make millions out of everything he brought up, but we never lost and he worked hard.

My dinner engagements with him came about every two years, which brought us up to six months ago. I never had anything to do with him outside of the office except at dinners at my house, formal dinners, when he was just one of the guests.

Each time I went to his place he had a five per cent larger interest in the firm. The last time left him with a full half.

I had begun to take it for granted. I knew that every two years I would have to eat all alone with him and listen to his rotten talk about women. He was a cad, and he knew I hated his stories. That's the reason he told them.

Then after dinner he would make his same smiling demand and there was nothing for me to do.

Did I tell you that I hadn't had a peaceful moment since he showed me that paper? I couldn't tell my wife about it. She is a wonderful woman. She doesn't even suspect that I was mixed up in the Landis affair.

You are the first human being I have been able to tell this thing to after fifteen years of living it. Fifteen years is a long time. I don't want your sympathy. It's all over now and I want to get it off my mind.

But that doesn't make any difference about my shooting Brentwood. As I said, he called on me last about six months ago. I thought then that I would have two more years of almost peace, when something else came up.

You may have seen a picture of my daughter Lucia. It was published last winter when she made her debut. She is her mother all over again, and I am just "daddy" to her.

She has always been my pal, since she was a little girl. And she is now, too.

Anyway, she made her debut last winter, and Brentwood started coming to the house more frequently. I would come home in the afternoon and find him at tea. My wife asked him to dinner two or three times, just with the family. She had never seen him ask for a larger share of the firm.

It kept up so that I began to have a big fear, bigger than my fear of Brentwood and his carbon paper. Suppose my girl should fall in love with him.

A couple of nights ago by some chance she was staying at home. She came into the library where I was trying to read, and I decided to try to find out how much she liked Brentwood.

She came over and sat on the arm of my chair and pulled my hair.

"Where is Brentwood tonight?" I started to question her.

"Pining away in some dark den, probably. I refused to let him come up. I told him it was daddy's night."

I patted her hand, but still that didn't mean anything.

"It seems to me he is coming around pretty frequently these days."

"You are not the only one who thinks so," and she blushed.

Fathers may be stupid, but I knew my daughter and there was a great load gone off my mind.

"Who is he?" I tried to be very stern.

Then she slipped down into my lap and told me it was young Landis. The boy had more push than his father and was a comer. I liked him. They had decided that he was to come to see me the next day, and she had stayed at home to tell me about it. Her mother had already given her approval.

Young Landis came to see me yesterday. I liked the way he talked and I told him I was glad that Lucia had chosen him. When he left I felt so good I told Brentwood about it. I had to tell someone, because it meant so much to have my girl happy. He said that Landis was to be congratulated and left it at that.

His manner meant nothing to me, and I had about decided to give myself a half holiday, when he came into my office and invited me to dinner that night. He saw I was happy and he wasn't going to let me be. He knew I wouldn't refuse to go.

I went. Everybody knows that now. He was just the same at dinner as ever. The same boasting of his amours. I managed to live through it, because all the time my mind was busy wondering whether I could argue him out of asking for a larger share of the firm right at present. I wanted to give Lucia and Landis a start and I had to get all the returns I could get to do it properly.

But it wasn't money he was after.

"I am not going to keep you in

suspense, Barnes," Brentwood began. "The reason I invited you up here immediately was to prevent you making the mistake you did this morning. It will never do for you to announce Lucia's engagement to too many people. They might not understand it later."

"Understand what?" I demanded. I didn't need an answer. I knew what he meant, but I had to have him say it.

"Because, Barnes, you will have to arrange for her to marry me."

I didn't argue.

I shot him.

III

BARNES finished his story as the train was crashing over the switches of the Grand Central. When they reached the station, the banker reached out his wrists for the handcuffs, but Thorne apparently didn't see the movement, as he led the way out.

After Thorne had deposited his prisoner at the Tombs, his one thought was the piece of carbon paper in Brentwood's safe deposit box. A brief sketch of Barne's story procured an order for his entry to the box.

Buried under a mass of bonds, securities and letters Thorne found an unmarked envelope. In it was a piece of carbon paper, carefully folded once.

The detective had brought a mirror with him, and he held it before the carbon to read the damning evidence. With staring eyes he read:

Mr. Blair Townley,

Chairman Charity Ball Committee.

Dear Sir:

On instructions from Mr. Barnes I am enclosing herewith a check for \$10 for tickets No. 313 and No. 314 to the Charity Ball.



Rushing toward him was Madame Blavsky.—Page 81

The Woman Who Cursed a Man

By Harold Ward

I

MADAME BLAVSKY, the world's greatest tragedienne, was dead.

They found her in the cold gray of the morning lying upon the floor of her drawing-room, her beautiful face twisted into a look of horror; her great brown eyes wide open, glazed, protruding; her red lips purpled, blackened, swollen—set in a sickening grin.

Her dress had been torn away from the rounded shoulders—the shoulders that had been toasted and raved over by a thousand critics. Between the breasts was a red gash where the angry knife had entered. There were dark marks of fingers on the skin of the milky neck.

The long, slender hands were torn and bruised, twisted out of shape, the flesh scratched as the rings had been brutally pulled from the fingers by the assassin in his eagerness to escape.

An open downstairs window showed how entrance had been gained. Yet there were no marks of feet in the ground beneath. It had rained during the day and the earth would have retained the footprints had any been made.

The drawing-room showed no signs of a struggle. Not a piece of furniture was disturbed, not a rug out of place. But several drawers pulled out, their contents scattered carelessly about the floor, showed that a hurried search had been made for valuables.

But aside from the rings torn from the Madame's fingers and possibly several less valuable trinkets, nothing of value had been taken except—

The life-size painting of Madame in

the role of Lady Macbeth—the painting by Rumley, which had created such a furor at the Paris exhibition five years before—had disappeared, frame and all, from its accustomed place on the wall!

The servants were questioned. None could throw any light on the affair—none save Felice, the maid. During the night she had heard the voice of her mistress raised in an agonized shriek of horror. The sound of a fall. Then her mistress had exclaimed in tones so tense, so vibrant, that they caused the chills to creep up and down her back and every nerve to tingle with fear:

"Oh, Mother of God! Help me! Help me! Can no one hear me? May my spirit never rest until it has driven you to confess!"

The voice had stopped suddenly with a choking sort of gurgle. She, Felice, had pulled the covers over her head to drown it out. Why had she not summoned help? She shrugged her pretty shoulders. Did the officers not know that Madame suffered from insomnia as a result of the nervous attack which had driven her from the stage? On such occasions she was wont to assume the roles she had played in years gone by. And—there was another shrug of the shoulders which spoke plainer than words—Madame was, like all great artists, temperamental. When buried in one of her characters she sometimes reached a high pitch of excitement. For safety's sake it was not always best to interrupt.

The other servants, although they had not heard Madame's cry as described by Felice, corroborated the maid's story of the nocturnal roles. They had learned

by experience to keep their distance. In the servants' quarters it was hinted that at such times Madame's unstrung nerves drove her almost mad.

Add to this that on the night of the murder there had been no moon and that the street lights in the vicinity had been put out of commission as a result of the storm of the day previous and you have the story in a nutshell.

II

THE career of Madame Blavsky had been a spectacular one. Whence she came no one knew. Reams of speculation had been written—speculation pure and simple—for Madame was decidedly reticent in regard to her past. All the press and public knew was that she had suddenly appeared in the offices of Richard Raine, Broadway's most successful producer—a rarely beautiful woman of almost middle age with the face and figure of a queen—and demanded a try-out in the Shakespearian revival he was planning. Something about her caused the busy man to accede to her demands. Two hours later he, the best judge of things theatrical in America, had proclaimed her the most wonderful tragedienne of modern times and had signed a contract with her at her own terms. A month later her fame had spread to the ends of the earth.

Then came ten years of stardom. A nervous breakdown was followed by permanent retirement. For two years she had lived a sequestered life, refusing to see even the friends of her former life, denying herself to all.

Possessing more than the usual artistic temperament, the house which she had purchased in which to spend her declining years was one which reflected the strange, odd character of its mistress. Erected prior to the Revolution, it was set in the midst of spacious grounds surrounded by an ancient iron

picket fence and almost hidden by trees. It had once been pretentious, but decay had claimed it for many years. Two stories in height, its deep, narrow windows heavily shuttered, over its sides a tenacious ivy plant climbing almost to the tottering tower, it seemed to be slowly mouldering into nothingness.

Yet withal it possessed an air of mystery and silence which appealed to the world-weary heart of Madame Blavsky and she had bought it on sight. The exterior remained unchanged. The interior, save for the installation of modern furniture and conveniences, was as it had always been—dark and gloomy—charged with mystery and the flavor of hidden panels, of romance and tragedy.

III

THE day after the funeral of Madame Blavsky, Richard Raine went into voluntary bankruptcy. On the day following, Amos Spaulding, the well-known attorney, notified the officials that the last will and testament of the murdered woman was in his possession. Important litigation in another state had taken him from the city. He had been too busy to read the papers. Upon his return he had learned of his client's tragic death and was ready to assist in bringing the assassin to justice in any way possible.

In the presence of a dozen police officials and reporters the will was opened and read. Drawn up a scant three months before and witnessed by three attachés of Spaulding's office, it was a brief document. Its preamble stated that the Madame was possessed of no kin of any kind. The servants were remembered with small bequests amounting to perhaps ten thousand dollars.

The remainder of the estate, which the testatrix estimated at nearly half a million dollars in money and jewels, was left to Richard Raine, her former manager.

The signature was genuine. Of that there was no doubt. And the reputation of Amos Spaulding was above-reproach; he was not the sort of man to be involved in any crooked deal.

Raine was the most surprised man of all. He stated emphatically that he had not seen Madame Blavsky for six months; had he known that he was to be the recipient of her bounty he certainly would not have taken advantage of the bankruptcy laws, but would have staved off his creditors until he was able to settle with them and re-establish himself upon a firm business foundation.

Because of the bequest the police grilled Raine, which, under the circumstances, practically amounted to accusing him of the murder. He countered with a cast-iron alibi. On the night of the murder he had not left his apartments, but had remained at home, going over his accounts and preparing for the bankruptcy courts.

His statement was corroborated by Hoskins, his valet. Hoskins, however, complicated matters by stating that he had admitted a heavily veiled woman shortly after nine o'clock in the evening and that she had not yet gone when Raine dismissed him at eleven. At Raine's orders he had placed a cold lunch on the sideboard and had then retired to his own quarters in the rear of the ten-room suite. He did not know what time the veiled woman had left.

The servants at the home of Madame Blavsky stated that they had retired to their own quarters shortly after dinner. The only exception was Felice, whose night off it had been. She had returned from visiting a friend between ten and eleven, coming in by the servants' entrance. It was always Madame's orders that on such occasions she should go to her own room, the Madame preferring to prepare herself for bed rather than run the risk of being disturbed should she fall asleep.

Since none of Madame Blavsky's household had seen her from the time dinner was served until her body was found next morning, the police worked on the assumption that it had been she who visited Raine on the night in question. Just what they expected to gain by the assertion they did not state. The press, however, made a great deal of the incident. To complicate matters Raine refused to divulge the name of his fair visitor, asserting angrily that to do so would compromise the name of a good woman who had visited him purely upon a matter of business which was no affair of the police or public.

Whereupon Fannie Fox, who had been a comedienne in one of Raine's defunct companies, came forward and tearfully admitted to being the woman in question. She was willing to run the risk of ruining her reputation, she stated, rather than see Raine suffer for a crime of which he was innocent. She had gone to Raine's apartments disguised at his request, she stated, because he was back in his salaries with all his players. She had known the manager for years and he wished to settle with her without the others knowing it. They had been hounding him to a degree where he was afraid to go to his offices. Consequently, when he had telephoned to her earlier in the evening asking her to visit him and talk matters over she had veiled herself as he asked.

Raine's alibi was complete.

A week later he took the police into his confidence and asked for their help. Where was the money Madame Blavsky had willed to him? In her signed statement she had admitted to being worth nearly half a million dollars. The books of the First National Trust and Savings Bank showed that they had had nearly that amount invested to her credit up until a week before her death. At that time she had suddenly asked that her securities be converted into cash and

crook, though, he managed to hold her love and got her to make her will in his favor.

"Finding himself going to the wall, he asked her to help him, and she drew her money from the bank for that purpose.

"Meanwhile, he had been secretly married to the Fox woman, and the affair in some way reached Blavsky's ears. Of an extremely jealous and emotional temperament, she disguised herself with a heavy veil and went to his apartments to denounce him.

"When she told him that she was through because he had thrown her overboard for a younger woman, Raine at first begged. Then, hard pressed for money and realizing that she was his last resort, he lost control of himself and tried force. He says that he had no intention of killing her; when he came to his right senses he had choked her into insensibility and really thought that she was dead.

"The emergency caused him to think rapidly. His apartments are on the second floor and there is a garage in connection. Running down the back stairs, he got out his car, brought it to the back door and, covering Blavsky's body with a blanket, carried it down and drove like the devil for her home.

"The absence of lights aided him, as did the darkness of Blavsky's grounds. Arriving, he carried the body into the house, letting himself in by means of her key. Realizing that he could be no worse off whatever happened, he commenced ransacking the place for money.

"About this time she recovered consciousness. He imagined that she was about to yell for help—probably she was—and he seized her again.

He choked her. She grabbed a paper cutter from the table and tried to fight back. But in her weakened state she was no match for him and he killed her with her own weapon. It was when she

was dying that she shrieked out that curse that the maid heard. He hastily threw open the window, jerked the rings from her fingers and escaped through the door to his machine and got back to his own place unobserved. That is why there were no marks on the ground beneath the window.

"When he found himself up against it he admitted his guilt to the Fox woman. She lied in order to provide him with an alibi.

"I had a hunch that I might get him to make some misstep if I took him out there tonight. There was a storm brewing and it was an ideal night for ghost stories. That's why I 'phoned for Cassidy to hustle out there and remove all the bulbs from the sockets before we arrived. I'll admit, though, that I pretty nearly talked myself out of ghost stories waiting for that extra flashlight battery to burn itself out. I underestimated it by half an hour. Most men have a streak of superstition in them, even if I haven't. But, then, I never committed a murder.

"I guess that I was pretty nearly as badly frightened as he was, though, when I saw the Madame coming at him as the lightning flashed. You see she had that picture of herself as Lady Macbeth on a secret panel that had been built in the old house. Why she had it turned to the wall at the time she was killed I don't know. But, at any rate, Raine in stumbling pressed his hand accidentally against the button. The panel turned just as the lightning flashed and it looked as if she was rushing straight at him, her hands reaching out for him.

"Sure, she had the money hidden in the secret closet behind the panel. I brought it back with me.

"No, I'm not superstitious, chief. But remember that curse she put on him? Well, the way things happened just as they did—maybe Sir Oliver Lodge may be right after all."

Thornton Smiled Significantly

By David Morrison

I

"THERE is a—lady outside who wishes to see you. There is a man with her."

"What's the name?" Thornton asked, visibly annoyed at the untimely intrusion.

"She would give no name. She said you would not know her. She seems very anxious to see you."

Thornton reflected a few moments. It was rather early for callers, and he had been about to dictate his morning mail. He resented the visit, but, for some reason he could not fathom, he felt a slight curiosity as to the identity of his callers. He turned suddenly to his secretary.

"Show them in, Miss Armstrong, please."

As the pair entered, Thornton's curiosity was increased.

The woman was about thirty years of age and strikingly attractive. She was expensively gowned and bore all the earmarks of wealth, but her companion was rather shabbily dressed and impressed one as a servant of the woman. The woman entered first, the man following behind her slowly, almost timidly. Thornton noticed that he clutched in his hand a large, square, box-like affair covered with black cloth.

"Mr. Thornton?" the woman gushed, advancing with a friendliness that was almost brazen.

Thornton arose, wondering. "I'm afraid you have the advantage of me."

"I am Miss Bender—Miss Ruth Bender," the caller beamed. "I'm sorry if I've chosen a busy moment to intrude, but I'm sure you will pardon me when the nature of my visit is made known."

Thornton motioned his visitor to a seat, and, as she drew up a chair, looked up questioningly at her companion. She seemed to have forgotten the man, and she now turned toward him in sudden remembrance.

"Just take a chair, Mr. Parker," she said, making no move to introduce her companion, who was standing some few feet away, gazing stupidly about the room and shifting from one foot to the other. He made no effort to put down the cloth-covered object he was holding.

At the sound of the woman's voice, the man turned dully, found a chair and sat down, making no move to draw the chair closer, evidently not considering himself a party to the conference. He held the black box on his lap and seemed to handle it with extraordinary care.

