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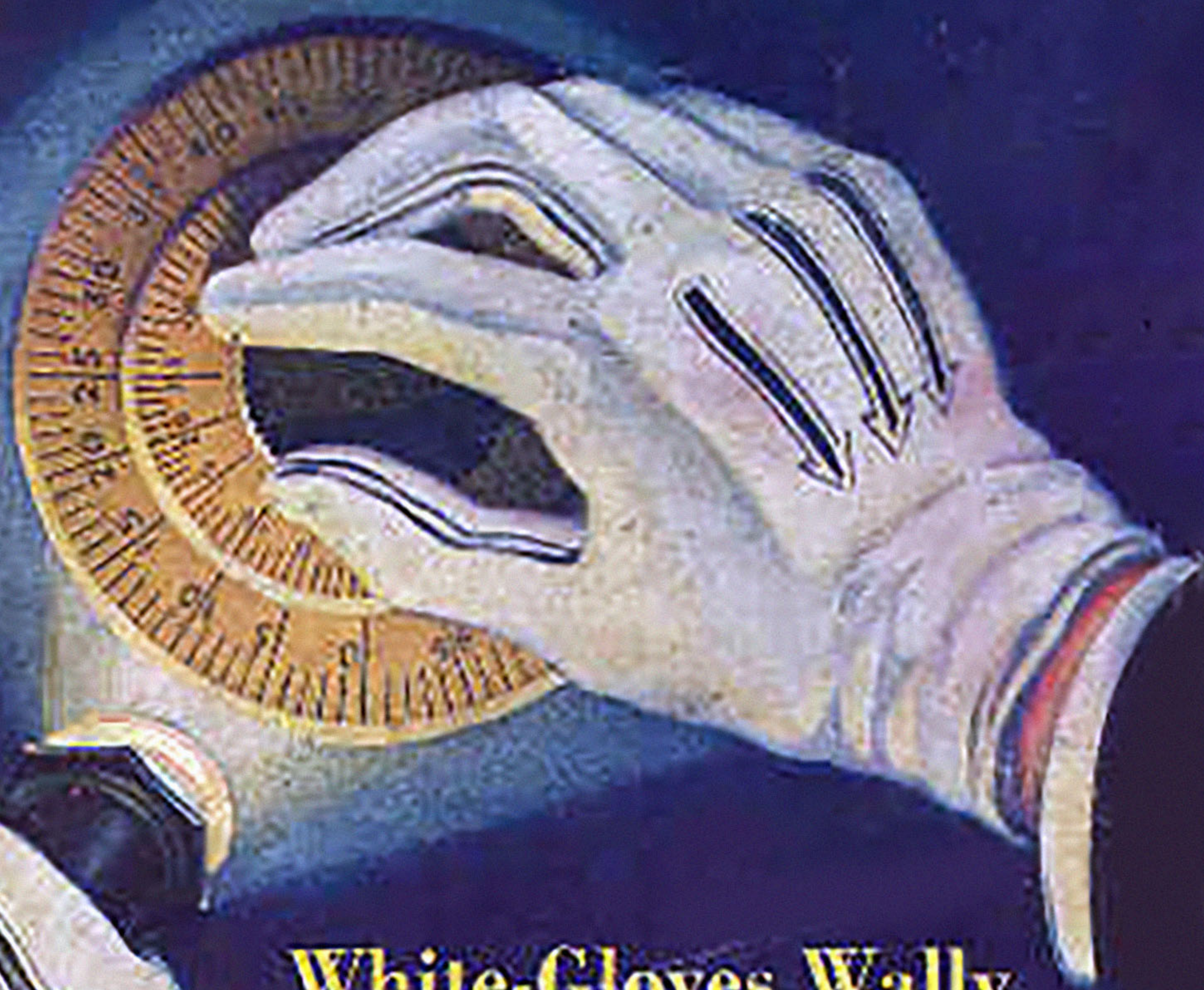
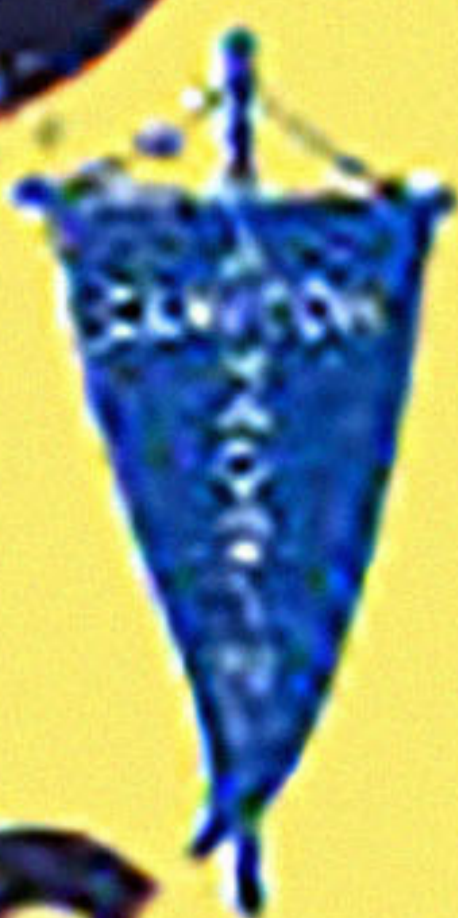
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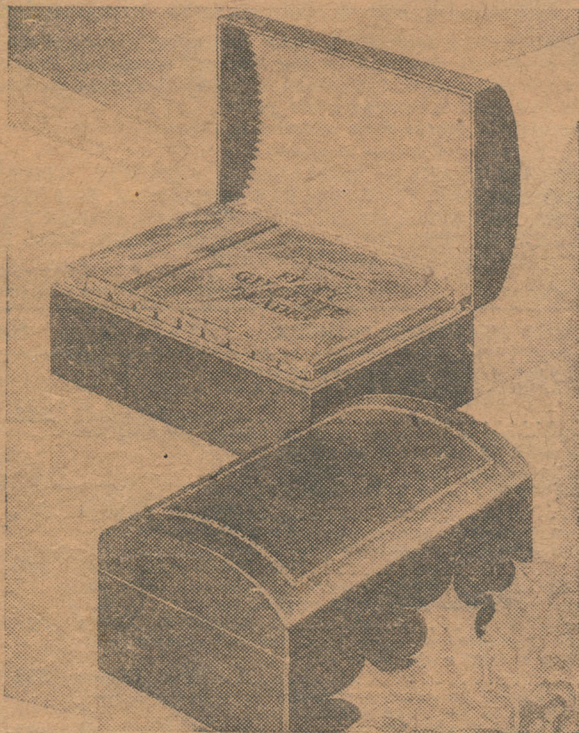
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Vol. XVI

SECOND DECEMBER NUMBER

No. 3

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

- WHITE-GLOVES WALLY.....Oscar Schisgall 328
An unexpected complication causes a gentleman crook to change his mind as he is about to quit the crime racket.

SHORT STORIES

- HOOKED.....Roland Phillips 365
To a glamorous, uncharted wilderness came a man with a fortune—to hide. There came another man—to steal.
- THE SURPRISE PARTY.....Erle Stanley Gardner 380
As soon as the High Collar Kid saw the man enter the telephone booth he prepared himself against an underworld surprise party.
- THE MYSTERY OF THE VAULT.....Arthur B. Reeve 387
"Kennedy, the new vault, theft-proof in every way, has been entered and robbed, without a clue being left!"
- SETUP.....Eric Taylor 398
Nick Givoni, mob leader, decided on extreme measures to obtain the confession in the lawyer's files.
- MR. WINDLE PINCH HITS FROM HAMLET.....C. M. Rockwell 411
Hamlet was worried about being or not being. So was Mr. Windle. But Mr. Windle was worried about his being and his enemies not being.
- EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF.....Allen S. Jacobs 423
It seemed to Shorty that the whole world was after the mysterious package which accident had given him.
- THE MISSING SLEUTH.....Tom Curry 432
Detective Durham followed a dangerous trail when he went after his partner, who had suddenly disappeared.