The woman turned to Thornton.

"I suppose you're wondering at the reason for my call," she began.

Thornton smiled, non-committally.

"It's something of the greatest importance," the stranger continued, "so I chose a time when I thought we would be least likely to be interrupted. It's of a very confidential nature. We will not be disturbed?"

Thornton found himself wondering just what it was about the woman that he did not like, but she had now aroused his curiosity and he determined to give

her an audience. He rang for his secretary.

"Will you see that I am not disturbed for the next ten minutes," he said to Miss Armstrong, when she entered.

The girl nodded assent and withdrew.

When the door had closed, the woman turned to Thornton, rather mysteriously.

"Mr. Thornton, as a live-wire business man, I believe you're interested in any legitimate proposition promising unusually large financial rewards?" she began.

Thornton breathed a sigh of relief, tinged with disappointment. The woman's manner and method of approach had whetted his curiosity and expectations, but he now prepared to listen to the usual harangue of the expert stock salesman.

"I'll warn you beforehand," he interrupted, "I'm not interested in stocks of any nature."

The woman smiled knowingly. "I haven't come to sell you any stock, Mr. Thornton. The proposition I have in mind is something bigger, better, surer. The rewards are—well, tremendous!"

She leaned forward suddenly, with an air of utmost confidence. Her voice was almost a whisper, and she glanced occasionally at the man who had accompanied her and who was busy fixing the mysterious box in a comfortable position on his lap.

"Mr. Thornton," the woman said, in a low voice, "that man there has a device that is destined to earn tremendous rewards for its owners!"

Thornton glanced at the box on the man's lap with renewed interest.

"What is it?" he asked.

"That I cannot divulge at this time. If you are interested, I'll have him explain in detail. It is his own invention, and naturally he is very jealous of his secret. He will let no one into the

secret unless there is a probability of their being interested."

"Like all inventors," she went on, "he is in need of financial assistance. If he should show his device to you now, you would grasp the secret immediately. Our proposition is this, it will require a considerable amount of capital to float this thing properly, but when you once learn the secret, you will readily agree that it is the surest investment a man could possibly make. The question is not whether it is a sure or risky investment—there is no doubt of its feasibility—but a question solely of finances. It will take considerable money, and we do not wish to take up your time or our own unless you are readily able to handle a proposition of this size."

"That would, of course, depend entirely upon my own opinion of its merit," Thornton replied, mystified and curious to learn the nature of the device.

"Certainly, Mr. Thornton!" the woman returned. "We could hardly expect anyone to interest themselves in something they have no confidence in. But it is not a question of confidence—the moment you learn the secret, you'll agree with us that the potential rewards in it are tremendous! Now, granting that you are interested, would you be able to finance a proposition requiring a considerable sum of money? Could you lay your hands on—say—fifty thousand dollars cash at any moment?"

"Double that amount, if the proposition is worth it!" Thornton replied, now really anxious to learn more about the mysterious box on the stranger's lap.

"Good!" the woman answered, enthusiastically. She turned to the man who had accompanied her. "Mr. Parker, will you demonstrate your device to Mr. Thornton?"

The man arose and stood by his chair

as he fumbled with several little contrivances on the mysterious box. He made no effort to advance closer to Thornton's desk.

The woman leaned closer to Thornton confidentially and whispered to him. "He's suspicious of everyone. He won't show you the complete details now, but you'll learn enough when you see it in operation. It will surprise you, I assure you!"

The man was facing directly toward Thornton, as he fumbled in his pockets for an object which he laid on the top of the box. A false lid was raised, and Thornton could not see what the object was that the man placed on the box, for the upraised lid hid it from view.

The man seemed to have trouble in working some of the mysterious parts, for he finally laid the box on the chair by his side, to give him entire freedom of both hands. He bent down over the box for a few seconds while he worked with something behind the upraised lid.

Suddenly, the woman at Thornton's side uttered a half-smothered shriek and clasped her hand to her heart. Thornton turned quickly in alarm. The woman's eyes were widely dilated for a moment, as if in extreme agony, then she suddenly slumped over in a faint. She would have fallen but Thornton quickly reached out his arm and caught her. He supported her in his arms while he looked up at the man.

"Get me some water, quick! This woman has fainted!"

The man seemed to grasp the situation instantly, for he immediately turned and hurried toward the door leading into the outer office. As he did so, there was a sudden blinding flash of light from the mysterious box on the chair.

Events in the next few moments happened with dramatic rapidity. The man turned suddenly at the flash of

light, grabbed the mysterious box and hurried out of the office. The unconscious woman in Thornton's arms suddenly revived, fixed her slightly disarrayed hat and gown, and arose to take her departure.

She smiled amusedly at the thoroughly mystified and dumbstruck Thornton.

"I thank you so much for the audience, Mr. Thornton," she smiled, "but I do not want to take up any more of your time than is absolutely necessary. We'll return at this time tomorrow—with the photograph."

"Photograph?" Thornton repeated, the light of comprehension entering his eyes.

"Yes, provided, of course, that it proves to be a good one. If it should not turn out clearly enough, we won't bother you again."

"Then that—mysterious invention was a—"

"Camera," the woman smiled mockingly. "It seldom fails. We've taken some wonderfully good photographs with it."

Convinced now that the woman's motives were ulterior, Thornton confronted her with a feeling of resentment at having been tricked so easily.

"I'm a busy man, Miss—Bender. Give me your proposition in as few words as possible," he said, curtly.

She seemed gallingly oblivious to his scorn. "We expect to have a very good photograph of you, Mr. Thornton—with me in your arms. It's merely a question of who considers that photograph of greater value—you or—Mrs. Thornton. We consider it worth to you at least five thousand dollars. That shouldn't be a staggering sum to a man who can lay his hands on fifty thousand cash at any moment he desires."

"And suppose I—don't consider it worth—or, rather, suppose I refuse to pay the blackmail?"

"Then, of course, I shall make the best bargain possible with Mrs. Thornton. I'm giving you first option."

"So generous of you," Thornton smiled, scornfully.

She seemed entirely unabashed and stood waiting expectantly, as if never doubting the final acceptance of her offer.

Thornton was interested in the woman's methods; she seemed so confident of herself.

"Tell me," he said, interestedly, "is this an—everyday occurrence with you?"

She smiled reprovingly.

"Rich men are not so plentiful, Mr. Thornton. Besides, we must pick our time. I never take chances—I always make sure of my ground first. You will notice I chose a time when you would be least likely to have any callers."

"But why all the rigmarole about the mysterious invention?" he persisted.

"I can't seem to conquer my love for dramatics, Mr. Thornton," the woman replied, smiling sheepishly. "I once followed the profession, you know, until I discovered there were greater returns in my present one. Besides, it is rather difficult to prepare to take a flashlight in a man's office without exciting his suspicion. The curtain covering the lens of the camera, you will recall, was not drawn back until the exact moment before the charge of powder was ignited. All a matter of mechanism," she explained, rather proudly.

"I suppose the—returns—are very gratifying?" he queried, noticing a huge diamond on her finger.

"I have no complaint," she replied, not taken back in the slightest. "Sometimes it is—rather embarrassing—but I try to cause as little trouble as possible."

"And is that part of your returns?"

Thornton asked, pointing to the stone on her hand which was flashing brilliantly in the early morning sunlight.

She gazed proudly at the diamond.

"Isn't it gorgeous?" she said, enthusiastically.

Thornton knew enough of precious stones to realize that the ring must have cost several thousand dollars. The diamond was extraordinarily large and of very fine cut.

The woman turned suddenly to go.

"Well, Mr. Thornton, I know you're a busy man, so I won't take up any more of your time—today. If we have been unfortunate in our photography, we will not bother you again. If it comes up to our expectations, I shall return tomorrow at this time for your decision."

Thornton bowed her out, admiring, in spite of himself, the woman's self-possession and complete confidence.

A few moments later he rang for his secretary, anxious to get his day's mail off his mind, so that he could give thought to the new problem that had thrust itself upon him. He waited a few moments and was surprised that Miss Armstrong was not as prompt as usual in answering.

He looked into the outer office and found her at her desk, gazing dreamily out the window, apparently oblivious to her surroundings.

He called her wonderingly. She rose with a start, and, smiling sheepishly, followed him into his office.

"Day dreaming?" he asked, smiling.

Miss Armstrong laughed, rather shamefacedly. "Yes, and a very foolish thing to dream about. I was picturing myself wearing the ring worn by the lady who just left."

"It *was* a beauty, wasn't it?" he conceded.

"Oh, it was wonderful!" his secretary exclaimed, with beaming eyes.

From the expression on the girl's

face, Thornton could understand how some women sold their souls for less expensive baubles.

II

PROMPTLY at ten-thirty the next morning, Miss Bender called and was ushered immediately into Thornton's private office.

Thornton nodded a pleasant greeting and offered her a chair. He noticed a large envelope in her hand and surmised that it contained the photograph. He glanced up at her expectantly.

"I have good news, Mr. Thornton," Miss Bender smiled, "that is, good news if you look at it from my viewpoint."

"You succeeded in getting a good photograph?"

"Excellent! It could not be clearer!"

He found himself wondering why he was able to joke so pleasantly with this woman, who had so easily tricked him and then laughed at his stupidity.

"Now, would you mind giving me your proposition in detail, Miss—"

"There is nothing that I did not tell you yesterday, Mr. Thornton," she interrupted. "I have the photograph here which my assistant took yesterday. It is a first class likeness of yourself, holding me in your arms. I believe it should be worth at least five thousand dollars to you. If you don't agree with me, then I shall strike a bargain with Mrs. Thornton for it—and I'm sure it would interest her!"

"And if I pay you this five thousand dollars, what is to prevent you from—"

"I'll give you the negative also, and my word of honor that I shall make no further attempt to use the incident against you."

Thornton smiled at the reference to her "word of honor."

"You realize, I suppose," he said, slowly and with emphasis, "that this is pure blackmail?"

"Please don't use that word, Mr. Thornton!" the woman returned, mockingly. "There are so many nicer ways of expressing it."

"Would you mind allowing me to see what I am asked to pay such a sum of money for?" Thornton said, changing the subject abruptly.

His visitor obligingly produced the photograph and handed it over. From the attitude of the two in the picture, it certainly would be conclusive evidence in any divorce court. Thornton gazed at it a few moments, smiling enigmatically, then turned to his desk and picked up a large envelope. Placing the photograph inside, he silently addressed the envelope and sealed it.

His visitor scented trickery. "Just a reminder, Mr. Thornton, that you haven't paid for the photograph yet, and another reminder that I still have the negative and can make as many duplicates as I choose."

Thornton made no reply, but turned and faced the door leading into his outer office.

"Have you everything so far, Miss Armstrong?" he asked, without raising his voice.

The woman turned quickly, on her guard, but she saw no one. The man at the desk was evidently talking to the wall. She glanced hurriedly about the office, then turned and stared wonderingly at Thornton.

Three short, sharp knocks sounded on the outer door.

Thornton smiled.

"You may cut the wires now, Miss Armstrong, please," he said pleasantly.

Two short knocks sounded on the door, in answer to his instructions.

Thornton turned to his caller. "Now, Miss—Bender, is it?—I want to thank you for the photograph and compliment you on the excellence of the work."

The woman's lips curled in contempt,

and she laughed carelessly, evidently confident of herself.

"I must warn you again, Mr. Thornton, that I still have the negative. It's a matter of a few minutes to make a duplicate of that photograph."

Thornton ignored her remark as he continued. "I will admit that I consider the photograph easily worth the amount you ask, but as long as it is not necessary to purchase it, why should I?"

The woman arose, furious, and prepared to make her departure.

"Just a moment, please," Thornton said, quietly, "I'll have to ask my secretary to unlock the door before you can go."

The woman rushed angrily to the door, for she believed Thornton was bluffing. She tried the knob and found the door locked.

She turned to the man at the desk with challenging eyes.

"Well, what's the game?" she panted, her first doubts beginning to assail her sense of security.

"Won't you sit down a few moments?" Thornton said, smiling at her discomfiture.

Miss Bender obeyed, then turned as if waiting for his next move.

"I think you told me your—profession was a very well paid one?" he began.

His visitor glared at him venomously and made no reply.

"Assuming that your words are true, I should think your liberty would be worth something to you."

Miss Bender turned, her face ugly in its mask of baffled rage.

"You can turn me over to the police, but a copy of that photograph will be in Mrs. Thornton's hands tomorrow!" she cried, furiously. "My assistant will attend to that! And what I will swear to on the witness stand will be plenty!"

Thornton smiled at her anger. Somehow he felt a curious sense of pleasure

in playing with her, as a cat does before eating the mouse it has caught.

"My secretary has taken down every word that has passed between us this morning," he resumed.

He arose and pulled aside a large picture hanging on the wall.

The woman turned and saw a dictaphone, and knew the man was not bluffing.

"You realize, I suppose, that it is within my power to—"

"Well, what's your proposition?" the blackmailer demanded, impatiently.

Thornton reached over and pointed to the ring on her finger. "If you consider a half-hour's work worth five thousand dollars, wouldn't you consider your liberty worth—that ring?"

The woman seemed dumbstruck at his words.

"Why, it's preposterous!" she exclaimed, seething with fury.

"That's according to the viewpoint you adopt," Thornton replied, quietly, with a note of triumphant mockery in his voice. "I'm busy, Miss Bender, but I'll grant you ten minutes to make your decision. Hand over that ring on your finger, and I'll give you your freedom and make no attempt at prosecution for your attempted blackmail. Otherwise, I shall be compelled to telephone for the police."

After a few minutes' deliberation, the woman suddenly tore the ring from her finger and threw it angrily on his desk. An almost imperceptible sob escaped her lips.

Thornton picked up the ring and placed it in his pocket. "Before you go, Miss Bender, I want to add to your disappointment by telling you that Mrs. Thornton would gladly have given you five thousand dollars for that photograph! That dictaphone you saw behind the picture was placed there by detectives in the employ of Mrs. Thornton. She suspected that I was in love

with my secretary. I pretended ignorance and allowed the instrument to remain, though I knew of its presence from the beginning. It was an easy matter to run in another wire for my stenographer yesterday, in readiness for your return."

He pressed the button on his desk and Miss Armstrong unlocked the door and entered.

He handed her the envelope containing the photograph.

"Will you please mail that for me at once, Miss Armstrong? And register it, please?"

The girl took the package and left the office.

The woman took advantage of her opportunity and gained the safety of the outer office. She turned and glared evilly at Thornton.

"Well, Mr. Thornton, for your trickery I'll reward you by telling you that Mrs. Thornton will receive a copy of that photograph in tomorrow morning's mail!"

"Which won't particularly interest her," Thornton replied, smilingly, "as she will receive the *original* in this afternoon's mail. My secretary has just mailed it to her by registered mail."

"You mailed that to—*your wife*?" the woman gasped, incredulously.

"Certainly. You see, Miss Bender, a divorce is the best thing that could possibly be handed to both Mrs. Thornton and myself. Our marriage is one that was never destined to last. It has survived this long only because of lack of sufficient grounds for divorce. And I would not think of bringing any unpleasant notoriety to any lady—until

you obligingly handed me what both Mrs. Thornton and myself have been seeking for months! Good day, and think you so much!"

The woman stormed out of the office, furious at the circumstances that had robbed her of the large sum she had expected and nettled at the taunting mockery in her intended victim's voice.

A few minutes later Miss Armstrong returned. She handed her employer the postal receipt for the registered package.

"Got it off all right?" he smiled.

"Yes, it will probably be delivered this afternoon."

"Good!" He smiled rather anxiously. He turned suddenly to the girl. "Vallance, what was it you were day dreaming over yesterday when you didn't hear my ring for dictation?"

The girl gazed at him in smiling uncertainty for a moment, the incident not coming to her instantly.

"Oh, about the ring that woman was wearing," she replied, laughing sheepishly.

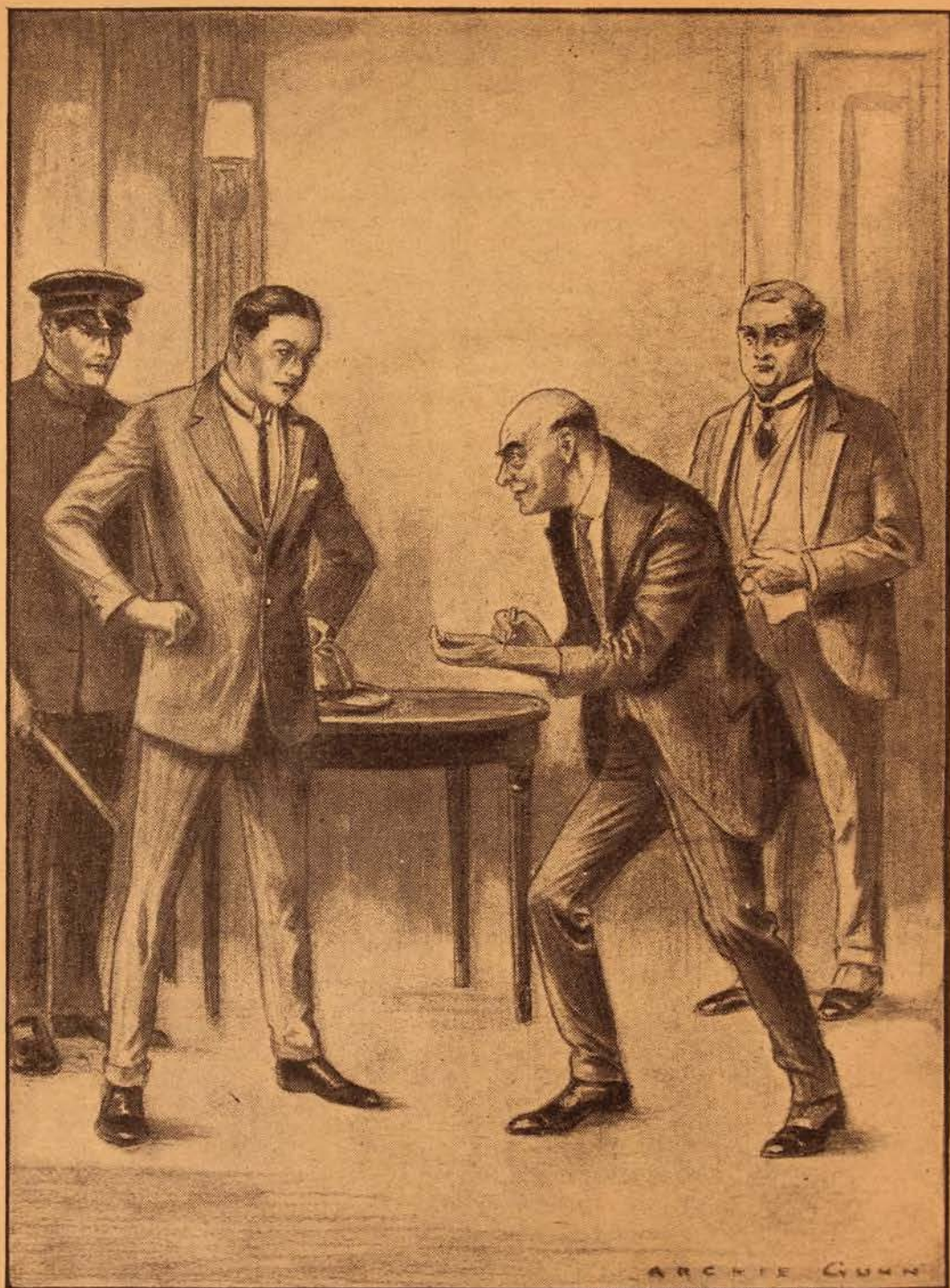
"Well, it was one day dream that came true," Thornton said, reaching in his vest pocket.

He withdrew his hand and placed the ring on her finger. The girl's eyes widened in astonishment, as she stared at the sparkling stone in disbelief.

"Why, it's just like the one that—woman wore!" she breathed in rapt admiration. "The stone is fully as large!"

"Yes, it does resemble it somewhat, doesn't it?" Thornton smiled significantly.





"It was this vein," he said, pointing to his arm with the point of the needle.—Page 101

The Dark Brown Dress

By Meredith Beyers

I

THIS story begins with the tale one Henry Grover told Meroe before seven in the morning, after I had ushered him into the room. We had never seen him before.

He was bald, with the exception of a curious and rather ugly strip of black hair at the back of his head. His eyebrows were heavy and black, and above the left one there was a mole with a long hair growing out of it which seemed to bother the eye beneath. He tilted back his head to gaze at us from under half-lowered lids which seemed too heavy to raise themselves. His face was smooth and molded with odd lines about the mouth.

"I have a room on the sixth floor of the Buckminster, facing south," he said. "My desk makes an angle with the window, and I sit so the light comes from the left and a little behind. By slightly turning my head, I can see the face of the Claridge across the rather narrow street.

"Now you must have observed, Mr. Meroe, that it is unpleasant to be stared at; that there is something distressingly tangible about it even when you are not aware of the owner or the location of the eyes which are staring at you. This feeling came to me yesterday afternoon. I looked hastily about the room. My door was closed and I was alone. I looked out of the window. Opposite stretched the windows of the sixth floor of the Claridge. Every ten yards was a set of bay windows. Not directly opposite, but just three or four windows to

the right, was the third of these sets.

"There I glanced, instinctively, and rather furtively trying to conceal the fact. In the side window was the back of a settee. Beyond this I saw a rather stout and elderly woman with slightly gray hair and a dark brown dress sitting motionless in a rocking chair and staring at me.

"This annoyed me so that I resolved to outstare her. I turned my chair slightly and directed a defiant glare which I held for perhaps thirty seconds before I discovered that she had not been looking at me at all. She took absolutely no notice of my action.

"Laughing at myself, I attempted once more to resume my writing, but again felt the irresistible impulse to turn my eyes. . . . Still the steady stare. Then for the first time I noticed something just above the back of the left end of the settee. It was the head of a man. The confused reflections at that part of the window had prevented me from distinguishing him before. Of course! I thought to myself. The man was undoubtedly talking to her, and she was listening very attentively. But my train of thoughts had been wrecked and work was useless, so I put on my hat and went out for a walk.

"It was nearly supper time, so I went downtown to my favorite restaurant. On the way home I stopped, as is my custom, at the Public Library. It was late when I returned to bed. As I opened my window I noticed that the bay window was dark, and presumed, of course, that the man and woman had retired.

"Now I am an early riser, sir. I very often do two or three hours' work before breakfast."

Here he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his head.

"Mr. Meroe," he said strangely, and evidently quite carried away with a vivid memory, "this morning I commenced to write, as usual. Soon came the first light of dawn. I kept on writing. Then it grew lighter and I turned off the desk lamp. . . . And, dear God! man," he said hoarsely, "I looked out of the window—I looked out of the window, and . . . there she was—that woman—still staring at me! And the head of the man was above the back of the settee in exactly the same position."

I leaned forward with a glance at Meroe.

"And what did you do, Mr. Grover?" he was asking.

"I went directly over to the Claridge, sir, but the janitor said that I was—er—crazy, and would not listen to me. What's more, he would not let me in to wake up the manager. So I returned to my room to make sure that I had not been dreaming. Being perfectly satisfied that this was not the case, I decided to appeal to you. If you will come directly to my room, I am confident that you will find things just as I have stated."

"And it is your opinion, Mr. Grover, that a crime has been committed?"

"Why, yes—er—well, that, of course, is one possibility."

"Come," said Meroe, putting the screen in front of the fireplace, "we will go immediately."

Once in the room, Grover advanced quickly to the window and uttered an exclamation of astonishment, for the room behind the third bay window opposite was the scene of a commotion.

Meroe bolted for the door with the two of us at his heels.

The office of the Claridge was empty. Not waiting to ring for the elevator, Meroe rushed up six flights of stairs.

I followed him, leaving Grover blustering and far behind.

We made our way toward the sound of voices down the hall, and stood in the doorway of a room facing a dozen or more people. Meroe showed them his badge of authority. Mr. Barhart, manager of the hotel, stood forth as main spokesman. I was surprised to find that all in the room were alive and on their feet, and noticed that Meroe was also somewhat disturbed at this.

"Where are the bodies?" he asked, addressing Mr. Barhart, who seemed rather astounded that Meroe had arrived upon the scene, and could not quite understand how he had known that there were bodies in the case when he, himself, had just discovered them.

"Why, we carried them to the bed in the other room," he replied, "and sent for the house doctor."

"Has he been here?"

"He has examined them, sir. In fact, he is still in the room with them."

"Were they dead?"

"Apparently quite lifeless."

"Then you should not have removed them until the arrival of the proper authorities, Mr. Barhart. Have you notified the police?"

"The police!" Mr. Barhart was quite taken aback. "It had not occurred to me that there was need to notify the police. I was about to notify the friends of these people and arrange with the undertaker. . . ."

"Then it had not occurred to you, Mr. Barhart, that a crime had been committed?"

There was a murmuring of voices among the assembly at the end of the room, among which were guests of the hotel, two or three maids, the elevator boy, and the telephone girl.

"A crime!" exclaimed the manager.

"These unfortunate people have been ill. Fifteen minutes ago a telegram came for Mr. Brentore, and, as they did not answer the phone, I, myself, came up to see what was the matter. I found them dead, Mrs. Brentore in the chair here, and Mr. Brentore on the settee by the window."

Out of the corner of my eye I saw that Grover had caught up with us and was standing in the doorway.

"What was the doctor's verdict?" asked Meroe of Barhart at this point.

"That they both had died of heart trouble, perhaps after having eaten a very heavy meal," he replied.

"Oh, but they were not present in the dining-room at dinner time," interrupted one of the guests.

Meroe beckoned to Grover.

"Mr. Barhart, this man occupies a room on the sixth floor of the Buckminster, very nearly opposite these windows. Yesterday afternoon he saw Mr. and Mrs. Brentore in the positions in which you have informed me they were found this morning. Early this morning he saw them in the same position. He rushed here to notify you. Your janitor laughed at him, called him crazy, and refused to let him wake you. I am sorry, Mr. Barhart, but I will have to ask all of you to remain in this room until I have investigated the situation a little more closely. . . ."

The telephone girl stepped forward and held up her hand.

"Lee Harmon, the janitor, has disappeared," she said. "He was seen by Miss Lougee, the night operator, at about six. Shortly after that there was a call for him about a water fixture, but he was not to be found."

Just then the doctor stepped forth from the bedroom.

"These gentlemen are here under the impression that a crime has been committed," said Barhart, with a sweep of the hand toward the three of us.

"And perhaps—perhaps we are wrong," said Grover, with his rasping voice. "I was the one who suggested the idea. I was very suspicious and consulted Mr. Meroe immediately, knowing that he, if anyone, could throw light on the subject. But—but perhaps I was over-hasty—yes, perhaps I was over-hasty. . . ."

"There is every evidence of a natural death," said the doctor.

"You are sure there were no marks of violence?" asked Meroe.

"Absolutely, Mr. Meroe. I have examined the bodies very carefully. Besides, they were found in a peaceful position, one in the chair and one on the settee. This would hardly indicate a death by violence. No, the deaths were undoubtedly caused by heart failure although I am at a loss to know the exact nature of this heart failure. There is a total lack of other indications."

"Does it not strike you as odd, doctor," said Meroe, "that the two deaths should have occurred simultaneously?"

"At first, yes. But on second thought, no," he replied. "They were both in a weak condition, and, in sitting conversing with each other, as was evidently the case, if one were to die suddenly, it would not be unnatural that the shock of the discovery should cause heart failure in the other."

Meroe shook his head doubtfully.

"And you are absolutely certain that they were not poisoned?" he asked.

"No. I am not absolutely certain that they were not poisoned," was the reply. "But I will assist in performing an autopsy this morning, if you wish."

"Please make arrangements to do that," said Meroe. "And I will notify the coroner at once. And, by the way, doctor, Mr. Barhart informs me that Mr. and Mrs. Brentore had been ill. May I ask what was the nature of that illness?"

"That I do not know, Mr. Meroe.

Although I am the house doctor, Mr. and Mrs. Brentore were in the habit of consulting a doctor by the name of Kramer. I know nothing about him other than his name and his distinctly odd personal appearance."

Meroe turned to the gathering at the end of the room.

"Is there testimony to be volunteered illustrative of the case as it stands," he asked. "Does anyone know where Dr. Kramer may be found?"

"I have heard Mrs. Brentore call Dr. Kramer on the phone," said the telephone girl. "He lives at the Braymore."

"When was Dr. Kramer last seen in this building?"

"He passed through the office to the elevator yesterday afternoon," she answered.

"I took him up to this floor, sir," said the elevator boy. Then an elderly woman stepped forward.

"My rooms are across the hall," she said, "and I saw him enter the room. It was about four o'clock."

"And how long did he remain here?"

"I do not know. But later in the afternoon, shortly after five, I saw the janitor come out of Mrs. Brentore's room. I thought nothing of it at the time, but perhaps it will prove to have some bearing on the matter, now that the janitor is supposed to have disappeared."

"I am quite sure that it will have a bearing," said Meroe. "And now, Mr. Barhart, may I please see the telegram which caused you to seek an entrance to these rooms this morning?"

Meroe read the message which Mr. Barhart handed him and then dismissed all except Barhart and Grover.

As the gathering dispersed, Meroe led me into the bedroom to examine the bodies. They were stretched side by side upon the bed under a sheet. The clothing was on a chair. I thought I heard Meroe utter an exclamation as he

held up the dress of the woman. Then he turned to the bodies. The skin of each of them was ashy pale and the lips were almost a pale slate color.

"It is hard to believe that they died of heart failure," I whispered. "It appears to me that the doctor and Mr. Barhart are very much interested in proving that a crime has not been committed."

Meroe did not answer. He was on his way to the phone to notify the coroner.

When he returned he proceeded to examine the bodies very minutely from head to foot. Once he poked me and pointed to the lower arm of the woman near the elbow.

"It looks like a needle-prick," I whispered.

Meroe then went over the arms of the man very carefully, but found nothing.

Suddenly he poked me again and pointed to the man's left leg.

There was the same little mark which looked like a needle-prick.

"Do you think they have been poisoned?" I whispered.

"The coroner will soon find out," he answered.

And then we joined Mr. Grover and Mr. Barhart, who had remained in the sitting-room of the suite.

Meroe sat down to examine the contents of the desk. I saw him put an envelope in his pocket.

"Mr. Barhart," said Meroe, "what can you tell me of this janitor, Lee Harmon, who was seen to depart from this room yesterday afternoon, who would not permit Mr. Grover to notify you of his suspicions this morning and who has, since then, disappeared?"

"I know absolutely nothing about him, Mr. Meroe, except that we have employed him for little more than a month."

"Did he come to you with recommendations?"

"His only recommendation was from—well, now, that's funny! It hadn't struck me before—his only recommendation was from Dr. Kramer."

"Hm! I see. Well, how long have Mr. and Mrs. Brentore been guests at the Claridge?"

"Three years this next month."

"And how long has Dr. Kramer been attending them?"

"Just this fall. Before that I do not believe they were in need of medical advice. If so, it did not come under my observation."

"And Mr. and Mrs. Brentore were quite wealthy?"

"Very wealthy, Mr. Meroe."

"As soon as the coroner arrives, Mr. Barhart, I will leave to make some further investigations of my own. I will return at two o'clock. Please see that all the available witnesses are present."

"And—you are still of the opinion that a crime has been committed, Mr. Meroe?"

"I would rather not answer that, Mr. Barhart, until I have received the coroner's statement. . . . And, Mr. Grover, there is nothing to keep you now, but inasmuch as you are one of the chief witnesses I shall ask you to be present at two this afternoon."

"Really, you know," he rasped, "perhaps I have been over-hasty. I would not wish to be the cause of unnecessary trouble by suggesting that a crime had been committed when—when—"

"You were certainly the early bird this time, Mr. Meroe," chuckled a voice in the doorway.

It was the coroner.

II

At the office of the Braymore, which was next door to the Buckminster, Meroe made inquiries about Dr. Kramer. He had occupied room number seventy-five on the seventh floor for two months;

was not seen very often; was in the habit of spending long hours, sometimes days, in his room with the door locked, and had been known to refuse to answer messages or telephone calls. They knew nothing whatsoever of his practice, were not even sure that he possessed one. The last seen of him was the afternoon before, when he had returned to his room after having been away for two or three hours.

There was an automatic elevator in the Braymore. This we took to the seventh floor. We knocked at the door of seventy-five, but there was no answer. We tried to open it, but it was locked. Meroe called a maid.

"Dr. Kramer does not permit us to enter his room unless he calls us, sir," she said, but handed him the pass key. The door was bolted from the inside and would not open.

"I think," said Meroe, "that we can get in through the window, if you will let us into a room which opens out onto the roof of the Buckminster. There is no space between the two buildings."

He was not mistaken. After climbing out of room seventy-two we encircled a small court and came to the window of Dr. Kramer's room, which was closed but unfastened.

Inside there was nothing—absolutely nothing belonging to Dr. Kramer. The drawers were open and crumpled paper littered the floor, as if he had packed very hurriedly.

"So Dr. Kramer has disappeared, too," muttered Meroe.