SERIAL STORIES

- THE SNOW EMPEROR.....Frederick Harper 352
A Four-part Serial—Part One.
- THE SOCIETY OF DEATH.....T. T. Flynn 441
A Four-part Story—Conclusion.

SPECIAL FEATURES

- DRAMAS OF THE PRISON HOUSE.....Charles Kingston 407
The tenth of a series of true stories about English jails.
- THE PUZZLE CHEST.....Helen Asbury 463
A Puzzle Department.
- FOLLOWING CLUES.....465
A Readers' Department.

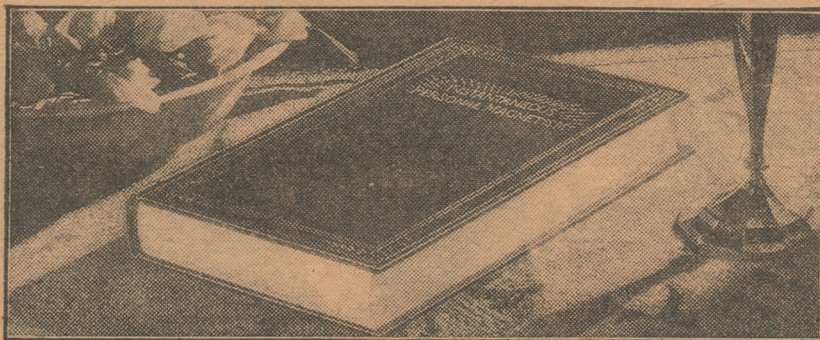
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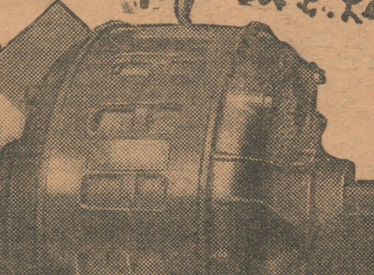
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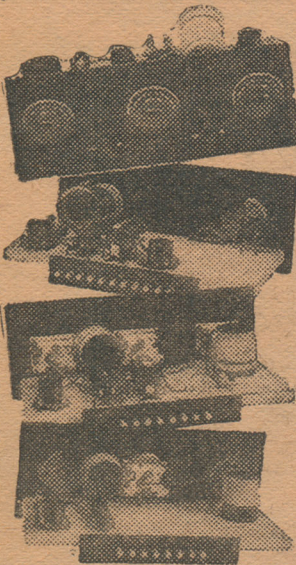
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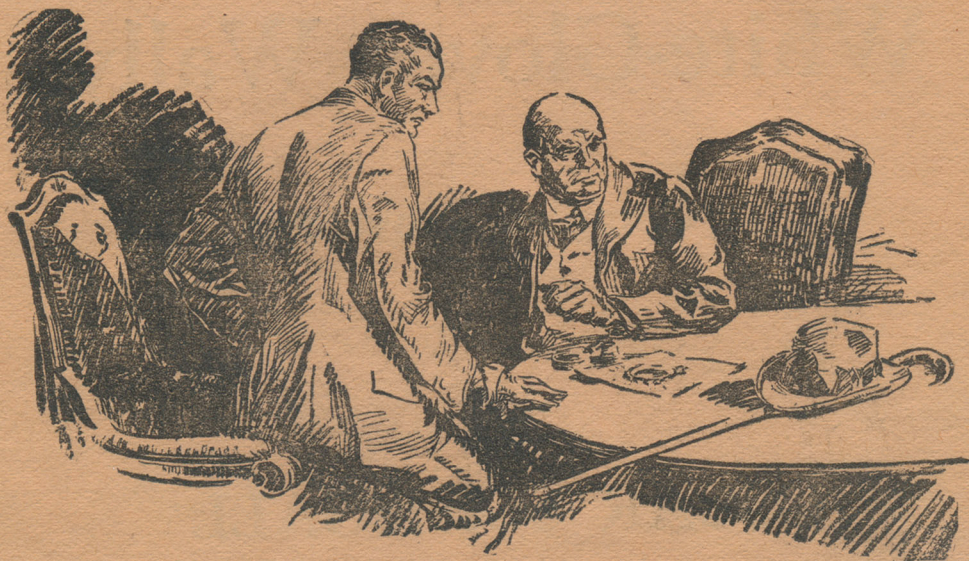


White-Gloves Wally

A Complete Novelette

By
OSCAR SCHISGALL





WHITE-GLOVES WALLY

A Complete

CHAPTER I

The Turning Point

WHEN he departed from the Seville Club, shortly after ten o'clock this evening, Wallace Gayard was quite conscious of the fact that a detective was shadowing him.

He felt no great surprise; neither was he unduly indignant. Of late this sensation of being closely watched had lost much of its novelty. . . . "But," he added to himself, with a grim little smile, "none of its significance!"

He had been aware of the surveillance for weeks—indeed, ever since the inexplicable disappearance of Mrs. Woodfillow's emeralds. Consequently, the recollection of that theft brought him a pang of self-censure; somewhere, obviously, it had lacked the polish, the

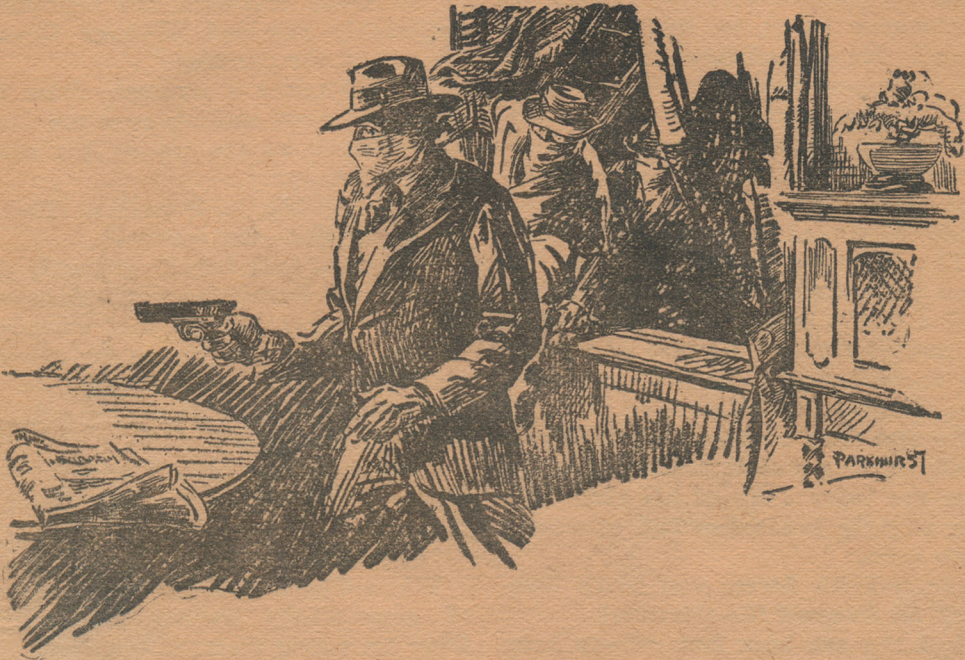
artistic finesse, which he liked to accord his ventures. Else, it would not have caused the police to conceive a possible connection between the vanished jewels and young Mr. Wallace Gayard. True, their ensuing vigilance had at times seemed laughably crude, yet it certainly offered moments of downright annoyance.

As, for example, on this critical evening—

"I shall *have* to drop the fellow!" Wallace firmly decided.