Outside, Meroe handed me the telegram which had been sent to Mr. Brentore. It was from Brattlenook, New Jersey, and dated November the twenty-ninth.

"Evidently you did not receive former telegram," it read. "Latimer disappeared four months ago in face of heavy debts. Advise you retract will immediately."

It was signed "*R. Goodnow.*"

"Harding is their lawyer," said Meroe, drawing from his pocket the envelope he had found in Brentore's desk. "If you will wire R. Goodnow of the death of Mr. and Mrs. Brentore, I will run up to see Harding and tend to one or two other matters. Then we will meet at Marston's at twelve-thirty for a bite of lunch before ending this curious little story about the woman in a dark brown dress who stared at Henry Grover. . . ."

There was an odd smile on Meroe's face, but before I could speak he was striding down the street away from me.

* * *

Shortly before twelve-thirty I seated myself in the lobby of Marston's to wait for Meroe. At twelve-fifty-five he came through the door as if he had been hurrying. His brows were puckered and he appeared distressed.

"What news?" I asked.

"That there were absolutely no traces of poison," he replied, leading me quickly to a table in the corner.

"Then—then the whole thing is a farce—I mean about the crime part of it? What about the janitor and Kramer? What about Barhart and the house doctor? . . ."

But Meroe did not answer. After giving our order, he leaned back in his chair, with his chin sunk to his chest in deep thought.

"There is not much time," he said. "I must make some sort of a showing at two o'clock, or the reputation of a year's hard work will be seriously injured. . . . Not that I really care," he added, with a curious light in his eyes and a slow shaking of the head.

"What did you find from Harding?" I asked, but again he was lost in thought and did not hear me.

We ate in silence. Then we sat in silence.

I looked at my watch. It was after one-thirty.

Suddenly Meroe leaned over to touch my arm.

"Do you remember," he asked slowly, "if those needle-pricks were directly over one of the large veins?"

"No," I answered. "No, I did not think to notice."

"It all hinges upon that," he said. "Let us go."

We arrived at the Claridge a moment before two. The elevator boy was waiting for us.

"They are all upstairs," he said.

As we approached the door to the room I could see that, indeed, they were all within; all who had been present in the morning. At the side of the door was Larkin, from Headquarters. He stepped down the hall to meet us.

"They tell me, Mr. Meroe," he remarked drily, "that you are attempting to build a murder out of a case of heart failure."

"Perhaps," smiled Meroe, making his way through the door and on past the assembly into the bedroom.

He was followed with curious eyes. In a moment he appeared again. There was a blank expression on his face as he looked at the coroner.

"The bodies have been removed, Mr. Meroe," he was informed.

"Are they with Jordan?"

"Yes."

"Then I must phone Jordan."

As Meroe disappeared there was a great murmur of voices. Upon his return he stepped behind the table on the left of which were the coroner, Barhart, Grover and the house doctor.

"I will begin," said Meroe, "by telling you what I have been able to discover about Mr. and Mrs. Brentore, the deceased. They were a lonely, childless couple, at one time poor. Five years ago Mr. Brentore came into sudden wealth through interests in an African diamond

project. He had originally been a jeweler of no great repute, forced to struggle to make food and clothing above the rent of the shop. Three years ago he sold his business and retired with his wife to this suite at the Claridge to live until old age should overtake them, which they did not expect would be very many years.

"The nearest relative to either of them was an elder sister of Mr. Brentore, who died in Brattlenook, New Jersey, leaving a grown son by the name of Roderick Latimer. Of the character of this man I will not venture to speak other than that he took a great interest in the suddenly acquired fortune of his Uncle Brentore, whom he had never seen.

"One day a man by the name of Dr. Kramer registered at the Hotel Braymore. He was from Brattlenook, New Jersey. He called upon Mr. and Mrs. Brentore, telling them that their nephew, Roderick Latimer, was one of his best friends, and had asked him to call upon them. Mr. Brentore was immediately interested, for he had often wished to know more of this nephew than he had heard from his sister before her death.

"One evening Dr. Kramer called again and found Mrs. Brentore indisposed. He volunteered his services, saying that he had given up his practice upon leaving Brattlenook, but would be very glad to render service to either of them at any time it might be needed. Curiously enough, Mr. and Mrs. Brentore, from then on, became more and more in need of these services. Their health commenced to fail. As time went on there came a thought which very often comes to men of failing health who are burdened with wealth. He had not made a will. Perhaps, yes, perhaps this was even suggested by Dr. Kramer. At least they talked together about this nephew who was Brentore's only relative.

"A decision was at hand. But he was evidently not satisfied with second-hand knowledge of this Latimer from one who had been a stranger until so recently. There was an old boyhood friend of Mr. Brentore's living in Brattlenook. His name was Goodnow. He telegraphed, asking Goodnow to look up Latimer and report results by wire. This was done, and the report received by Brentore was favorable, so he made an appointment with Harding, of the Mentor Building, to draw up the will. Then he telegraphed Goodnow to inform Latimer of what he had done, and to ask him, Latimer, to come at his earliest opportunity at his, Brentore's, expense, for a short visit here at the Claridge.

"That was yesterday. Goodnow sent a night letter to Brentore, which arrived this morning. In endeavoring to see that Mr. Brentore received this message, Mr. Barhart discovered both Mr. and Mrs. Brentore dead. I will read you the message.

"'Evidently you did not receive former telegram. Latimer disappeared four months ago in face of heavy debts. Advise you retract will immediately.'

"Now Brentore had received a favorable report, apparently from Goodnow. So you see the unfavorable telegram had been intercepted and the favorable one substituted. I found from Western Union that the correct telegram left their office.

"Now at this point let me remind you that Dr. Kramer was seen to enter this room yesterday afternoon at four. That the janitor who came here a month ago with only Dr. Kramer's recommendation was seen to leave this room at about five. This morning it was discovered that the janitor had disappeared. And since then I have discovered something which may interest you—i. e., that Dr. Kramer has disappeared from his quarters at the Braymore!"

III

THERE was a murmuring at this, and Meroe waited for it to subside before he continued.

"Much of the above information not obtainable here at the Claridge I obtained from Frank S. Harding, whom I discovered to be the lawyer engaged to draw up the will. Some of it I have inferred as necessary to make the tale coherent. And now we will approach what I still choose to consider a mystery, from another angle. . . .

"It has to do with Henry Grover here, who came to me at six-thirty this morning, over half an hour before Mr. Barhart had entered the room. Mr. Grover occupies a room directly opposite this one at the Buckminster. He came to me rather distressed because yesterday afternoon at five, or a little after, he had been disturbed by the figure of a woman with slightly gray hair and a dark brown dress who stared at him from this room. Soon he discovered that she was not staring at him, but at a man who was evidently talking to her and whose head he could see above the back of the settee in the window.

"It had bothered him so much, however, that he stopped work and went out for a walk. He remained for supper and did not return until dark. Not seeing a light in this window he presumed that the inmates had retired for the night. But early this morning he discovered them in exactly the same position, the position in which they were found later by Mr. Barhart. Rushing over to the Claridge, he was stopped by the janitor, who laughed at him, called him crazy and refused to allow him to wake up the manager. Not long after this the janitor disappeared. Mr. Grover came to me at six-thirty, told me the story and requested that I accompany him to his room to see for myself. When we arrived we found that the situation

had already been discovered, so we made our way to the scene as quickly as possible.

"At first my suspicions were aroused at the reluctance with which the house doctor and Mr. Barhart accepted even the remotest suggestion that a crime had been committed. I have since, however, come to the conclusion that it was but a natural instinct on the part of parties interested in the business end of the establishment to avoid encroachment upon its good name."

There was a slight bow of acknowledgment from Barhart.

"It surprised me a great deal to be informed that there were absolutely no indications of a death other than natural. So I examined the bodies myself, and found what it would be only too easy to overlook, that which I had every reason to suspect was the mark of a hypodermic needle. There was one on the arm of the woman and one on the leg of the man.

"I was therefore doubly surprised and disconcerted when the coroner informed me that there were absolutely no traces of drug or poison. Things had come to my notice which left no doubt whatsoever in my own mind that the whole thing was a very clever conspiracy or plot, but the whole framework of my theory would fall away if Mr. and Mrs. Brentore had died a natural death.

"It all depended upon one fact. When I rushed through to the bedroom a while ago it was to verify this. The bodies were gone. I called up Jordan and asked him to look for the needle marks and tell me if they were situated each of them over a large vein. His answer was 'Yes.'

"Now is it not true, Doctor, that if air is introduced into a large vein it may be carried in the venous circulation to the right ventricle, and be then forced by the systole of the latter into the pulmonary artery or its primary branches,

acting like a clot, possibly even producing a clot? . . ."

"It is, Mr. Meroe. That would be what is termed an air embolism. It would have somewhat the same effect as phlebitis of a large vein. . . ."

"And it would produce death?"

"It would."

"And the face and surface of the victim would be ashy pale with the lips and mucous membrane a pale slate color, as was the case with the bodies in question?"

"Either that or the face would be livid and bluish, and in some cases the limbs are convulsed."

"And there was nothing in your examination of these bodies with which you could contradict my statement that death was caused by the introduction of air into a large vein by means of an empty or partially empty hypodermic needle, thus leaving the marks which I discovered on examining the bodies this morning?"

"Nothing, Mr. Meroe. It is a thing which had not occurred to me before in relation to this particular case. It is only in exceptional cases that there are any distinctive signs to be found on physical examination."

"And how long after the introduction of the air would death occur?"

"Death might take place in a very few moments, not due to mere asphyxia—but in some degree, at any rate, to syncope—"

"Now, with the doctor's word in support of my theory," said Meroe, turning to the others, "I advance the tentative hypothesis that Mr. and Mrs. Brentore were murdered deliberately by the malignant introduction of air into a large vein. Now, as this could not very well be accomplished without their consent, or without drugging them, or binding them, I suggest that it was accomplished upon the pretext of injecting a medicine applicable to an ailment from which

they believed themselves to be suffering at the time."

There was a moment's silence.

"But could one die such a death, Mr. Meroe," interrupted the rasping voice of Mr. Grover, "and remain in the natural sitting posture in which I saw them as early as yesterday afternoon, and in which Mr. Barhart found them this morning?"

"They could not," answered Meroe; "and for that reason I was about to offer the additional suggestion that, after having been successfully murdered in this unusual way, the bodies were placed in a sitting posture as nearly natural as possible. And why? It would seem that one would not take the trouble to do this without a perfectly definite and undoubtedly ingeniously conceived purpose. It is this and one other point which have led me to some rather startling conclusions since seven o'clock this morning. There is in this room, at this moment, one who will verify all that I am saying.

"Did it not strike you as suggestive that the lady across the hall should have seen Dr. Kramer enter this room and the janitor depart from it? I leave you to draw your own conclusions from this and the fact that when one disappears both disappear. And who would derive the greatest benefit from the death of Mr. and Mrs. Brentore? Would it not certainly be the nephew, Roderick Latimer, who disappeared from Brattlenook in the face of heavy debts? Who else would spend weeks of patient labor on a plan to hasten the preparation of the will and, immediately after that, the death of these people?"

"At this point I offer as another suggestion that Roderick Latimer, Dr. Kramer and Lee Harmon, the janitor, are one and the same person—"

There was another burst of murmuring. There was a slightly sarcastic smile on the face of Larkin.

"—and that in the person of the janitor he was able to intercept the telegram the receipt of which would have ruined his chances of being named in the will, and that in the person of the doctor he was able to commit the murder at the proper time and without any great outcry."

"Mr. Meroe," said Larkin suddenly, "most of what you have given us, clever and coherent though it is, is mere theory. Have you proof of what you say? Can you lead us to the murderer?"

"If the case ended at that point I would not have proof of what I say. I would not be able to lead you to the murderer. But Roderick Latimer did not stop there. He went a step farther. He went a step too far. In an effort to protect himself without having to flee the country entirely he had conceived a plan which was entirely too perfect for him to carry out without a flaw. He knew that the best way to escape detection and still be on the ground until such time as it was safe for him to resume the character of Roderick Latimer, pay his debts, and take up the life of a wealthy and righteous citizen—was to be right under the nose and on the side of the detector. This would have been very successful had he been the mastermind to think of all the details at once. He was not that perfect mastermind. And now, Lee Harmon, Dr. Kramer, Roderick Latimer and Henry Grover, what have you to say for yourself?"

IV

THERE was a general outcry of astonishment. Henry Grover looked about him and up at Meroe in utter amazement. There was another sarcastic smile on the face of Larkin.

"You would look more like yourself without that on," said Meroe, reaching for the hair which grew out of the mole above Grover's left eye, but it did not

budge. Grover uttered an exclamation of pain and arose in indignation.

"Come out of it, Latimer," said Meroe. "It will not help you now to put up a bluff. You came to me at six-thirty. You were in a hurry as you accosted the telephone girl at the Charlesgate Club. You were not in a hurry when once you had entered my room. You made your story entirely too dramatic to get away with it naturally. You described the woman as having slightly gray hair and a dark brown dress. It was when I found that her hair was really only slightly gray and that her dress was a *very* dark brown that I got the hunch about your whole game. I defy any man to sit in your room at the Buckminster and tell Mrs. Brentore's dark brown dress from a black one while it is hanging over a chair in the center of this room. And it would be equally impossible to recognize her hair as *slightly* gray without having seen it at very close range. And when I found that the window of Kramer's room at the Braymore opened onto the roof of the Buckminster not far from the stairway leading down to the sixth floor, your floor, I was convinced. Also you were too eager to retract your suggestion that a crime had been committed, after seeing the possibility of its being considered otherwise. . . ."

"Now let's see whether that mole will not come off. It doesn't look quite natural to me. Your ideas of disguise are a bit crude for this day and age. I wish I had seen you as Dr. Kramer and the janitor. . . ."

Grover had backed away from Meroe. Suddenly the coroner reached up for the mole. Grover jerked away with another exclamation, but the mole was left behind, held up to view in the coroner's fingers.

"Do you deny anything that I have said?" asked Meroe, "Do you deny

that you kept a room at both the Braymore and the Buckminster and managed to keep up the appearance of living in both of them by means of the stairway in the roof? Do you deny that for the past month you have worked yourself to death as Lee Harmon, janitor of the Claridge, in order to be the more certain of success in your little plan?"

I felt a real tinge of pity for the man as he hung his head. Suddenly he looked up.

"Perhaps it would help clear matters," he said in a strained, but quiet voice, "if I showed you just exactly what was done in the case, for instance, of the woman."

He reached in his hip pocket and drew forth a little box. He removed from it a hypodermic needle.

"It was this vein," he said, pointing to his arm with the point of the needle. . . ."

We watched him with gaping mouths, half stupefied by the strange tones of his voice. Suddenly Meroe lurched toward him, but it was too late. The

needle was in his vein and his thumb was pressing home.

"I would rather not be bothered with the red tape of a trial," he said quietly.

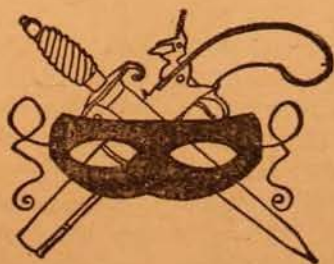
* * *

I will not describe in detail the scene which followed. There were screams from the women and somewhat of a panic as they rushed from the room. He did not live more than fifteen minutes.

Meroe left the rest in the hands of Larkin and the coroner. We walked home through the park breathing clean air and sunshine to clear our souls of the unwholesomeness with which we had been steeped since morning.

"You know," said Meroe, "he would have slipped away with the whole thing right under our noses if he had not described the woman who stared at him as having been dressed in a dark brown dress."

And that was the last I ever heard Meroe mention of the affair, for it was his custom to forget these things as soon as his part had been played.



In Full Payment

By John B. Hart

I

CHU KWONG listened respectfully to the words of his father. "My son," the old man began, "it is written in the books of great wisdom that a son gains virtue who pays his father's debts. Harken, then, to the story I shall tell you. Thus knowing your father's debt, it may chance that you can pay it in the land of the white barbarians whither you go in the train of my most honorable and elder brother, Fong Su."

The old man pulled gently at his pipe, watching the thin spiral of smoke ascend toward the cloud-flecked sky. He was silent until recalled to the present by the discreet cough of Chu Kwong. He continued:

"It happened in the days before this disease called Democracy descended upon the Middle Kingdom, and the Daughter of Heaven still graced the golden throne.

"It was my task to administer justice in the city of T'sen Pi'en. One day there were led before me five evil men who had brought great pain to the honest citizens by their robberies and their murders. I listened to the stories against them, and because they seemed to be true stories I sentenced them to be flogged and then hung.