He stopped. Ostensibly it was to glance into an interesting show window. Actually, his eyes darted to the stocky figure, some sixty yards away, that had stepped into a doorway to light a cigarette.

"The same Nemesis who trailed me last night," mused the young man. "Well—!"



BY OSCAR SCHISGALL

Novelette

Abruptly he spun around and crossed Fifth Avenue. With a brisk, determined stride he proceeded in the direction of Broadway. His eyes were lively and luminous, and his gait was that of a man who walks to the rhythm of a song in his mind. He granted no heed to the several people who turned to stare after him.

Curiously, people did turn when Wallace Gayard passed; they wondered, perhaps, whether they had seen him on some stage. For indubitably his was a handsome young figure—erect, vigorous, and admirably poised. He was clad in evening clothes whose impeccable cut hinted of London's West End. He swung a cane of gleaming ebony whose knob and ferrule were bits of ivory. And his white gloves—the inevitable appurtenances which had earned him, among his in-

timates, the nickname, "White-Gloves Wally"—were fresh, unspotted, and unwrinkled.

As he approached the crowds streaming through Broadway, he glanced back over his shoulder.

"Still faithful," he thought with a smile. The detective was persistently trailing; yet it was evident that the danger of losing his man in the crowds was hurrying his steps.

But White-Gloves Wally Gayard did not plunge into those throngs. Instead—

At the corner before him hung the voracious maw of a subway entrance. He went into it and instantly raced down the cement stairs. At their bottom, Wally changed his course. He turned to the right, toward the exit which would lead him back to the street—and started upward at the pre-

cise moment when his shadower lunged down into the entrance.

If the thickset detective became incontinently hasty, he was to be pardoned. He rushed down the steps to the accompaniment of a muttered oath. Of Wallace Gayard, however, he discovered no sign at the bottom; and immediately his anxiety welled to explosive proportions. Had the fellow already descended to the train platform?

The detective wasted no time. He crashed through a turnstile and elicited half a dozen outraged ejaculations as he pushed through a group of women. He knew that he must find Gayard before the man entered a train!

By that time, however, White-Gloves Wally sat in a taxicab, his hands folded over the ivory knob of his cane. He was slightly breathless but otherwise quite calm.

"Fifty-Fifth Street and Sixth Avenue," he directed the chauffeur.

And the cab bore him off—to keep his rendezvous with the most amiable fence in New York.

ERNEST BORODINE, who purchased the various gems that Wally Gayard so mysteriously acquired, wore his affability as a cloak to enfold his shrewdness. On this night, after he had examined the bracelet his visitor produced, he challenged incredulously,

"How much?"

"Five thousand dollars."

The corpulent fence leaned back in his chair and laughed; laughed in a genial, tolerant, somehow paternal manner that set his whole gelatinous body to quivering.

"Absurd!" he mocked. "Why, my dear boy, this bracelet isn't worth—"

"It is worth," insisted Wally, "twenty thousand dollars. That, you know, is what Mr. Cumberly paid for it."

"So the morning papers reported," Borodine admitted. "But I couldn't realize half that amount. Five thou— Why, Wally, that's ridiculous. Any-

thing more than two thousand is out of the question."

"Anything less than five thousand," implacably rejoined Wallace Gayard "is out of the question."

He had taken a cigarette from his case; and now, smiling over the flame that danced on the tip of his silver briquet, he urged.

"Let's not haggle, Borodine. This is to be our last—transaction."

"Oh, now, look here!" Instantly the stout fence was serious and placating. "I don't want you to feel offended, Wally. There's no reason for our not continuing to do business together. If you think that in this case my price is not high enough—"

"You miss my point," quietly said Wally. "What I mean is—I'm through!"

"Through—?"

White-Gloves Wally blew a stream of gray smoke toward the ceiling. Over his young features flowed an odd expression—wistful, thoughtful, introspective.

"Yes," he said softly. "Yes, Borodine. From now on I intend to follow the straight little path of honest endeavor. To-night the crook dies. This is—my turning point."

At the beginning Ernest Borodine could not believe it. He sat bewildered—a fat, bald, rosy mass of astonishment. But of a sudden he frowned in suspicion.

"Who," he demanded, "is the lady?"

"There is no lady," said Wally. "This is self-reformation."

"But—why?"

"Because life has become too uncertain. It would be folly to continue while the police so constantly watch me." He waved to the bracelet. "Last night, when I got that, I almost lost my freedom—in fact, I slipped out of the window just as the police entered the door."

Borodine had half risen; now he slowly lowered his limp bulk.

"You mean," he muttered, "that you're under suspicion?"

"Evidently. And, under the circumstances, this is the wisest moment of my life in which to—change. I've been considering it for some time, anyway. You see, Borodine, I've accumulated enough to live quite comfortably for a long time." White-Gloves Wally stared down at the tip of his cigarette and added, "Besides, there's Nicky Silotta. He's been annoying me."

The mention of Silotta caused Borodine to stir uneasily. In truth, the name usually brought vexation even to the police. For Nicky Silotta, who had amassed one of the outstanding bootleg fortunes, had recently turned his Midas touch upon other enterprises. He had become the partner of a hundred successful criminals, sharing in their profits and yet, oddly, never subject to their misfortunes. Some whispered that his money kept him out of jail; others declared that a dozen shrewd lawyers devoted their talents to holding his activities just beyond the reach of the Courts. Whatever the reasons might have been, the man resided in peace and luxury on his newly purchased Long Island estate; and his wife and daughter were hopefully knocking at Society's door.

"I know," said Borodine, "that Silotta wants you to work for him. He has asked me to persuade you—"

"How, by the way," Wally interposed, "did he learn of the connection between us?" He spoke in mild curiosity, with no hint of accusation; and after the words, he puffed his cigarette.

The fence shrugged. "One of his men saw you come in here after the Woodfillow affair," he explained. "Silotta merely put two and two together. Since then he has asked me four times to urge you—"

"Don't attempt it," Wally advised. "I've always worked alone quite happily. It's much more pleasant than joining a gang of cutthroats. . . . And since I don't intend to work at all after to-night, Silotta may as well spare his efforts."

Ernest Borodine ominously shook

his round head. His frown deepened.

"You know, Wally," he warned, "Nicky Silotta has strange ways to get what he wants. Just now he wants you. If you don't join him, he—well, he'll find some means of persuading you."

"Possibly," agreed the young man as he leaned forward to crush his cigarette in a tray. "And that is merely another reason for my dropping the crooked life at this particular time. I've had enough of it. I'm through!"

So decisive was his tone that Ernest Borodine recognized the futility of debate. The fat man pondered; studied the attractive young countenance across the table; absently drummed his fingers on his knees. The room was quiet, in repose—offering no hint of the drama that was soon to crash upon it.

Presently the fence murmured, "Maybe you're right, Wally. Maybe you're right. . . . You know, my boy, you've always been a puzzle to me. I—I've never quite been able to understand why a fellow like you, with your personality and brains, should—ah—"

"Steal?" volunteered White-Gloves Wally.

"Yes."

The young man's brows arched cryptically.

"I stole," he explained, "because my type of theft never conflicted with the dictates of conscience and—well, decency."

Borodine chuckled. "You mean your robberies were invariably in good taste?"

"Exactly. I wonder if you realize that I never stole from anyone who would be affected by his loss."

"Well, now," laughed the fence, "that doesn't justify your guilt, does it?"

"No. It merely justifies my selection of victims," said White-Gloves Wally, wholly in earnest. "Consider, Borodine: There was Mrs. Woodfillow, whose emeralds I brought you. Every year she drops at least a hundred

thousand dollars at the Casino at Cannes, and the loss doesn't bother her. To her the theft of the emeralds was a mere bagatelle. But to me the theft meant—"

"Fourteen thousand dollars," drily put in Borodine.

"Or take any of the others as examples. Cumberly, let us say. His racing stables and bets cost him enough to ruin most men. Do you think the fact that I stole this bracelet from his home will affect him? Why, the man spends more than five times its worth in maintaining the actress for whom it was intended!"

Ernest Borodine drew a long breath that emerged again as a chuckle.

"Well," he said, "as long as you vindicate these things to yourself, I hardly suppose I need dispute your arguments. . . . But returning to the price for this bracelet: Let me see . . . I'll give you—"

And that was as far as the fence could proceed.

For then it was that the amazing thing happened—the shock that left them both stunned.

A sudden, momentary flash of greenish light exploded in the room. At the same instant a sound like the crack of a gun burst from the general direction of the window.

His heart bounding, Wally whirled around to stare—and what he saw brought him to his feet with a muffled gasp of astonishment.

Into the window jutted *three steady revolvers!* . . .

In the darkness beyond the weapons, three men loomed on the fire-escape. Wally's first dread that the police had trapped him was swept away by the realization that these men were masked!

They were crouching, entering the room like so many spectral apparitions materializing out of the night. And the first to touch the floor whispered hoarsely:

"Stand still, you two! Keep your mouths shut!"

CHAPTER II

A Telephone Summons

FOR a second Wallace Gayard stood utterly dazed.

Then the normally swift functioning of his mind reasserted itself, broke through the bonds of stupefaction. He saw clearly and thought clearly. It was obvious that these three men, with handkerchiefs bound about their faces, were not of the police. What, then, could they want? The Cumberly bracelet?

Wally shot an oblique glance at the table. The jewelled circlet was gone. . . . He understood that Ernest Borodine must have seized it in rising; and a glimpse of the man's fleshy, tightly clenched hand convinced him of this.

"Up with your arms!" snapped the low voice behind the nearest mask. "Back through that door—both of you!"

His weapon was jerked to indicate Borodine's bedroom. And the fence himself, very pale and unsteady, immediately moved toward it. Possibly his obedience was the more prompt because he remembered that he had an automatic of his own in that bedroom. . . .

"I told you," the masked figure rasped at Wally, "to get in there!"

And, for emphasis, an ugly muzzle jabbed the young man's chest. Two narrow eyes blazed at him from above the handkerchief.

White-Gloves Wally slowly stepped backward. He was unarmed; it was futile to oppose these men. Yet his eyes studied them keenly, struggling to find something familiar in their appearances, in their postures. All three were quite burly, their bodies eloquent of muscle. They were well dressed in the latest fashion of Broadway, with lapels too stiffly pressed and trousers slightly too voluminous. Their hats were of felt, with brims tugged low. Wally decided they represented the upper "racketeer" class. . . . America's most opulent development among criminals.

He moved back toward the door of Borodine's bedchamber and finally passed through it. The fence was already in the room. And the three revolvers still menaced both of them through the open door.

One of the masked men turned his head to the others.

"Get busy!" he ordered. "I'll cover 'em!"

Apparently it was his intention to enter the bedroom, also, there to guard its prisoners. But while the man spoke, Wally Gayard saw something that sent an electric thrill of inspiration through him.

A key protruded from Borodine's door. . . .

What he did was impulsive—the act of one accustomed to obeying his wits. His foot suddenly lunged out with furious force. He kicked the door, and it flew around to close with a crash!

One of the masked men gasped and leaped at it. His bulk smashed violently against its panels. But the impact occurred just after Wally had turned the key . . . and the door held despite its tremblings.

There were no shots.

Wally understood, and his eyes glowed. These men did not *dare* shoot! They could not risk rousing the house!

He whirled around to the dumb-struck Borodine. "Where," he whispered excitedly, "is your gun?"

"In—in there!" The fence pointed a shaking finger at the top drawer of his bureau. "What the devil do they want? Who are they?"

White-Gloves Wally had already sprung to the drawer. The bureau stood within a foot of the window, now open behind its curtains. He darted one rapid glance through it—and saw that the fire-escape joined it to the window by which the men had entered. With a revolver he might—

He yanked the drawer open, delved into its contents. Borodine started to his assistance—at the precise instant when an automatic and an arm in-

truded between the window curtains!

The fence cried out a shrill warning, frantic and horrified. But he was too late. . . .

The muzzle of that weapon fell through a vicious curve. As Wally looked up from the drawer, the weapon thudded against the side of his head!

He scarcely groaned. He merely turned a little, his eyes fiercely shut in pain. Desperately he tried to seize the bureau for support. Failing, he staggered against Borodine. The fence clumsily attempted to hold him, but his own muscles were paralyzed by the sight of the automatic pointing death directly at his head.

Wally slumped down weakly to fall in an unconscious huddle on the carpet.

And the breathless voice of the masked man who entered the window rasped at Ernest Borodine:

"You boys are pretty clever, ain't you? One more stunt like that, and I'll bump you into hell!"

When Wallace Gayard regained his senses, he found himself alone with his corpulent friend, the fence. He lay on Borodine's bed, quite limply, and a cold, wet towel encircled his head.

For a while White-Gloves Wally made no effort even to think. He lay still, suffering excruciating pangs in his temples. His whole head seemed to be an anvil on which a heavy hammer beat relentlessly. His evening clothes were sadly crumpled, and his glossy dark hair lay in hopeless dishevelment.

"Feeling better?" Borodine anxiously whispered.

Wally answered with an inconvincingly groaned reassurance. He moved a little, and his head seemed to split in two. But as the minutes passed, his strength returned; the punitive pounding in his temples began to abate. He waited hopefully. Yet it was fully twenty minutes before he was able to sit up without becoming too dizzy; before he could intelligently question the distressed Borodine.

"Did they," he asked, "get the bracelet?"

"No!"

"Your—money?"

"No. They took—nothing!"

Wally's eyes widened in surprise. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, his bruised head turbaned with the wet towel. But this sudden mystery of the three masked men served quickly to clear his startled brain.

"I can't understand it," Borodine declared. "I've searched the house, and not a thing is missing."

"But that's impossible!" Wally's strengthening voice blurted. "They must have had a reason—"

"A reason I've been trying to find for the past half hour—and can't."

White-Gloves Wally regarded the stout man in astonishment.

"How long were they here?" he asked.

"No more than five minutes."

"And didn't they speak to you? Didn't they ask—"

"No. I stood in this room, covered by the revolver of the man who hit you. After a few minutes somebody in the next room called, 'All right! Let's go!' Then they left—by way of the fire-escape. My automatic, incidentally, went with them."

A queer, grim smile hardened Borodine's lips.

"If I were the ordinary citizen," he added, "I suppose I should notify the police. Unfortunately, in my business I can't afford to attract official attention. Especially—" He dropped his massive figure into an easy chair. "—when I have a suspected man in my apartment."

Somehow these words carried a new significance to White-Gloves Wally. He eyed the fence with sudden thoughtfulness. Could it be that the three men had taken something of whose disappearance Borodine was fully aware—something concerning which he preferred to have Wally know nothing? . . . Possibly. And yet—

Borodine must have divined his speculations; his smile returned drily.

"No," he said, "I am not trying to deceive you. If I had wished to do that, I could have told you they had taken your bracelet."

"I appreciate that," quietly said Wallace Gayard. "You do play fair, Borodine—"

Still, when he started home, a half hour later, White-Gloves Wally was profoundly puzzled. He sat in a corner of his cab, and his gloved hands were folded as usual over the ivory knob of his cane. His head continued to throb painfully, and an ugly welt had risen an inch above his left ear, so that he was constrained to wear his hat at a rakish angle.

In other aspects, however, he was quite his former self—erect, well groomed, and attractive. His pocket held the four thousand dollars for which he had finally sold the Cumberly bracelet to Ernest Borodine.

But his thoughts found little cheer in the sale.