"But in the night they escaped from their jail and, coming to my house, sought revenge upon me for having passed just sentence. And they would have succeeded in their evil purpose had it not been for a certain white barbarian who was my guest. With the

aid of his weapons, he fought against them, killing four and wounding the fifth.

"Strange are the ways of these white barbarians. This man who had saved my life would accept neither gold nor presents of any kind. Therefore I am in his debt, which is a burdensome state to an honest man.

"Before leaving my house, this man presented me with this card, which bears his likeness and his name written in a strange hand. Take it with you, so that should he cross your path you may know him and perchance befriend him as he befriended your father."

Chu Kwong bowed low and prepared to withdraw. But his father stopped him, saying:

"One other thing, my son. In this land to which you go there is a dog of a Cantonese to whom I lent some hundreds of taels. He has not returned them. It is also written that a son gains virtue who collects all that is owing to his father. It may be that from this Li Sing there will be no money forthcoming. But a man can pay in other ways. Now you may retire."

II

WHEN he was just past forty, Gregory Westlake came into his inheritance. He returned to London after a career of hardship and adventure pursued in many lands. He settled down in his father's house and prepared to enjoy himself.

And for a season he did enjoy himself. The renewal of old friendships,

the making of new ones, the going about to this house and that, the solid comfort of English life plus an income that was more than sufficient for his needs—all these were as balm to his hitherto lonely and harassed spirit. Then he married Lady Miriam Stonewald and began a sojourn in a garden of sorrow.

Who ever solved the riddle that was Miriam Stonewald? No one, I'll wager, unless it was a man or woman who could solve the mysteries of the sea. For, like the sea beside which she was born, she was unfathomable, often unexpectedly kind, often senselessly cruel, and always inconstant as a summer breeze.

She was beautiful and she had wealth and a pretty taste in clothes. But, besides, she had charm and no one who ever came under its influence ever forgot her, ever quite ceased to be her slave.

It is a mystery why she married Gregory Westlake. Certainly she did not love him. Nor was it his income that attracted her, since it totalled less than a fifth of her own. Perhaps it was as Lady Cooper put it, "Oh, Westlake just chanced to be around when the whim to marry seized dear Miriam."

Stored up in Westlake's heart was all the love and affection accumulated by a man who has lived a lonely life in strange lands. All of it he lavished on his wife. He gave her himself wholly and for eternity. And the greater tragedy was not that she refused his gift, but that she seemed unaware that it had been offered. A week after they were married she went her usual way—a ceaseless round of receptions, dinners, dances—and her husband had become simply another of those possessions one has but doesn't think about.

It was shortly after her return from the Glencairn shooting that she met

an undersecretary at the Chinese Embassy, a certain Chu Kwong, who was greatly the rage because he could sing exotic love-songs to strange Chinese music.

"Oh, do bring the dear child over and present him," she said to her host at the Spanish Ambassador's reception.

Don Ruy Diaz laughed and sent one of his aides to fetch the good-looking young Chinaman.

When Chu Kwong heard Lady Miriam's name he smiled pleasantly into her eyes.

"Your father—perhaps he is Mr. Gregory Westlake?" he asked in his soft, almost feminine, voice.

"That is my husband's name," Lady Miriam replied.

Chu Kwong clasped his hands together and bowed very low.

"Then we should be friends, madam, since already I am your husband's friend."

"You know my husband?"

"Alas, no, madam," Chu Kwong answered. "Nevertheless I am his friend."

And bowing again, he moved slowly away.

Intrigued by his perfect self-possession, his quaint manner, Lady Miriam determined to add Chu Kwong to the host of her admirers.

It was not a difficult task. Chu Kwong was at the age of idealism when any pretty woman who will listen to a young man's hopes and aspirations is an angel in disguise. And Lady Miriam had the knack of listening.

She let him come to tea and over the cups draw her a picture of a new China with himself in the foreground holding a very important position indeed. She let him bring her little presents—queer fans of sandalwood and ornaments of apple-green jade. It was her whim to captivate him and she gratified it.

Chu Kwong's attitude toward West-

lake was odd. Gifted with the Oriental's ability to penetrate to another's moods, he saw clearly beneath Westlake's mask of nonchalance. He saw that the man was unhappy—unspeakably so. And not knowing that the cause was Lady Miriam's indifference and neglect, he was possessed with a measure of contempt for his father's friend.

To a Chinaman, possession of a desirable woman is more than nine points of the law. It is the law complete. How, then, could a man married to Lady Miriam, living in the same house with her, privileged to enjoy the thousand and one intimacies of such living, dare to be anything but overwhelmingly joyous? Did it not augur a lack of taste and appreciation for so enviable a being to be unhappy?

Nevertheless Chu Kwong, bound by filial devotion, never lost sight of the fact that it was to this Englishman that his father owed his life. And always his eyes were open, seeking here, seeking the opportunity to pay his father's debt.

And it came about that one afternoon he called at the Westlake house to escort Lady Miriam to a sale at Christies. The servant put him in the little drawing-room behind which was Westlake's library.

For a little Chu Kwong sat beside the window looking out into the quiet street. Then growing restless, he rose and began pacing up and down the length of the room. As he neared the folding door leading to the library he heard voices.

Matters of morals and good taste vary greatly. A Chinaman can listen behind a closed door without forfeiting his self-respect. So Chu Kwong stood very still and listened.

A man's voice that Chu Kwong had never heard before was speaking.

"... and from there we'll take native boats to the river's source. The shooting is bound to be good. Will you come, Gregory?"

And Westlake replied:

"Sorry, old chap. Like to and all that. But I—I can't."

There was silence for a minute. Then the strange voice broke out, its tones impatient:

"I know what it is. I think that you are hugging your misery to your heart. Forgive me for speaking like this, Gregory, but—well, damn it all, I hate to see a good chap come a cropper because a petticoat can't see he's the finest man on two continents."

There was the sound of a chair being pushed back, followed by an exclamation from Westlake:

"Gad, man, it isn't pretty, is it—to see your pal making all kinds of an ass of himself!"

He laughed. Then his voice became serious.

"But truly you don't understand. No man could who hadn't been in the same boat. Miriam is in my blood—like that damnable African fever. And you can't get rid of it and you can't forget it—ever. I know I'm not wanted here; wouldn't even be missed if I trekked anywhere, but—well, I can't go."

"See here," he went on after a short pause, "to no other man on earth would I tell these things. Do you know that sometimes I am almost ready to pray for Miriam's death, so that once irrevocably separated from her I can pull myself together and be my own man again."

Then someone entered the library and the conversation ceased.

That evening Chu Kwong sat long and motionless, absorbed in his thoughts. Knowledge, ideas, suggestions that had come to him from hear-

ing Westlake talking to his friend crowded his brain and bewildered him. One by one he sorted them and weighed them and placed them in their proper relationship. And it seemed to him when he was done that his duty was clear.

Then in his whole being there raged a battle between duty and desire. It lasted until the dawn had lighted up the chimney-pots and paled the stars. It left Chu Kwong exhausted, but around his lips there were lines of purpose and determination.

The next morning he visited Li Sing, importer of teas and spices and perhaps a little of the juice of the yellow poppy.

After he and his host had accomplished the necessary ceremonies of greeting, he came to the purpose of his call.

"Li Sing," he said, "there is a debt of money that you owe my father."

The other Chinaman moved his huge bulk uneasily. He coughed behind his hand, shaking his head sadly.

"That is true, O elder brother."

"And you can pay?"

Li Sing grew still more embarrassed.

"My business is poor, son of an illustrious father, and I have no money."

Chu Kwong's eyes narrowed.

"Debts may be paid in other ways than with money," he suggested.

Li Sing's face brightened.

"What is it that you wish me to do?"

Chu Kwong leaned over him and whispered a sentence or two into his ear.

The other man sprang to his feet.

"No! No!" he cried. "That is impossible."

"Why?"

Li Sing stretched forth his hands appealingly.

"But can you not see? There is the danger to my life."

Chu Kwong, sitting as immovable as an idol, looked at him coldly.

"But there is the danger to your honor if you do not do as I have asked," he said brutally. "Shall your ancestors lose face because you are a cheat and a coward?"

Then Li Sing fell upon his knees and pleaded. But to all his offers and protestations Chu Kwong turned a deaf ear. His eyes were veiled with the mist of incomprehension, as though he could not understand the other's words.

At last Li Sing rose. He made a little gesture of defeat.

"I will do as you have ordered," he said quietly.

"That is well," Chu Kwong replied.

Then he, too, rose and departed.

III

CHU KWONG again stood humbly before his father.

"My father," he said, "I have paid your debt to the white barbarian and also I have collected that which Li Sing owed you."

The old man nodded his head gently.

"You have done well, my son. Tell me now the details."

Chu Kwong cleared his throat.

"I found the white barbarian sick, O my father. And I removed from his person that which was gnawing at his heart. I permitted Li Sing to be my servant in the matter and for his services absolved him from his debt."

He drew forth a clipping from a London newspaper, and translating slowly, read it to his father:

All London was shocked by the brutal murder of Lady Miriam Westlake. The horrible event took place last night as the deceased was leaving the Haymarket Theatre in the company of her husband. According to witnesses, a short, stout man sprang from the crowd and silently plunged a long knife into her back. In the ensuing excitement the assailant escaped and there was no one

who saw his face clearly enough to identify him. Charles Hornby, baker, of Reading, swears that the man was a Chinaman, but Inspector Grant, who is investigating the case, believes this to be highly improbable.

Chu Kwong folded the clipping and returned it to his pocket. Then he looked gravely at his father.

The old man removed the stem of his pipe from between his lips and spat contemplatively.

"I do not quite follow all the details

of this matter, my son," he said. "But undoubtedly you have done well."

Chu Kwong half turned away.

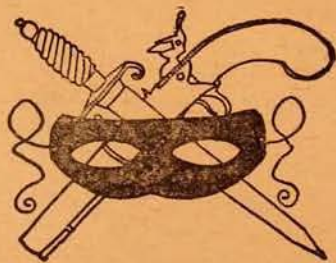
"And if in paying your debt, O my father, I have paid it partly with my heart's blood, have I acquired virtue?"

The old man nodded.

"You have acquired great virtue, my son."

Chu Kwong bowed his head.

"Perhaps that is so," he said softly.



The Man Who Knew Too Much

By John D. Swain

I

"THE trouble with me," said the last patient of the day, "is that I know too much."

The statement did not surprise Arbuthnot, the consulting alienist. The patient who had just left his office had assured him that he was perfectly all right save for a glass heart, which he lived in constant terror of cracking by colliding with somebody, or by slipping on a wet pavement.

Before him, there had been a pretty girl bubbling with enthusiasm over a scheme for curing stammerers by intravenous injections of parrot's blood. And so it went, every afternoon from two until four. Arbuthnot elevated his brows politely, and gazed upon the pale, emaciated man of sixty-odd who faced him across the wide table.

"You know too much—about what?"

"Everything! Big things, and trifles. All my senses are abnormally keen. Without in the least wishing to do so, I overheard all your conversation with the patients who preceded me, through your soundproof door. Coming downtown, I passed seven hundred and thirteen pedestrians; and I could describe each one so minutely that any reasonably intelligent police officer could identify him at sight. On the street cars, I can hear the ticking of every watch, and distinguish the minute differences in beat and pitch. Yesterday I rode for two miles along the principal business street of a Jersey city. I can write out for you every sign, every scrap of lettering on the shop fronts of the side

I was facing, along the entire route. When I smell a perfume, I at once identify each of the dozen or more coal-tar derivatives from which it has been built up."

Dr. Arbuthnot nodded.

"I have treated cases not unlike yours," he said. "There is no cause for alarm. You are probably overworking. Drop everything and play for a while. Golf. Or long tramps in the country."

"No use. I should count the apples on the trees, and if I laid down to rest I should hear the grass grow and the earthworms burrowing far beneath. I can stand it daytimes, but of late my mind retains its activity until I sink into a sort of stupor toward dawn. I am sixty-three, and I've never used drugs of any sort. Now I want something to make me sleep, at least every other night."

The alienist made the customary examination, with stethoscope and ophthalmoscope; tested his reflexes, and questioned him upon his family history.

John Slade's father had been of a type not uncommon in rural New England, although dying out. Self-taught, save for what the village academy could impart, he knew a little about many things. He was a naturalist, of sorts. Was always pointing out glacial scratches on the rocks in the neighborhood, and finding Indian arrowheads. Had a fine collection of butterflies, and knew them all by their Latin names. Botanized a great deal by day, and read the stars by night through a rusty old telescope. Understood the ways of

fishes and wood creatures. Could enjoy his New Testament in both Greek and Latin. With his hands he was able to repair sewing machines, pumps, typewriters, or clocks, and could design and build a modest house unaided. Knew surveying, and served as the local undertaker. With two or three simple tools he could do things that would have baffled a master mechanic,—yet could not have passed an examination as plumber's assistant. A gentle, visionary man, the only resident of his county to whom Spinoza and Descartes and Einstein meant anything at all, he lived and died as poor as a church mouse.

Slade's mother was a French-Canadian, unable to read or write. She had the illiterate peasant's extraordinary powers of minute observation, was a neat housewife, a mixture of cunning and credulity, and a devout Christian.

John Slade himself cared nothing for money. When he needed any, he invented something. His education, begun by tramping the countryside with his father and absorbing all sorts of ill-assorted facts, had been pursued in many lands. At one time he buried himself in Johns Hopkins, engrossed in biology and embryology. Next he was heard of at Oxford, steeped in mediævalism. Physics at Leipsic and Prague. Chemistry at Bonn. Back again to the States, he flitted from Massachusetts Tech to the Edison laboratories. Always learning. Never producing—save when lack of funds drove him to some hack work: a course of lectures before the Lowell Institute, the invention of a crankless ice-cream freezer, an article for some technical publication.

"I know too much," he repeated after answering all of Arbuthnot's questions. "That is the trouble. And now I cannot sleep!"

The physician gave him some advice as to exercise and diet, to which he listened abstractedly. Then he handed

him a little vial of the lethal tablets which would, for a time at least, permit his distracted brain to forget.

Usually he was able to dismiss his patients from his mind after he had done what he could for them, and filed their cards away. He did not find it so easy to forget Slade.

For one thing, he came upon articles written by him from time to time, in the journals to which he subscribed. His fellow practitioners mentioned him occasionally. Slade was a sort of mystery, and it was admitted that he knew more about embryology and chemistry than they did themselves. Nobody could tell just how much the fellow did know! Whatever he said or wrote was uttered with authority and was hard to refute. He had a laboratory which none of them had ever seen, and where it was rumored that he carried on extraordinary experiments, the nature of which was unknown.

Nevertheless, Arbuthnot had very nearly forgotten him when, six months after his call, he received a brief note requesting the alienist to visit him the following afternoon, upon a matter of life and death.

II

PROMPTLY upon the departure of his last patient at a little after four next day, Arbuthnot stepped into the taxicab he had already summoned, and fifteen minutes later was admitted by John Slade himself to his quarters on the top floor of a wholesale storage house well downtown. There was nobody about except the janitor, who took him up in a rickety freight elevator and indicated the door bearing Slade's card.

He had become much thinner, more haggard, the physician's swiftly appraising glance told him, as he took his dry, skinny hand in greeting. The eyes seemed to have retreated deep into their

bony sockets, and were now magnified by thick toric lenses. The man's bare feet were thrust into sandals, and he wore a light, loosely belted linen robe falling to his knees. He took Arbuthnot's hat and indicated an easy chair.

The room was evidently Slade's general living quarters. It was large, square, lighted on two sides by windows. Its utter lack of the atmosphere of the conventional bachelor's "den" struck Arbuthnot at once: There were no hospitable glasses, or tea-things, nor so much as a pipe rack or ash tray. The place was as ascetic as a monk's cell; an effect heightened by Slade's girdled robe and the sandals. Books—ranks and columns of them—in built-in cases along three sides of the wall. A great flat table, with reading lamp and precise stacks of papers, a rack of sharpened pencils, an open volume with fresh marginal annotations. A wide couch bed at one end, its blankets neatly folded. Filing cases at its head and foot. Through a half-open door Arbuthnot glimpsed the famous laboratory—mostly a gleam of white enamel, against which glimmered the blue-green of retorts and the glitter of polished brass.

Slade seated himself.

"Do you believe that suicide is ever justifiable, Arbuthnot?"

The physician started.

"Certainly not!"

Slade laughed.

"Old inhibitions, doctor! First, your Hippocratic oath—which was never composed by Hippocrates, and is a jumble of pompous platitudes. Then, your religion. We mustn't take life—because that power is the only one we hold in common with God. Therefore—God is jealous!"

Arbuthnot scanned the face before him, scored deeply with the lines of insomnia, strangely illuminated with the vast mental energy going on within.

Everything at top speed,—he thought without replying. Blood pressure too high, of course. Pulse rapid and wiry—you could catch its flutter over the hollow temples. Breathing short—and stirring only the upper chest. Burn out pretty fast, at this rate. . . .

"I told you what my trouble was," Slade continued in his tired voice. "I know too much. And I know more now than on that day when I consulted you. Oh, very much more!"

Still the alienist uttered no comment. Let the poor devil talk. It was a relief—sort of safety-valve.

"The fact is, I know so much that I am a menace to God Almighty! One of us—so it seems to me—must go. And you sit there, smugly, and tell me that suicide is wrong. As one would tell a naughty child not to bite its nails."

Slade closed his eyes for a moment and inhaled a deep breath. Then he pulled open a drawer in his table and held out a little oblong glass slide.

"Bits of protoplasm, Arbuthnot. Life cells. And all the scientists in the world, with their most cunning microscopes and reagents, cannot isolate one of them and say whether it would have developed into a rear-admiral or a cucumber; an elephant or a moth; a theologian or a toadstool! Am I right?"

The physician half smiled.

"With certain reservations you are perfectly correct," he admitted.

"One step separates me from divinity," Slade remarked. "I haven't yet actually created a life cell, but I stand on the threshold. And then—what?"

"Many have stood on the threshold a long time, Slade. With the eggs of sea-urchins and—"

"Grammar school stuff! Piffle!! I tell you, in less than a year, probably within three months, I can from inorganic substances form a living cell. Then, having the power of creating and destroying life, I shall emerge, the lone

pioneer, the first human being to rise to godship. And I don't dare. I tell you, *I am afraid!* What of? I don't know. Not of anything that can happen to this wreck of a body. Not of any hell-and-damnation stuff. Not of pure annihilation. But I am horribly afraid—of *something*. So much so that I am withholding my foot just as I lift it to take that final step that divides men and gods."

"I think you are perfectly right," Arbuthnot assented in soothing tones. "I'd feel the same way about it myself!"

Slade stared at him for a moment before his yellow face broke into a myriad of little wrinkles, and his voice into cracked laughter.

"You're only a little fellow in your profession, after all! You think I'm demented—even now you're figuring on how to keep me quiet till you can get a message to the Psychopathic Hospital."

The alienist went mottled-red. It was precisely what he was thinking—but he was a man of great dignity, and hated to be mocked even by a lunatic.

"You've no right to say that," he parried. "I simply agreed with you."

"Well—even alienists know enough not to contradict their patients, don't they? You didn't dispute that chap when he told you he had a glass heart! Humor us, my learned friend. Humor us!"

Instantly dropping his banter, he leaned forward, his voice falling to a whisper.

"What would you say if I told you that I could take any life cell and make of it what I choose? What are the determining factors? Light—heat—moisture—food—what we term in general, environment."

He touched a thick, leather-bound book on the table.

"Here are the formulæ, all worked out. What will you, my good Arbuthnot? An oak tree, or a lizard? A

pretty girl, or a serpent—or, if you like, both in one?"

He rose jerkily, and beckoned his visitor to follow him into the other room.

Arbuthnot, now thoroughly on his guard against any sudden violence directed by Slade against either of them, followed him into a room twice as long as the other, and fitted up as a laboratory.

Even in his anxiety, the extraordinary neatness and order of the room caught his notice. There was none of the litter familiar to such places presided over by man, with only vestigial housekeeping instincts. Brass and nickel were gleaming. Test tubes, glass jars, stood in racks or on shelves. Rows of labeled bottles were not sticky or stained by escaping drops of their own contents. Tables, floor, walls, showed no trace of dust or grime. A tall three-leaved screen cut off one end of the long room, which was lighted from a skylight, it being too early to turn on any of the numerous incandescents.

Slade crossed over to where, apparently, a huge steel safe was set in the wall, and opened the thick door. It swung easily and noiselessly upon its oiled pinions, revealing a closet the height of a tall man, with a perforated disc upon the floor, and a grill of shining rods extending to the top. Overhead was an oblong box thickly wound with heavy copper wire. A number of dials, indicators and gauges were attached to a heavy plate screwed to the inside of the door. Slade turned to the silent physician.

"This is my lethal chamber," he explained. "One who enters this steel chest and throws this switch, ceases to exist. He disappears. More scientifically, since in our universe nothing can be destroyed, he is transmuted into material not identifiable by our imperfect senses. Simply open the door five

minutes after I enter, and you will see. Or rather, you will not see!"

Arbuthnot made an involuntary step toward the other, who smiled and closed the heavy door.

"Do not be alarmed! I have other things to show you."

He pointed out a few of the ingenious contrivances in the laboratory, calling especial attention to his electric incinerator and showing his guest how, by turning a small lever, a globular furnace became white hot in a minute or two. Anything placed therein would shrivel almost instantly to ashes.

"And now for the real exhibit," he said, leading Arbuthnot to the far end of the room and around the screen which he had noted on entering.

III

LATE afternoon had set in; and the dusk revealed nothing but a long row of square glass cases standing upon a trestle and emanating a sickly greenish light in the afterglow which slanted down through the skylight.

Slade switched on some incandescents.

Details leaped out at Arbuthnot. He noted that some of the glass tanks contained a fluid, while others were dry. Electric wires were connected with each, and thermometers indicated their interior heat. Faint stirrings—a little scraping on the sand of one of the dry containers—indicated some sort of life within. Slade touched his sleeve and directed him to the end of the row.

Peering within, the alienist made out some creature which he could not identify, nor even classify as plant or animal. It swayed gently in the water, its eight or nine inches erect, with a bulbous head and a suggestion of human features; but its limbs were like some unwholesome plant, with twigs for hands and feet. It seemed rooted in a yellow-

ish-gray clay at the bottom of the tank. Little bubbles rose continuously from its mouth.

"Part man—part seaweed," observed Slade. "What do you think of it?"

Arbuthnot bent closely over the stagnant water. A feeling of horror crept through his veins like iced water. The homunculus turned its head—if it was a head—upward, and its eyes, whitish and without expression, seemed to look through the viscous fluid into his own. A rudimentary nose—a wide mouth—sessile ears—these he made out before the thing seemed to take fright and slithered down to burrow into the clay in which its lower limbs were rooted.

Without a comment Arbuthnot permitted himself to be led to the next tank.

Here was, unquestionably, a miniature woman. Beautiful and shapely as a fairy, with perfect breasts and an exquisite little head swaying upon a slender neck, her skin shimmered silvery-green in the water. Arbuthnot turned deathly sick as he saw that below the waist she—it—was seemingly a slimy eel!

Concerning the occupants of the other glass boxes he retained only a jangled sense of hideous and unclassifiable monstrosities. There were serpents that were part vegetable; plants that mocked humanity. There were other things that fascinated by a sort of loathsome beauty. Sickened to the soul, he was dragged back to a consciousness of the present by the low-pitched voice of John Slade, whose presence he had forgotten.

"I don't suppose that I can possibly explain my feelings toward these little creatures. We have no adjectives, no similes for it—because it isn't a human emotion. I am the first man ever to know it. There is nothing of sex in it, you see; nothing comparable to love of wife, or parents, or offspring. It is the yearning of the creator over the people he has created. God feels it, I suppose,

for us; but in depicting God's love we grope for words and say that he cares for us as a father for his son."

He moved from the blue-green tanks with their faint stirrings of a nameless life shadowing the translucent glass. At the end of the screen he turned to look squarely back at Arbuthnot.

"Although a narrow and unimaginative man, you are an honest one," he said. "You will know what to do. I am going back to nothingness!"

The physician heard him cross the room, caught the soft click of the lever as he threw open the great steel door. He leaped forward, overturning the screen, and beheld Slade with a quick motion cast aside his single garment and shuffle off his sandals. His naked body stood out for a second against the dark interior of the metal closet; and then the door closed noiselessly behind him.

Arbuthnot's impulse to rush forward and open the door was arrested by a deep, musical tone which came from the closet. Slowly, and by infinitesimal tonal shadings, it rose through the scale, culminating at length in an incredibly thin and high note, like the keenest harmonic of a violin. It died away into silence; but he had a feeling that the sound was still mounting up and up, though now far beyond the range of his ear. Then he turned, steadily enough, and switched on the current in the electric incinerator.

The half-hour that followed was never anything save a horrible nightmare. The details were not clear, and he made no effort to recall them. On many a sleepless night he prayed to be able to forget them all.

When the furnace was white hot he began dropping into it, one by one, the living organisms from their glass tanks. As he moved back and forth, there were times when he felt that he was a malignant deity destroying a world. A sense of megalomania, like that induced by

certain drugs, obsessed him. The poor creatures didn't want to die; that was plain enough. They clung to their bleak, arid lives, and they feared and hated him. When Slade had approached their tanks they had evinced a feeble pleasure or, at least, a sluggish indifference. But from Arbuthnot they shrank, seeking to hide away among the pebbles and sand and fragments of coral. And into his mind came the words of Scripture, how on the Last Day the human mites shall call upon the mountains to cover them!

The little tree-man fought with a futile rage, seeking to bite his fingers, and making no more impression upon the skin than if it had been buffalo hide. Its tiny twig-like fingers struggled ceaselessly; and it seemed to feel acute pain as he uprooted it from its bed of clay. But the eel-woman offered no resistance; and her tragic despair was the harder to bear. She covered her wee breasts with her hands, and tears unbelievably minute rolled down her face.

Down Arbuthnot's streams of perspiration poured, as one by one he dropped Slade's creations hissing into the white-hot incinerator. When at length he had done, ending by burning the great book filled with the formulæ which might conceivably enable another to recreate a forbidden microcosm, his limbs were trembling and his pulse racing.

Ordinarily, he would have dreaded to open the steel door which Slade had closed behind him; but after what he had done, anything else seemed commonplace. His nerves refused to react further. Listlessly, and almost incuriously, he crossed the room, turned the lever and pulled open the door.

A wave of heated air swept out, stirring the damp hair upon his forehead. But there was no one inside.

The steel closet was shining and empty.

Fit for a King

By Walter Deffenbaugh

I

MEN who read books, with whom I have talked more than a little in my spare time, are fond of quoting Shakespeare. Perhaps they quote others, but mine is a mind like President Wilson's—one poetic train is enough on my single-track—and so I can't remember the rest. One quotation sticks particularly in my memory.

It is something about "There is a tide in human affairs which, taken at its flood, leads on to victory." Perhaps that isn't quite right. It has been a long time since I have read it, because working up and down the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the beaches of the North Pacific, one can't carry much of a library.

But what made it stick with me was that thing in it about the tide. You know the tide and the waves are like a woman; they can't keep anything secret for very long. Just give them time and they will tell all about it. A woman can't keep a secret—neither can the sea.

That fellow knew what he was talking about when he wrote that, but he did not know it half so well as we did, because he did not know how much we depend on the tide and the surf for our tips on what the smugglers and other criminals are doing along our uninhabited coasts. If it were not for the help of the sea we would surely be lost.

It was a wave—a big one, unwell-

come at the time, unmasked and rough, as waves usually are—that solved for me one of the greatest mysteries our service was ever called upon to run down, and one which had baffled our best men for more than a year.

I'll tell you about it.

Do you remember James J. Plainfield, the man who made twenty or thirty millions out of railway and steamship lines in the West and died a few years ago? You do, I guess; everybody does. I never met him myself, but at the time I am speaking of it was part of my day's work to look up him and his past history pretty thoroughly.

Did you ever hear of a place he built out here on the West Coast to entertain a king? He called it the "Aerie"—eagle's nest, you know. He was that kind of a fellow—big and rough and blustering but with a sort of poet's imagination. It was that which had brought him up from a common sailor to what he was and which gave him the idea when his chance came to have a real king as a guest, to build this place up on the rocks to take him to and stand with him up there where he could take in the whole Pacific with one sweep of his hand and say, "Here, King, see this ocean? Well, I control that."

He's dead now, Plainfield is, but the king isn't. I've got two letters at home from His Royal Highness—one asking for full details of what I found out about his friend's house on the cliff and the other thanking me for my report. I don't mind saying that

in the second one he says that he feels sure that if I had been on the job he would have been perfectly safe.

Of course that is more of a compliment, like some kings like to make, than anything else, because this king never saw the "Aerie." He got too busy with a war they were having over in Europe and had to cancel his acceptance of Jim Plainfield's invitation. Jim Plainfield, himself, got pretty busy in that same war in the shipping end of it, and I guess he and all the rest of the world would have pretty nearly forgotten all about the "Aerie" if a newspaperman in Seattle hadn't assembled a lot of facts and strung them together in a sensational story he called "The House of Fatal Mystery" which was copied all over the country.

That was the way I got in on it. The big chiefs in Washington read it and, as it was in our territory, we got orders to look into the matter, and it surely did seem serious and mysterious enough for somebody to look into.

It seems that in six months no less than four men, who were last seen in the neighborhood of the "Aerie," had disappeared off the face of the earth. More than that, two women, who couldn't tell what had happened to them or the missing men they had accompanied to the House on the Cliff, had been found exhausted and more than half crazy in the big woods that the place on three sides surround.

It was a House of Mystery all right, but as fine a structure as you ever saw. Plainfield had given orders that it was to be "fit for a king"—and it was in more ways than one.

It was a sort of glorified log-cabin, something like what I understand they call *châlets* or hunting lodges in Europe, but I don't believe there is one in Europe like this House on the

Cliff. Jim Plainfield, as I said, had been a common sailor, but he had a soul far above tar and ropes and canvas. He had roamed the far seas and seen a lot. He had studied a lot. And, when the riches came, he kept on traveling and seeing and reading. He loved the sea and his big yacht, the *Fir*, was a common sight on every ocean.

It was in this way he met the king. I never knew the exact details, but I believe he saved the king's life or something like that during a yacht club regatta. At any rate, their friendship became common knowledge, and when the king planned a visit to America it was common gossip that he would be Plainfield's guest when he reached the Coast.

Plainfield was always a very busy man and depended for details a great deal upon subordinates who had been with him for years, in most cases. So even in so important a matter as the building of this house for a king he only went as far as drawing the plans and giving directions for the furnishings. The actual superintendence of the thing, we learned, had been left to a man named Harry Stanwood, who had been steward of the big yacht, valet to Plainfield and generally his man of affairs in minor business and quite largely in social matters.

So, while the boss planned the house, it was really Stanwood who built it and had it all ready with every convenience to receive a king, and it was some job, too, out in that wilderness. Materials had to be hauled for miles and labor was very scarce. Stanwood, who was something of a mechanic, had to do a good deal of the work himself, but he had plenty of time, so it did not make a great deal of difference.

He was a most interesting sort of character. We found out all about

him, because in our investigation we started out with Plainfield himself and gradually took in everybody who had had anything to do with the "Aerie." Naturally Stanwood came second, because when the war came on and it was found that the king could not come and Plainfield became so busy with his shipping interests, he left Stanwood in charge of the house with permission to do as he pleased—practically gave it to him.

There used to be some gay old times out there, and Harry Stanwood became well known in all the Puget Sound country for his hospitality at the expense of his boss. It was war time and everybody was more or less on edge with war worry and speculation and German spy scares and one thing and another. It seemed to be a great relief to a lot of people to go out to the "Aerie" for a few days and sort of rest up.

Out there one could forget the war. Plainfield, himself, was above suspicion. Stanwood, the financially receptive host of the place, was past fifty years of age, apparently not desired for war duty and by his own statements of many years an Englishman—a statement borne out by his speech, manner and conversation.

Besides that, the State of Washington had voted "dry," but the "Aerie" never seemed to have heard of the law going into effect. Stanwood ran no bar, but the cellar stock was checked against each paying guest and the cellar itself, in a sort of cave under the cliff, was one of the house's principal points of interest. It was big enough to house a regiment—a natural formation in the rock upon which the house was built—and upon those notable occasions when Stanwood himself was host to his own particular cronies, he frequently

ordered supper served underground where the wine and spirits were handy.

Not many people knew of the place. I have always doubted if Plainfield ever knew anything at all about what went on there, but among those who did know, the "Aerie" was a celebrated rendezvous. That was so until this newspaper article with its array of gruesome facts threw a damper of dark mystery about the whole region, cut off Stanwood's source of revenue and probably hastened the death of Plainfield, which occurred within a few months and before the mystery surrounding his chalet had been solved.

II

WE were really first drawn into the case in a sort of semi-official and confidential capacity. One of the men who had disappeared thereabout was a former assistant to a Cabinet officer who still had many friends in Washington. The circumstances were such that they did not want to call in the regular peace officers of the State of Washington. There was a matter of a little spree and a woman or two involved. We were called in as much to avoid publicity as anything else, but we got in good and deep—we and our old friend, the sea, after we had watched in vain for it to give up a body.