Rather, they swung again and again to the three masked men. Why had they come? What had they wanted? . . . With a start, he remembered the flash of light and the soft explosion which had heralded their appearance on the fire-escape.

But the grotesque idea the memory evoked was abruptly interrupted. The cab stopped, and White-Gloves Wally stepped to the sidewalk in front of his home.

He could not suppress a little smile as he discerned the thickset figure that strode impatiently across the street, as if it had a destination. That anxious detective, he reflected, must be infinitely relieved to see his man reappear. . . .

He went upstairs and ten minutes later lay in bed, gazing thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"My turning point!" he whispered to himself.

Yes, the Cumberly bracelet represented his final criminal endeavor. On

that point his determination was irrevocable. For two years he had been a successful and unsuspected adventurer in polite society. Gallantry, charm, an infectuous smile, a ready good humor—these had been the implements of his trade; these and an uncanny skill in opening safes. . . .

That he had enjoyed the zest of those two years, he did not deny. They had been constantly thrilling. They had exercised all the ingenuity of which he was possessed. A glorious adventure! He had played with danger, laughed at it, defeated it. But now—

"*La comedia e finita!*" he murmured. "My turning point. . . ."

And he fell asleep.

It was scarcely eight o'clock when the trilling of the telephone beside his bed roused Wally Gayard. With a jerk he sat up, startled. The dull ache in his head swiftly recalled the occurrences of the previous night, and he blinked a little as he raised the instrument to his ear.

"Hello?"

"Gayard?" The voice in the receiver was heavy and afflicted with a familiar rasp. Now it held unusual buoyancy, however. "Good morning! Nicholas Silotta speaking."

White-Gloves Wally swung out of bed, his brows suddenly contracted.

"Yes?"

"I'm at my home in Roslyn Gardens," said Silotta. "I want you to run over here this morning."

"I'm sorry," firmly answered Wally. "I'm not—"

"No need being sorry, Gayard. I've got a proposition for you. I think you'd better come."

Something insinuating in Silotta's voice—a mockery and a threat and a trace of unctuousness—brought a quick frown to Wally's features.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Oh, now, you don't expect me to go into details over the phone, do you, Gayard? I'm just advising you to come, see? Say, eleven o'clock."

"No," decided Wally. "I guess not.

I've often told you I'm not interested in—"

"Hold on, hold on!" gently interrupted Silotta. "I'm afraid we don't understand each other, Gayard. You're a pretty smart young man. You haven't forgotten last night, have you?"

Wally stiffened. He sat silent, his mind racing. Then, very quietly, he muttered,

"Oh—I see. . . . You were behind that, were you?"

"Certainly," laughed Nicky Silotta. "That's why I'm advising you to come and talk things over. You'll be here by eleven?"

And White-Gloves Wally realized that some nebulous threat was being held over him. Precisely what it might be, he could not determine. Yet he knew Silotta well enough to understand the man was not accustomed to bluff his way to success.

"Shall I expect you, then?" the voice in the wire asked.

"Yes," softly replied Wally, "expect me. . . ."

CHAPTER III

Blackmail de Luxe

ELEVEN o'clock—and Nicky Silotta smiled shrewdly across his mahogany desk at his flawlessly attired visitor.

He was not an unusually big man; yet the hard, bulging muscles of his face and shoulders lent him the illusion of bulk, of immensity. His face was square, forceful, and habitually grim-lipped. It was a countenance that might have compelled respect, had it not been for the small, cunning eyes—eyes that lurked shiftily over purplish pouches, like the eyes of a porker. The little hair that remained on his flat head was a mixture of red and gray, and dangled in a curious manner over his right eyebrow.

He was not alone for this interview. Three men stood behind him, their right hands sunk in their jacket pockets. They were heavily built, and it

seemed to White-Gloves Wally that he vaguely recognized them despite the absence of masks.

He sat quietly, his young figure fastidiously groomed in grey. His legs were comfortably crossed, and a new felt hat lay in his lap. As he regarded Silotta, his fingers toyed with his gloves, idly. . . . But this outward composure was hardly in accord with his inner misgivings.

"That's an ugly looking lump for so handsome a head," chuckled the man at the desk. "Sorry my boys had to do it, Gayard. They had orders not to start rough stuff. But they tell me it was your own fault. You tried to grab Borodine's gat."

"I see," said Wally. "According to your libretto, I was supposed to become paralyzed as soon as your boys appeared."

"Not paralyzed, just sensible."

White-Gloves Wally nodded and smiled drily. "Suppose," he suggested, "we get down to business."

"Sure," readily agreed Silotta. He reached to a humidor for a cigar. "Our business is simple enough. In fact, it's the old story. I want you to work for me."

"That's out," firmly said Wally.

"Well, I don't know. . . ." As he lit the cigar, Nicky Silotta smiled obliquely at one of his assistants. Then, staring up into a billow of smoke with mock gravity, he added, "No use your jumping to quick conclusions, Gayard. You'll change 'em in a minute, anyhow—even that peculiar idea you've got about hitting the straight and narrow path."

"So your boys sat on the fire-escape and listened to me, did they?"

"Uh-huh. . . . They tell me they had a good laugh."

Wally's sangfroid matched his host's. He glanced up at the three grinning faces beyond Silotta's massive shoulders. And then, his brows raised cryptically, he drew out his cigarette case.

"What's your game, Silotta?"

Instead of replying, the thickset man

delted into a drawer of his desk, while his lips sucked the cigar and belched rhythmic, audible puffs of smoke. He closed one eye as if it smarted and tossed something toward Wally.

"Have a look at this," he invited.

White-Gloves Wally looked—and a chill shot through him.

The thing was a small picture. On it he saw himself as he had been the previous evening—immaculately dressed, seated at a table with the plump Ernest Borodine. And between them, quite glaringly recognizable, lay —*the Cumberly bracelet!*

His thoughts darted to the flare and the low explosion which had preceded the appearance of the men on the fire-escape. Narrowly he raised his eyes to encounter Silotta's.

"So," he said quietly, "that was a flashlight."

"Uh-huh. My boys used a pocket camera. Got you and the fence from the window. Pretty neat little gift for—well, say the police, eh? Especially with that bracelet on the table."

"Clever," said Wally in a voice somewhat too calm. Inwardly he was tingling, and his eyes flamed. A persistent thudding filled his whole being. But he fought to keep his tones casual. "The point is, Silotta, that even juries have begun to doubt photographs. They're so easily faked."

"That's right," laughed the man in that singular rasping way of his. "Fact is, Gayard, I once had a picture of myself eating dinner with the Czar of Russia. Friend of mine faked it. And I guess you're right enough when you say a jury may not want to convict on picture evidence these days. . . . That's why I dealt myself an ace in the hole."

"I see. You've planned this blackmail very carefully, haven't you?"

"Very," said Silotta. He turned to one of the three men. "Better bring it in, Steve," he added.

Waiting in silence, White-Gloves Wally tried to keep himself calm; tried desperately. But it was sheer agony to confront the placid, confident Silotta

whose muscular countenance was now wreathed in smoke. The man had obviously trapped him—at the time when he had determined to change his mode of life!

The fellow addressed as Steve returned presently; and he bore a rather heavy wooden box which resembled nothing more than an old fashioned phonograph. This he placed on Silotta's desk; and from its side, Wally noticed, hung a tube which forked to terminate in ear-phones, not unlike a stethoscope.

"You might put those things to your ears," said Nicky Silotta, pleasantly. "Only I guess I'd better advise you not to try getting at the contents of this box. These boys, I suppose you've noticed, are armed."

"I have noticed it," said Wally drily.

When he had adjusted the ear-phones, Silotta moved a little switch at the side of the box. Instantly voices flowed through the tube—unmistakable voices that, despite his efforts for composure, drained the color from White-Gloves Wally's cheeks.

What he heard was:

"I stole because my type of theft never conflicted with the dictates of conscience and—well, decency."

"You mean your robberies were invariably in good taste?"

"Exactly. I wonder if you realize I never stole from anyone who would be affected by his loss."

Wally snatched the tube from his ears. As he turned toward the complacent Silotta, his whole countenance was burning. For he had heard enough to comprehend the frightful truth.

A dictograph had been used to record his interview with Borodine!

"Remarkably clear, isn't it?" said Nicky Silotta.

"I—I suppose I ought to feel flattered," answered Wally, somewhat stiffly. "You've gone to unusual lengths to—trap me."

Clues 2

"Oh, it wasn't particularly difficult," the thickest man assured him, with a shrug. "I had the idea for months. When I read in yesterday's papers that the Cumberly bracelet had vanished at a party at which Mr. Wallace Gayard was one of the guests, I knew you'd be around to see Borodine pretty soon. So I had my boys break into his flat while he went out to dinner last night. They planted the little microphone behind his radiator. We used a Dictophone attachment to record the conversation, and Borodine's own radio-antenna wire carried your words to our machine on the roof. Then the boys went down the fire-escape for the flashlight. And they removed the microphone, by the way, while they kept you two in Borodine's bedroom. . . . A little risky, of course, but worth the results. As a clever man, Gayard, you ought to appreciate it."

Wally did not reply. His eyes fell to the box. Three revolvers, he knew, were prepared to repulse any attempt to destroy the disc it contained.

"I turned the thing on at random," said Silotta. "It's got your whole conversation with Borodine—enough to send you both to jail."

Unexpectedly a grin spread over his muscular face; he tapped ashes into a tray and added,

"Naturally, we've scratched out your unkind references to myself—which, incidentally, gave me a good chuckle. And you understand that if you force me to send this to the police, I'll do it anonymously. All you'll say won't be able to prove it came from me—or why. So you see, Gayard, where we stand, don't you?"

Yes, White-Gloves Wally saw—saw that he stood on the brink of arrest. If this disc and the photograph went to the authorities, his new reformation would be affected behind grim prison bars. . . .

"High grade blackmail," he snapped. "Well—what are the terms?"

"I've already told you. I want you to work for me."

"Silotta, I'm going straight! I've committed my last crime—and I mean it!"

"That," the stocky man answered contemptuously, "is a lot of bunk." Suddenly, then, he bent forward and snatched the cigar from his lips. His eyes narrowed in their pouches, in that cunning way of his. "Gayard," he rasped, "I've been trying to get you for a long time! You're a good man—brainy and fast, and you've got plenty of nerve. I like the way you work. That's why I want you with me!"

"Thanks for the compliment," drily said Wally, "but—"

"All I want you to pull for me," Silotta rushed on, "is one job! Understand? *One job!* . . ." His voice dropped to a low, heavy pitch. With almost brutal directness he said, "Pull it for me, and I'll give you the disc and the photographic plate. Leave it, and I'll send 'em to the cops. . . . There you are, Gayard. That's my offer, and it's straight!"

"What," asked White-Gloves Wally, "is the job?"

"One your position will help you to do. That's why I need you in on it. I want—the *Thatcher diamonds!*"

Wally sat very still, peering at Nicky Silotta. His features indicated nothing of his emotions or thoughts.

The Thatcher diamonds. . . . He knew them well; had seen them a dozen times; had even, in the old days, contemplated their acquisition. But their very size had caused him to hesitate, for it would have been difficult to dispose of such stones even to Borodine. Unless they were cut—thus splitting their value—any traffic in them would have been extremely dangerous, for they were unique and easily identifiable. They comprised a score of beautifully matched gems out of which Anderson Thatcher had fashioned a pendant, a bracelet, and a brooch for his wife—the whole collection's worth reputed to exceed \$500,000.

And for this half a million dollars Nicky Silotta was angling. . . .

That he had been characteristically thorough in his preparations for the coup was indicated by his ensuing words:

"It ought to be an easy take for you, Gayard. I understand you're invited to that Thatcher week-end party at their Manhasset place."

"Well?"

"It's ten to one Mrs. Thatcher'll wear the jewels. Your job will be to get them—and bring them here!"

Wally's lips twisted in a slightly bitter smile.

"You've certainly gone into every aspect of this, haven't you, Silotta?" he murmured. "You know even Mrs. Thatcher's guest list. . . . A servant bribed, I suppose?"

"That's my business, Gayard, not yours. What do you say to the proposition? Is it a deal?"

White-Gloves Wally rose. He began drawing on his gloves, and his smile wandered easily from face to face. Despite the bruise on his head, he was undeniably attractive. And now there was no hint of strain in his features. He had thought rapidly—and decided.

"Well?" demanded Nicky Silotta. "What do you say?"

"The proposition," said Wally, "is accepted."

CHAPTER IV

The Net

ON Saturday morning, the day on which the Thatcher week-end gathering was to begin, Detective Sergeant Timothy Blaine restlessly paced the floor of a small office at Police Headquarters. Lean, shrewd, aggressive, and as highly tensed as a fighting cock, Blaine was the man who had first focussed a suspicious eye on young Mr. Wallace Gayard.

He had studied Wally, and it was at his instigation that a shadow had been affixed to the young man's heels. Now, to the lieutenant who frowned at him across a desk, Blaine snapped:

"Gayard is going to the Thatcher affair. Maybe he'll try something, maybe he won't. But personally—I hope he does!"

"You're still confident he's a crook, eh?" the lieutenant muttered.

"Confident? I'd bet a year's salary on it! Why, look here." Blaine halted and faced the desk argumentatively. "The man has no visible source of income—though he does claim to dabble in stocks. No income you can put your finger on, and yet he lives in an apartment for which he pays sky-high rent. He has a valet. He runs a Isotta Fraschini roadster. He travels in top-notch circles. Plays golf with bankers and tennis with their daughters. Belongs to the Seville Club. Spends more on clothes in a month than you and I in a year. . . . What's the answer? Especially when you remember that a number of unexplained jewel thefts have occurred at functions he's attended?"

The lieutenant shrugged, stared thoughtfully at a pencil.

"All that," he said softly, "isn't enough to bring him before a jury."

"No," agreed Blaine, grimly, "but no crook can go on and on infinitely without making a slip sooner or later. And when Gayard does slip—"

"You'll be there to catch him?" laughed the lieutenant.

But Detective Sergeant Blaine was too deeply in earnest to smile. He shook his head curtly.

"I'm watching him," he said. And that was all that escaped his tight lips.

"Will you be at the Thatcher affair?"

"No. Gayard knows me by this time. I'm putting Sheppard there."

"I suppose it's all arranged?"

"Certainly," said Blaine. "Sheppard's in the house as a butler. I've given him orders to keep his eye on Gayard from the moment the man arrives. . . . And I've got a hunch that something's about to break! Gayard went to see Nicky Silotta this week—and somewhere there's a reason!"

"Well," sighed the lieutenant as he

picked up a paper. "I wish you luck, Blaine. It's high time we got somewhere in this mess."

The recollection of the theft of the Cumberly bracelet a few days ago caused him ominously to shake his head. Of this crime, however, he said nothing. Despite it, he placed utter confidence in Detective Sergeant Timothy Blaine. He knew his subordinate to be a shrewd and capable executive who, though he worked slowly, almost invariably achieved his purpose. And now his purpose was to trap Wallace Gayard.

In stationing Detective Sheppard in the Thatcher home as a butler, Blaine had laid a closely meshed net into which that personable young man might easily step.

And, indeed, White-Gloves Wally was at that very moment riding directly into the net. . . .

Preoccupied, he sat at the wheel of his blue roadster as it hummed its way along Long Island's Northern Boulevard. He drove mechanically, his gloved hands functioning of their own accord; and his narrowed eyes were fixed on something far beyond the road—on the Thatcher diamonds.