I won't mention this man's name. We succeeded in keeping the facts quiet and avoiding scandal even after we found his body. It's the way we have in the service. But you must have read in the newspapers about the others. We found them and we also checked up on the two women found half crazy in the woods. I don't wonder that they were.

Naturally, we were first suspicious of the people at the house itself.

There is nothing particularly suspicious about four or five people dying or disappearing in the course of a few weeks or months in this big world of ours, but when they happen to do so in the immediate vicinity of an isolated place up on a cliff looking out over the Pacific and none of them has any connection with one another, save through visiting this spot, something seems to be wrong. It is like there was a regular fog of suspicion clustering about the whole locality and we plunged in first where the fog was thickest.

But the trouble was to find the people who were or had been connected with the "Aerie." Stanwood was in charge, but it was easily found out that he spent most of his time in Seattle, Portland, Vancouver or Victoria. Indeed, the facts stood out like sore thumbs that he had been particularly conspicuous in one or another of these cities upon the dates of the mysterious disappearances, that he had seemed greatly concerned over them and had himself led the searching parties that had recovered the two women but had been unable to find any trace whatever of the four men.

Outside of him we could find no one regularly connected with the place except Song Chin, a Chinaman of the usually mystical age of forty or eighty or thereabout, who so completely "nosabbied" everything except expert cooking that we had to give him up and put him in the same class with the rocks and the trees and the ocean. Rather, considering the fact that sermons are said to come from stones, that the big firs distinctly sing and that the waves roar in anger when their long ocean trip is ended at the coast, Song was dumbest of them all.

There were a couple of young Indians who puttered about the place occasionally, cutting firewood and sometimes

acting as guides in the woods or handling a few canoes and a motorboat that were kept in a sheltered cove about half a mile down the coast from the rocky crest where the house stood. But they were no different from a couple of hundred other young bucks along the coast and indeed Stanwood seemed to have employed a lot of them rather indifferently from time to time. It was true, as he explained, that a month's pay was enough to last one of them half a year and they usually quit on pay day.

There was a garage, but no chauffeur or mechanic. Stanwood was fully qualified to act in both of these capacities and indeed that was one of the reasons Plainfield had put him in charge of the house. He was a whole crew of servants in himself. During the time that guests were on the cliff, we found that it had been the custom for them to bring their own servants—a couple of Japanese boys or a maid sufficing for these visits, which were generally of a sort in which the utmost privacy seemed to be desirable.

So we were up against it, so far as the house staff was concerned, and forced to attack at the mysterious house itself.

III

It was a twelve-mile ride through a huge forest of firs over a private road to reach the place and outside of a few scattered and tangled wood trails this was the only way to reach the "Aerie." Loggers had never penetrated that section and the underbrush was too thick to make the country attractive either for hunters or for deer or bear themselves. It was one of those places where the forest remains just as God planted it, waiting its turn to serve its purpose in the world.

From the sea, as we finally saw it, the place seemed the most inaccessible spot in the world. Standing high on a great

cliff, the waves beat interminably on jagged rocks that formed its base. Always the spray seemed to dash halfway up this great 300-foot pedestal upon which the house stood. Down below was the little cove in which the canoes and the motorboats were stored, but even these had been dragged to the spot through the forest and the nearest really safe havens for watercraft were fifty miles south and in Barclay Sound beyond the Strait of Juan de Fuca far to the north.

It was heart-breaking work, but it had to be done. We quartered and criss-crossed that whole tangled section of primeval forest. We made trails through parts of it that not even a pheasant had ever seen, so thick was it. Ahead of us we drove Indian guides and Scandinavian axemen until they were reeling with weariness, wet with perspiration and soaked with the eternal dampness of these woods, and nothing could we find. Finally, absolute exhaustion drove us back to the "Aerie" to rest up, but principally we went there to collect our frazzled wits and think things over.

Naturally, we had made a complete search of the house—or as complete as we could. Stanwood had not been there at the time. He had pleaded important business in Seattle and as we had him constantly shadowed in the city, we were rather glad of his absence, but he came out while we were there the second time and with him along with us we went through the house again with a fine-toothed comb, to say nothing of flashlights, jimmies and other tools. We had said we were going to tear the whole house apart until we had solved the mystery. But we didn't find anything.

The house itself was a beauty. Built all on one floor, with the exception of an observatory on the roof to give it a little touch of distinction, I imagine, it was apparently hewn out of solid logs from the little clearing behind it. Even

the floors were of solid slabs of cedar and so was the woodwork with which the interior was finished.

From the rear, or the land side, you stepped into an entrance hall alongside the kitchen and from there into a great combined living- and dining-room that took up the whole center of the house. To the right were four or five bedrooms and to the left the private suite built for the personal use of the king. In front of this was a sort of sun-parlor and study and a private dining-room, and along the side a huge bedchamber with a massive bed in it made out of native cedar.

Most of the beds in the house were of the usual brass variety but the royal couch was a huge and most interesting affair. Stanwood confided to us that he had made it himself for Plainfield's room, but the boss had done him the honor of selecting it for the king because it was such a fine example of the craftman's skill. It was, indeed. We all had to take our hats off to Stanwood as a master at carpenter work.

He had a marvelous set of wood-working tools and he seemed to be more worried about them than about anything else as we searched the house, ruining the edge of one after another as we tested floors and walls and sought to pry up huge timbers with delicate chisels. We tapped and tested and sawed and bored until the house was pretty near a wreck. And still we could not find anything.

At last, as the best boatman in the party, I volunteered to make a search of the ocean front. We had done it before from the motorboat, keeping well off the rocks and searching the face of the cliff through binoculars. But I wanted to get in closer and finally persuaded an Indian to go with me in a canoe. It was plain he did not want to go. I had to talk real rough to him, but

he knew about the federal prison on McNeil Island and he recognized my badge. He figured that the sea was safer than my anger and we started out.

It was a hair-raising trip, although we had selected the ebbing tide of a fairly calm day for our exploration. Even on the ebb the swells of the wide Pacific were torn into surf by great hidden rocks and dashed into foaming spray as they were broken by the claws of the cliff. We could only edge in a way, then turn and paddle for our lives—turn back and try it over again the same way.

Not much satisfaction in that sort of work, I soon decided, but the sea has always been my ally in duty along the coast and I had a hunch it would help us out in this baffling case and I was playing that hunch strong. Just as we edged in for the last time I saw something—a shadow, it might have been, or a discoloration in the cliff, but at any rate it was something—and dropped my glasses to seize my paddle to swing in closer, but before I could dip we were nearly capsized on a hidden rock and only the caution of the Indian, whose muscles had already been set for flight, saved us from death as the vision was snatched from my eyes.

IV

WHEN I got back the other fellows listened politely enough but they were too busy with another angle of the case to take my fleeting vision very seriously. Brierly and Campbell were seated at the big table in the living-room with the notes and papers they had taken from their pockets before them. Stanwood was in his room and Corrigan was keeping watch on things outside, as one of us always did.

Brierly was talking, or rather thinking aloud, as he reviewed the facts we all knew and sought to find some hidden meaning in them.

"There was Adams," he said, "the first one to drop out, Seattle ship-builder, supposed to be a millionaire, bachelor and privileged to have brought this Miss Johnson here with him if he wanted to, I suppose. No discoverable reason for running away or committing suicide. No idiot would try to run away from here on foot anyway.

"The Johnson girl knows nothing about it or I'm a Dutchman. Says he went to the king's room to go to bed, she heard him scream and the room was empty when she got there. Windows all closed—no other door. No one here who could run the car and after two days of it she went sort of off her head and tried to get out on foot.

"Then come Hunt and Terwilliger. They were here together and alone except for a Jap valet and chauffeur. No one knows what door they went through. The Jap says he had gone to his room over the garage after eating his supper and that they were gone in the morning. Certainly they left the car behind. Both were good friends, prosperous business men, happily married, out here, apparently, just for a little rest.

"Now we come to the boss's friend. What happened to him? Successful lawyer, fine record, brilliant future, no troubles that we know of. Bit of a rounder, he was, they say, and I guess it's true if that Kilmer girl came out here with him. Tried to find him, she says, after he vanished. Doesn't remember where she last saw him, she says, but thinks it was some place inside the house here. Now what became of him?"

"What in hell became of any of them?" Campbell answered with a shrug of his shoulders.

We were silent for several minutes. Then Brierly shifted his position suddenly and hurriedly relighted his pipe—a sign that he had an idea, or at least thought he had.

"What business was Adams in?" he demanded of us.

"Shipbuilding, you idiot," I answered, because he knew as well as I did.

"And what business were Hunt and Terwilliger in?" was his second question.

"Airplane spruce—what's the idea?" I grunted in reply.

"And the boss's friend. What was his game? Lawyer, wasn't he, but what kind of clients did he have?"

That set Campbell and me to thinking. Who were his clients?

"Corporation lawyer, wasn't he?" Brierly asked, eagerly. "Handled things in a legal way for big firms, gave advice to big manufacturers, didn't he?"

We agreed that he did.

"Was he attorney for Adams's shipyard?" Brierly went on. "He was. Here's his name on the letterhead as one of the directors. He was general counsel for Hunt and Terwilliger's lumber company, wasn't he? You bet he was and a stockholder in it, too.

"Is it just a coincidence or is there anything funny in the fact that all four of these men were big figures in the munition business out here?"

Campbell took his feet down from the table and I started scratching my head as this new angle soaked in. They were in the munition business—all four of them—but who—how—what connection was there between that fact and their mysterious disappearances? Neither Campbell nor myself are particularly quick thinkers. We sat silently, waiting for Brierly to go on.

"Why did these men come out here?" he asked. "Was this place advertised for rent? No. Very few people knew anything about it and you know that Stanwood refused several pretty good offers from people who did know, but whom he didn't want out here for some reason or other. Some people asked

to come and were allowed to do so. We know who they were and know that they paid well for the privilege. They got back all right and told some of their friends about the place.

"But how did these missing men get out here? Tell me that."

I turned to Campbell. He had done most of that end of the investigation and I was not quite sure of this angle of the case myself.

"Stanwood invited them," he answered.

"Sure of that?" asked Brierly.

"Positive. He urged all four of them to come. Why? What the devil are you driving at anyway?"

For answer, Brierly leaped from his chair and ran softly from the room over to the bedroom wing of the house. He opened the door into the hall noiselessly and disappeared for a moment.

"It's all right," he reported as he resumed his seat. "Stanwood's in his room, reading."

"What of it?" Campbell wanted to know.

"Just that we've got to make sure that he stays there or some place else where we can find him when we want him," was the reply. "Go tell Corrigan to keep an extra eye open and then hustle back here."

We smoked in silence until Campbell came back and Brierly was ready with a new line of questions. He was a man who thought a lot and let his thoughts sort of simmer in his head until they jelled. Then he was ready to talk and when he talked it was to some purpose.

"Who is Stanwood?" he demanded.

"Englishman," I answered. "Sort of upper-class servant. Has worked for Plainfield for years. Gambles, drinks and runs with women when the boss isn't here."

"How do you know he's English?"

"Well, I don't," I admitted. "But he's been accepted as English here and over

in Canada for a long time. Talks about England and all that sort of thing."

"Humph," grunted Brierly. "Remember that Austrian chap we rounded up after he blew up that ship in Seattle harbor last month? What was his name?"

"Good-looking, well educated chap," I muttered. "Why it was—Stan—Stan—," and I turned to Campbell, who had made the arrest.

"Goshamighty, Stanwich," Campbell exploded.

"Exactly," said Brierly, with an air of great satisfaction. "Stanwich. And do you remember that our friend inside there showed a particularly keen interest in that case and that he was asking about it only this morning?"

"Yes," I nodded; "but what possible connection is there between that and this case here?"

"Just this," said Brierly, slowly and distinctly: "I've a lot more than a hunch that our friend is no more English than Song Chin, that his name is Stanwich and not Stanwood, that these two men are either brothers or cousins and both on the same job."

"You mean—?" I asked.

"I mean that the fellow in jail down in Seattle destroys munition ships and the fellow in here destroys munition makers and that they both work for the same boss. These four men were all munition makers and Stanwood either murdered them or knows how they were murdered."

It was a little too much for me and I sat still, thinking hard. Campbell started up and made for the hall door, but Brierly halted him.

"What are you going to do?" he called.

"Sweat it out of the devil," he answered.

Brierly shook his head.

"Can't be done," he said. "He's too deep for that. There's a trap in this

house some place and we've got to find it." Then he turned to me. "What was that again you thought you saw on the side of the cliff?"

I explained again and we waited for Brierly. He was senior man and besides had the clearest head in the party and we readily agreed as he outlined his plan.

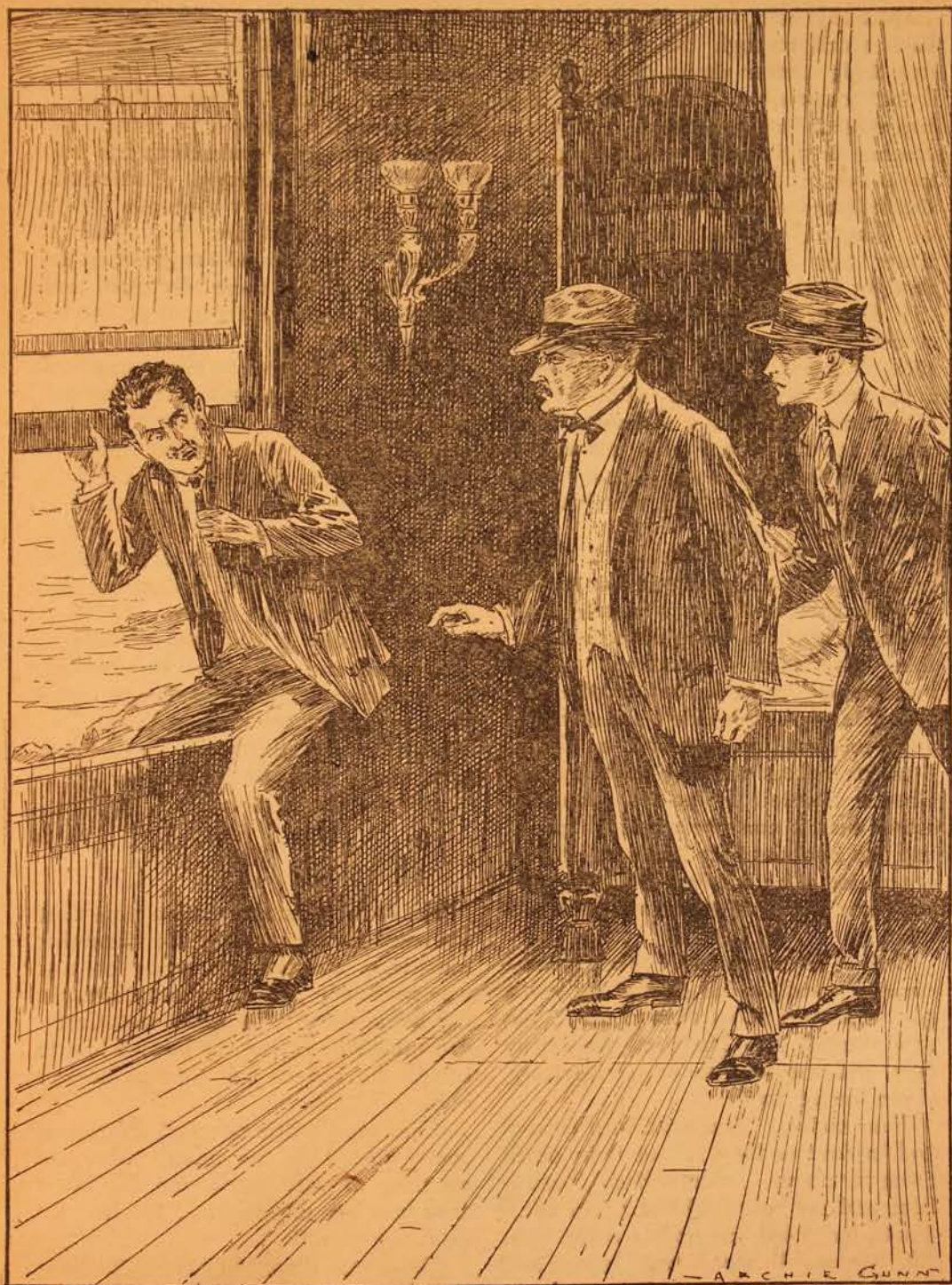
"Campbell," he said, "you and Corrigan go through the king's bedroom again. It's the most likely place and that's where the girl says Adams disappeared with a scream. Mac, I hate to ask you to do it, because I know how dangerous it is, but you're the best boatman and we ought to know what that thing is you saw. I'll relieve Corrigan outside and think things over."