Somehow this forced theft of the gems loomed before him in an ugly, unenticing light. He had no desire to steal the jewels—or anything else, for that matter. The prospect completely lacked the thrilling glamour of other adventures.

But he had no alternative. Nicky Silotta's clever blackmail cracked over his head like a compelling whip.

With a grim little smile White-Gloves Wally remembered his conversation the previous evening with his corpulent friend, Ernest Borodine. Quite frankly he had confided his singular position to that sympathetic, though rather apprehensive, man. For Borodine himself, after all, was in great danger because of Nick Silotta's strategy. He realized that if ever the disc and the photograph reached the

authorities, he would assuredly find himself before a stern Court.

Curiously, however, he manifested implicit faith in Wally's ability to carry out his agreement with Silotta. In truth, the fence assumed an almost philosophical attitude toward the entire predicament and even ventured to moralize.

"You see," he had pointed out, "it's not so easy for a man to go straight—even when he wants to." He sighed. "I discovered that long ago."

"I haven't changed my mind," Wally assured him, "about turning the new leaf."

"No? Well, my boy, it strikes me that the theft of the Thatcher diamonds is a peculiar manner in which to start on the straight road."

"Not," answered the young man, "in the way I intend to steal them."

"Eh?"

But White-Gloves Wally had enigmatically smiled without adding further information. Later, however, he admitted that he had made full preparations for the theft.

"What sort of preparations?" the puzzled Borodine inquired.

"For one thing, I've asked Anderson Thatcher if he'd like to run up to Saratoga with me Monday. The races are on, you know."

"The races?" Borodine stared, somewhat bewildered. "What on earth have the Saratoga races to do with the Thatcher diamonds?"

"Very little," Wally confessed with a smile. "It's merely a device to show me where in his house Thatcher keeps his safe."

"I don't understand you at all!" Borodine had asserted.

But White-Gloves Wally had planned his preparatory steps quite carefully.

Now, as he drove toward the Thatcher estate at Manhasset, his wallet contained \$10,000 in cash . . . a sum he had drawn from his bank this morning. And though he had no intention of spending it, he believed that it might prove of inestimable service to

him in acquiring the famous Thatcher jewels. . . .

His blue Isotta Fraschini was the first guest car to swing into the iron gates of the Thatcher grounds. His eyes sparkled oddly as he surveyed the white monument which was the banker's home—a French chateau that might have lent glory even to the Loire.

Anderson Thatcher—tall, slightly stooped, and grey, with an aquiline face and piercing green eyes—met him on the veranda with an enthusiastic welcome.

That was at noon.

Half an hour later White-Gloves Wally launched his campaign for his host's diamonds.

"I've brought quite a bit of cash with me," he explained, rather hesitantly. They were alone in the library, where a butler had just served them cocktails, and Wally's hand rose to his pocket. "I wonder," he asked, "if you'd mind putting it somewhere until Monday? I don't like to have it lying about my room, and it's making my pocket bulge most uncomfortably."

Thatcher laughed, for the very thought of a grotesquely bulky pocket in the fastidious attire of young Gayard seemed somehow improper.

"Of course," he chuckled, setting down his glass. "Let me have it. I'll drop it into the safe."

Wally produced his wallet and extracted from it the \$10,000—most of it in denominations of \$100 bills. He smiled merrily as he saw Thatcher's astonished stare.

"I'm going straight on to Saratoga," he explained. "And I know at least five horses that I trust to the extent of two thousand each."

"Well!" declared his host. "If you wired the bookmakers about this, they'd welcome you with a banquet. I think I see before me a young man on the brink of sad disillusionment."

Nevertheless Anderson Thatcher took the money and started toward an adjoining chamber. Idly lighting a cigarette, Wally accompanied him.

They chatted; they jested. And meanwhile the banker raised the corner of a hanging tapestry to reveal the dial of a wall safe. . . .

Unfortunately Wally could not stand near enough to the man to discern the combination. This, however, caused him no great anxiety, for it was, after all, to skill in opening such safes that he owed his amazing success.

He stood at a window, smoking and talking pleasantly while Thatcher deposited his money. In truth, he scarcely looked at the banker. He was staring outside, commenting on the poplars that lined a walk.

Yet inwardly White-Gloves Wally was wholly content.

He had discovered the whereabouts of the safe with a ruse that could staunchly endure all investigation. To lend it a convincing veneer, he even intended to proceed to the Saratoga races on Monday.

But Wally did not realize that a narrow-eyed butler named Sheppard had paused at the door to dart a quick frown at him and at the safe just before moving on. . . .

LA TE in the afternoon Wally Gayard completed his second preparatory step:

He was happy in the possession of a valet whose discretion and loyalty were beyond reproach—a valet whom Detective Sergeant Blaine had that morning mentioned to his chief. Wally had found Armand Descartes in a little café in Tours, where the fellow had resignedly been waiting on tables while cherishing a hopeless ambition to go to America. With the pleasant comradeship of French waiters, Armand had one day disclosed his wistful desire. And White-Gloves Wally, rather liking the little man, had offered him the amazing position which had miraculously crystallized a dream.

Armand came to America as Monsieur Gayard's valet.

After four years in this position, he no longer entertained any wish to do

anything else. For he was utterly content, even delighted. He served Wally with a loyalty that did not question; nor was it ever shaken by any suspicions the small Frenchman might have harbored.

At five o'clock this afternoon Armand Descartes passed the iron fence of the Thatcher estate—*on a bicycle!*

The sixteen miles of pedalling from New York had not left him unusually weary; for Armand—preserving the habits of old France—rode his bicycle for a few hours every Sunday, in stoic defiance of the automobile horns that roared their angry impatience at him.

But he was vastly perplexed. Why should his employer desire his bicycle in this strange place? What incomprehensibly American whim could have prompted such a request? . . .

Four times Armand passed the Thatcher fence before, suddenly, a familiar figure beckoned to him from beyond its grill. The valet immediately approached and dismounted. He saw White-Gloves Wally in tennis togs, perspiring and a little breathless, as if he had run far. Trees screened him from the grounds; and before speaking he darted swift glances along the road.

"Armand," he said quickly, "you see those bushes? There, across the way, beside the trees!"

The valet glanced around, puzzled.

"Yes, m'sieu'—?"

"Have the bicycle there at midnight—and wait for me."

"Very good, m'sieu'."

"And be certain you are not seen. You had better remain *behind* the bushes!"

"It is understood, m'sieu'. I shall be there. . . . And until then?"

Wally slipped a bill through the iron fence. "Amuse yourself in the village," he said. "You'll probably find a restaurant and theatre."

"*Merci bien, m'sieu'!*" Armand was startled but appreciative. He bowed as Wally started away with a wave of his hand; and he whistled quite gaily

while he pedalled on toward a pleasant evening in the village.

As for White-Gloves Wally, his eyes were luminous with excitement as he rapidly strode back to the tennis courts. That bicycle was destined to carry him to the home of Nicky Silotta in Roslyn Gardens, just two miles away—a distance he ought to negotiate in a very few minutes. He hoped to be back in his bed at the Thatcher home long before agitation seized the household. . . .

He was ready. The stage was set for his last theft.

And within the house Detective Sheppard tensely awaited it . . . meanwhile arranging a new and quite brilliant trap of his own conception. . . .

CHAPTER V

3 A. M.

"**T**HERE they are," White-Gloves Wally said to himself in the evening, "the pearls that must be thrown before a swine."

For Mrs. Evangeline Thatcher, plump, small, and happy, was wearing her diamonds. Despite her age, she danced with every gentleman at her gathering. And thus Wally presently found an opportunity to examine the stones at his leisure, while he swung his hostess through a languid waltz.

"A pity," he thought resentfully, "that anything so exquisite must be put into the hands of a man like Silotta!"