V

CAMPBELL and Corrigan went at their job at once, but I had to wait for the next ebb tide, and before I left I made sure that one man at least would be on the edge of the cliff with a coil of rope in case things went wrong. I knew there wasn't much chance for a capsized man among those rocks, but if I did hit trouble a rope was the only possible chance for my life.

I couldn't find an Indian anywhere about the place. I think they had an idea I might want to go out there again. And so I had to go alone in a lighter canoe. The sea was a little smoother than before, or rather a little less rough. You couldn't call it smooth at all. I crept in closer and closer, while Campbell watched from the top of the cliff. I didn't dare use the glasses because the paddle took both hands, but I found the spot I had seen and kept my eyes on it. Plainer and plainer it grew as I edged toward it and I let out a whoop of satisfaction as I saw a narrow opening in the rock.

I waved an arm at Campbell and



He saw his chance, and before we could stop him, leaped through the window.—Page 123

turned my head to make sure of the back track through the surf when I saw a big comber almost on top of me. I don't know where it came from. They happen that way sometimes. But it was coming all right and I would have said my prayers if I had had time. It caught the little canoe like a barrel at the crest of Niagara, and in a huge surge of water and blinding spray, I dashed straight at the cliff.

I didn't guide the canoe. God, or somebody else did that. But the next thing I knew, I flew between jagged rocks that scraped the sides of the canoe and then with a sickening lurch and a flop I slid into quiet water, twilight and then darkness. I had hit the fissure in the rocks and was inside a huge cave.

Two or three minutes later I had managed to pull myself together enough to look about. I was shivering more from the shock of being alive than anything else. But I managed to find matches and scrambled out into the shallow tide pool. I couldn't see any roof about me, but I threw pebbles as high as I could without striking anything and when I shouted I decided from the sound that it must be mighty high. I had slid in about fifty feet and, lighting one match after another, I felt my way back into the darkness to see what was there.

Only a few steps had I taken when I came to a wall, which I could see was a sort of a shelf about twenty feet high, and climbed it. There on the rocky floor was the solution of our mystery, if not the key to it.

Four bodies. Four dead men twisted and broken as they fell to their death from far above. Adams, Hunt, Terwilliger and the boss's friend, I had not a doubt, but I did not stop to make sure. My last match was in my fingers and I had some job ahead if I were not to join them.

Scrambling down the wall I splashed toward the sunlight at the mouth of the cave where the surf still boiled about the jagged rocks. To swim through it was impossible. My only chance was to find a pinnacle I could climb and trust to Campbell and his rope. Fortunately, there was one a few feet out of the opening, and, watching for a calmer moment, I leaped and caught it in my arms and clung there drenched and lacerated but above the pull of the receding waves.

Finally I managed to squirm around so I could look up and saw Campbell and Corrigan, flat on their stomachs, leaning over the edge of the cliff and waving to me. In a minute the rope was lowered with a loop on the end of it and into this I thrust my arms. They hauled me up with a few more bruises and cuts, but I was alive and the rest didn't matter much.

Breathlessly I told Brierly what I had found and gave him the approximate measurements and directions of the cave. Quickly he paced it off and where do you think we located the spot above the pile of bodies? The bed in the king's chamber!

VI

WE didn't waste any more time then but went for Stanwood. He knew that something unusual was going on and was nervously pacing up and down the big living-room. Campbell and Corrigan grabbed him and we hustled him in beside the bed he had told us he had built.

"Stanwich," Brierly snarled, and the man winced at the name, "you are standing directly above the bodies of four men you murdered. How did you do it and why?"

The words shook the man to his marrow, but he still kept part of his nerve. He denied the charge, denied his name,

denied everything, but as I described what I had seen, he broke still further in a sort of superstitious terror, which I couldn't understand for a time. Brierly was an adept at the game and as he picked up an axe and attacked the bed, the fellow leaped back with a squeal of alarm.

"So that's it, eh?" said Brierly with a grin. "Come now, show us how it was done and save a lot of trouble."

He gave up at that and showed the devil's trap. Hidden in the head of the bed was a spring which, when he pressed it, released another spring in the side of the couch, just where a man's knee would rest when he climbed into bed. Securing a pole, he pressed this spring from a safe distance and swiftly the bed tilted at a sharp angle while a black hole opened in the floor for an instant and then closed again into its perfect jointures.

The scheme, he explained, as he grew calmer, was to set the spring at the head of the bed only when the trap was to receive a victim. At other times the room was perfectly safe. He might have set it for us, but did not believe we could ever prove anything against him and also feared that the fall of one of us would reveal his secret to the others.

His terror at my story, he explained, was due to the news that the bodies were still under the house. He had found the chimney opening into the cave when he came there to build the house and the trap was a culmination of the discovery, but he could hear the waves washing

down below and believed that the bodies that fell through it would be washed away with the next tide. Then, if they were ever found, it would be supposed that they had tumbled from the cliff.

"But why did you kill these men?" Brierly demanded.

"I didn't kill them," he answered. "They fell while I was not here."

"True, but you set the trap and then invited them here. Why did you do it?"

He was silent for a moment, then set his jaws and straightened his shoulders.

"They were enemies of my country," he said. "They were making munitions to destroy my brothers. Why should I not destroy them?"

"But this house was built before the war," Brierly insisted. "Why did you build this infernal trap?"

"Because," he answered slowly, "Mr. Plainfield ordered this house built to entertain a king. I do not believe in kings. They are the enemies of mankind. He ordered a house 'fit for a king.' I made it so."

We drew back, startled at the hate that gleamed in his eyes and at the cruel cunning of the radical bared before us. He saw his chance, and before we could stop him, leaped through the window. Another instant and he had thrown himself over the cliff to the rocks and surf below.

There isn't much else to tell. We never found out who he really was. No, I haven't said what king it was who sent me those letters. Perhaps you can figure it out for yourself.



The New Mystery Books

By Captain Frank Cunningham

I

THE DESERT FIDDLER, by William H. Hamby.—A story of ranch-life in Southern California, with all the conventional mortgages, irrigation ditches, villains and persecuted heroines with aged fathers. Bob, the hero, is one of those male Pollyannas who tries hard to do what is right, and in the interim plays on his beloved fiddle. This is one of those stories that you know how will end after reading the first few chapters.

II

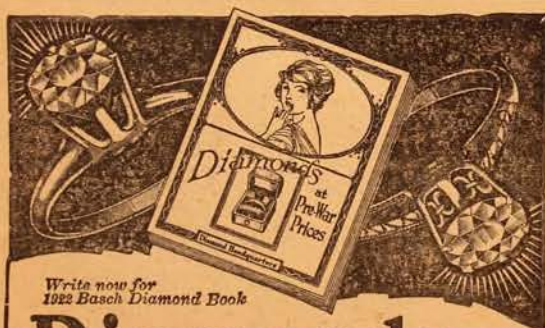
GET YOUR MAN, by Ethel and James Dorrance.—Yet another conventional

yarn. This time the scene is laid in the Frozen North. A young West Pointer, refusing to believe that his father committed suicide, goes to the Yukon to devote his life to tracking the man he believes to be the murderer. The story therefore is something on the order of a movie chase. Trite stuff, on the whole.

III

OWL TAXI, by Hulbert Footner.—A badly written mystery yarn. The opening chapter fails entirely to convince when the hero changes places with a taxi-driver. After that the melodra-

(Continued on page 126)



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(Continued from page 124)

matic situations that follow each other hot-footed are too improbable to be taken seriously. Bad as was "The Perils of Pauline," it was yet a masterpiece compared with this story. I can't even recommend this novel as a suitable Christmas present for a miserly uncle.

IV

LISTER'S GREAT ADVENTURE, by Harold Bindloss.—A story that starts with an elopement in Canada and ends with a treasure hunt on the West African Coast. Of course the hero must find the treasure in order to win the girl. Lost treasure stories are always intriguing, and this is no exception. There is plenty of excitement, and the hero has enough daring courage to equip a dozen men, which makes you take a grain of salt at the end of every chapter.

V

THE CROSS-CUT, by Courtney Ryley Cooper.—Again we have the Easterner going West to take charge of a silver mine in the wilds of Colorado. The usual villain, the usual struggle to gain possession of the mine, the usual suspicion of crime hovering over the hero, and the usual obstacles to overcome. Not a thing in this whole story that is the least bit original.

VI

THE UNLIGHTED HOUSE, by James Hay, Jr.—In this detective story we have something more to claim our attention than the usual murder mystery. A United States Senator loses from his overcoat pocket some valuable state papers. Of course there is a murder connected with the missing papers, and a Sherlock Holmes detective who finally solves the mystery. Not a bad yarn,

but still not new or clever enough to make me want to throw my hat in the air with enthusiasm.

VII

THE THREE EYES, by Maurice Leblanc.—A powerful mystery story that is as good as anything the creator of Arsène Lupin has written. It deals with the unique and terrifying discovery of an aged inventor, and its disastrous consequences to those having knowledge of its secret. The plot is rather fresh and novel, and there is a delightful love story. A good book to read.

VIII

DEVIL STORIES, an Anthology, edited by Maximilian J. Rudwin.—To me one of the most interesting anthologies yet published. If you are at all thrilled by the supernatural, and have a secret desire to know something about that most mysterious of personalities, the Prince of Darkness, here are enough yarns to tickle your fancy. The editor has selected twenty well-written stories, all of which have the Devil as their central character. Fascinating reading, and well worth your time. A book that would not be out of place in your library.

IX

THE HOUSE OF NIGHT, by Leslie Howard Gordon.—This is a hectic tale of the Mexican-Arizona border. One of the craftiest officers of the famous Villa kidnaps the beautiful daughter of a rich rancher. Of course he does not reckon with the fearless hero who "loves her deeply." There's the plot, and what happens takes up the whole of the novel. Enough guerilla warfare to break the dull monotony of a winter's evening.

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33x4	13.45	20.95	2.65
34x4	14.45	22.45	2.85
34x4 1/2	15.45	22.90	3.25
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Perfect machines, Standard size, Keyboard of Standard Universal arrangement, 42 Keys, writing 84 characters—universally used in teaching the touch system. The entire line of writing completely visible at all times, has the tabulator, the two color ribbon, with automatic reverse, the back spacer, ball bearing type bars, ball bearing carriage action, ball bearing shift action, in fact every late style feature and modern operating convenience. Comes to you with everything complete; tools, cover, operating book and instructions—nothing extra to buy. You cannot imagine the perfection of this beautiful reconstructed typewriter until you have seen it. We have sold thousands of these perfect late style machines at this bargain price and every one of these thousands of satisfied customers had this beautiful, strictly up-to-date machine on five days' free trial before deciding to buy it. We will send it to you F. O. B. Chicago for five days' free trial. It will sell itself, but if you are not satisfied that this is the greatest typewriter you ever saw, you can return it at our expense. You won't want to return it after you try it, for you cannot equal this wonderful value anywhere.

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When the typewriter arrives deposit with the express agent \$4.85 and take the machine for five days' trial. If you are convinced that it is the best typewriter you ever saw keep it and send us \$5.00 a month until our bargain price of \$64.85 is paid. If you don't want it, return it to the express agent, receive your \$4.85 and return the machine. We will pay the return express charges. This machine is guaranteed just as if you paid \$100.00 for it. It is standard. Over half a million people own and use these typewriters and think them the best ever manufactured. The supply at this price is limited, the price will probably be raised when next advertisement appears, so don't delay. Fill in the coupon to-day—the typewriter will be shipped promptly. There is no red tape. We employ no solicitors—no collectors—no chattel mortgage. It is simply understood that we retain title to the machine until full \$64.85 is paid. You cannot lose. It is the greatest typewriter opportunity you will ever have. Do not send us one cent. Get the coupon in the mails to-day—sure.

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SMITH TYPEWRITER SALES CO., 90, 218 N. Wells St., Chicago, Ill. Ship me the L. C. Smith Model No. 5, F. O. B. Chicago, as described in this advertisement. I will pay you \$5.00 monthly as rent until the \$60.00 balance of the Special \$64.85 sale price is paid. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. It is understood that I have five days in which to examine and try the typewriter. If I choose not to keep it I will carefully repack it and return it to the express agent. It is understood that you give the standard guarantee.

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"A Woman In Exchange"

By Howard Rockey

Would you give a wonderfully attractive girl in exchange for a ruby? Not even for the finest ruby in the world, worth a king's ransom? Don't speak too quickly. Read this remarkable story first—in December issue of

Saucy Stories

On Sale November 15th

"The Front-Page Hound"

By Alice L. Tildesley

A story that will keep you giggling and chuckling from beginning to end, and that has sufficient dramatic force to sustain breathless interest throughout. This novelette and ten other remarkable stories are in the December issue of

THE FOLLIES

A NEW MAGAZINE OF FASCINATING FICTION

On Sale Now



Notable among current musical announcements is that Florence Easton, soprano, Metropolitan Opera Company, now records exclusively for Brunswick. Her initial record (just released) is the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria."

Soprano High "C" Without "Metallic" Suggestion

*A Brunswick Achievement Vouched
For By Highest Musical Authorities*

Musicians, critics, teachers, all will tell you the severe test of a phonograph is in rendering "high notes," especially *soprano*.

Remember this when buying a phonograph, and insist that soprano records be played.

Note, then, how most instruments vibrate, sound "metallic" when the higher notes are reached.

Then hear the same records on The Brunswick.

Hear the full range of "high notes." Soprano High "C" in ringing intensity, without slightest "metallic" intrusion—clear-toned, vibrationless! And you will marvel at difference so great in phonographs.

Exclusive methods the reason

By means of exclusive methods of Reproduction and of Interpretation, Brunswick achieves perfect rendition of the so-called "difficult" tones—the piano, the harp, the human voice. Methods which apply to no other phonographs or records.

The Brunswick Method of Reproduction is exclusively Brunswick. The Brunswick Method of Interpretation, in producing records, has not been successfully imitated.

Hence, buying any phonograph without at least *hearing* The Brunswick is a mistake. And to be without Brunswick Records is to be without what is best in music.

Ask your nearest Brunswick dealer for a demonstration. The Brunswick plays all records, and Brunswick Records can be played on any phonograph. Hear, compare—then judge for yourself.

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BRUNSWICK

PHONOGRAPHS AND RECORDS

Note: New Brunswick Records are on advance sale at all Brunswick dealers on the 16th of each month in the East, and in Denver and the West on the 20th.



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Hear These Brunswick Super-Feature Records

Each month Brunswick releases from three to six Super-Feature records—the best phonographic music of the month. The current release presents three Metropolitan Opera Company's stars, two of whom, Florence Easton and Giuseppe Danise, make their debut as exclusive Brunswick artists on these records. A notable release.

30011—Ave Maria (Bach-Gounod)..... Florence Easton
30010—Di Provenza il mar (Verdi's "Traviata," Act II,
Scene 1)..... Giuseppe Danise

10040—Dreams of Long Ago (Carroll-Carusio)... Mario Chamlee

NOTE—The above records are on sale at all Brunswick dealers in conveniently packed envelopes of three—price \$4.00. Or singly, if desired. Hear them by all means.

Any phonograph can play Brunswick Records



We'll say Gran'pop packs a wallop!

GRAN'POP PROBABLY is.
THE NATIONAL champion.
AT SWAPPING things.
TWO YEARS ago he swapped.
THE OLD blind mare.
FOR A cider mill.
AND THEN of course.
WHEN WE went dry.
CIDER MILLS got valuable.
AND GRAN'POP swapped again.
AND GOT a flivver.
SO I said, "Gran'pop.
SUPPOSE I start you.
WITH THAT old busted.
BABY CARRIAGE back home.
COULDN'T YOU swap it.
AND GET me.
A LIMOUSINE."
A CRAFTY gleam.
CAME INTO Gran'pop's eye.
AS HE said, "No.
BUT I'LL tell ye.

I'LL SWAP a match.
FOR ONE of them.
CIGARETTES OF yourn.
THAT SATISFY."
SO WE swapped.
ONE BROKEN paper match.
FOR ONE perfect cigarette.
AND YOU ought to see.
HOW PLEASED he was.
IT DID me good.
TO BE "done" by Gran'pop.



SWAP some change for some Chesterfields. Your good money never brought better value. Choicest tobaccos (Turkish and Domestic) so blended that you get every last bit of their flavor. And Chesterfields do what no other cigarette can do for you — "They Satisfy"

They Satisfy **Chesterfield**
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