There was no choice, however, save that of prison. . . .

Gay and delightful as it proved, the dance ended quite early; early, at any rate, for a Thatcher function. One-thirty saw most of the guests retiring to their chambers, for Anderson Thatcher had informed his company of twenty that he had arranged a golf tournament to start immediately after an early breakfast the following morning.

Some of the men, in truth, did linger until two for a nightcap, a smoke, and

a chat. And among these Wally sat in the library, with an attentive butler hovering about, always ready to serve.

Shortly before two a ripple of excitement coursed through White-Gloves Wally. Inwardly he stiffened. Outwardly he sat at ease, smoking a cigarette and discussing the recent antics of the stock market. . . . For, obliquely, he had seen the white-haired Anderson Thatcher enter the adjoining chamber; the room, Wally well knew, which contained the wall safe.

And Thatcher was carrying a black little jewelry case. . . .

"Well," Wally yawned behind a polite hand, "I think it's time to turn in. There's a heavy day ahead to-morrow; and—" He grinned. "—there's Thatcher's little tournament cup to win!"

The few men with him agreed, quite gaily; and by half-past two in the morning the Thatcher house was silent, dark . . . and presumably asleep.

But Wally remained tensely awake, working.

In the privacy of his chamber, his swift fingers opened his suitcase. He drew out all its contents and placed them on the bed. Then he extracted a few stitches from the grip's lining, and when he raised the cloth he gazed upon—further tools of his strange trade.

For this was the suitcase he had employed on many an escapade—one whose frequent uses symbolized a history of polite and efficient crime.

From under its lining he pulled, first, a flat patch of yellow hair which, when tossed to the bed, assumed its proper shape of a wig. Then came a handkerchief of black silk; a short, compact automatic; and finally an electric torch some four inches in length. The cap he proposed to use was quite new and lay among his clothes—for his old one, unfortunately, had suffered a bullet hole through its peak at the time of the Cumberly bracelet's theft. . . .

With his equipment ready, White-Gloves Wally undressed. His evening clothes were carefully hung in a closet, his fastidious habits insisting on me-

ticulousness even while his heart thundered with excitement.

Five minutes later he stood dressed in an ordinary dark lounge suit, too common in color and style to be identified in the dark—or even, for that matter, in daylight. This, his “business” suit of blue serge, was his cheapest yet most effective piece of attire.

He slipped his feet, finally, into a pair of gray tennis shoes.

Before his mirror he adjusted the yellow wig and pulled the cap over it. A momentary surveyal of his reflection brought a grim little smile to his lips.

Then he switched off the light, sat down on the bed, and waited.

It was odd that to-night his heart thudded so much more violently than it had on any other adventure. He could not understand the nervousness. Was it that something deep within him trembled with a presentiment of what was to happen? . . .

He glanced down at the luminous dial of his watch. “Twenty minutes of three,” he muttered impatiently. The house had been hushed for what seemed hours. Yet he decided to wait; he *must* wait—despite the abnormal restlessness that tried to goad him on or restrain him, he scarcely knew which.

Those minutes of silent waiting were eternities. In his pocket his fingertips pattered on the automatic, and he frowned at the door as he listened.

There were no sounds.

It was after three when at last he bound the black silk handkerchief about his face and drew on his gloves. Then he rose, his eyes unnaturally brilliant over the mask. Very quietly he crossed his room and opened the door.

He stood still, again listening; and again he heard nothing. The house was dark, hushed. . . .

White-Gloves Wally softly closed his door. On the soundless soles of the tennis shoes he moved down the stairs, their deep carpet lending its aid to mute his steps.

When he paused on the lower landing, there was about his dark figure something spectral, fantastic. The eyes above the mask were twin specs of light. He stood alert, stiffly tensed, one hand in his pocket.

The absolute stillness was reassuring, and Wally seemed to slide as he proceeded to the small chamber whose tapestry concealed the safe. Not even a squeak escaped from under his tennis shoes.

In the room, he did not immediately go to the safe. Instead he turned to one of the two great French windows which gave upon the veranda.

Here he worked carefully with its lock; and a moment later it stood an inch open.

And then, at last, he went to the tapestry.

From his pocket he pulled the small flashlight. When he lifted the corner of the hanging cloth, as Thatcher had done, its faint golden beam plunged upon the dial of the safe. Wally instinctively held his breath; and the agile fingers of his right hand began to turn the little dial. They turned carefully, searchingly, as they had worked at many a safe. His ear was close to them, tensely listening for the almost inaudible sound of a falling tumbler or a click within the mechanism. He moved the dial from number to number, patiently, cautiously, until—

The thing happened so suddenly that White-Gloves Wally had no time even to release his breath.

There was the sharp sound of an electric switch—and the room blazed with light!

Wally whirled around. His eyes widened. A freezing spasm shot through him.

For he was staring straight at a man—a man in butler’s livery—who was levelling at his chest the ugly, menacing muzzle of a revolver!

In a fiercely triumphant whisper Detective Sheppard ordered:

“Stand still! Put up your hands!”

CHAPTER VI

For Freedom

IN the first second White-Gloves Wally instinctively moved to obey. He was dazed.

Never before in the two years he had relied on his wits had he been caught by surprise. Never before had his elaborate precautions ended in failure. And now—

He stared over his mask into a taut, narrow-eyed face. And he understood. He had been trapped. In the corridor behind the "butler" an open closet door showed where the man had concealed himself while he waited, watching the safe. . . .

But the very shock of this realization served as a lash to Wally's senses. His brain leaped into furious, desperate activity. He realized that unless he could do something quickly, at once—

But Detective Sheppard's revolver mercilessly forbade any move.

The man himself, already puzzled by the sight of blond hair under the cap, stepped forward to tear away the burglar's mask. He came across the room sternly, menacingly.

And at that instant inspiration burst upon White-Gloves Wally — crashed into his brain with the force of a thunderbolt. He saw a chance—a slim chance, wild and dangerous and uncertain; yet still a chance! And he seized it.

As Sheppard moved forward, Wally unexpectedly swayed.

His head fell back, and he closed his eyes. Limply he slumped down, down, his knees powerless to sustain him. Before the detective could reach him, he lay huddled on the floor—a motionless, drooping, and apparently unconscious figure!

In amazement Sheppard halted. For a second he gaped in bewilderment. Had the shock of the past few seconds caused the yellow-haired man to faint? . . . It was the only explanation, the obvious explanation; unwittingly Sheppard accepted it.

Frowning, he kneeled. His hand moved to rip away the black handkerchief. At that moment the detective's revolver, ostensibly needless, was pointing at the floor. His extended fingers touched the mask. And then—

Then something hard jammed mightily against Sheppard's abdomen!

Simultaneously, two other things happened. The man on the floor opened blazing eyes, and his left hand seized the detective's right wrist!

Sheppard gasped. He started back, half in rage, half in stupefaction. But Wally, with his automatic jammed against the policeman, jerked up his head to whisper furiously:

"Don't move! Drop your gun!"

The detective did not stir. He kneeled there, rigid, gaping in a sort of hypnosis at the eyes that flamed over the mask.

"Drop your gun!" Wally shot out again. And suddenly his own automatic pressed more tightly.

Sheppard looked down at the muzzle pointing death into him. He looked at his imprisoned right wrist, at his revolver held futilely toward the floor. More eloquent than all this, however, was the light in those threatening eyes. Because of them and because he was not a rattle-brained fool given to useless heroics, Sheppard obeyed.

His weapon fell from his fingers.

"If you make a sound," Wally warned hoarsely, "I'll shoot my way out of here!" He drew a quick breath. "Get up!"

He himself accompanied Sheppard's responsive movement. In a moment both men were standing, and Wally's automatic hovered an inch from the detective's heart. The man's gaunt face had lost all its color. He was breathing heavily.

"Turn around!" Wally ordered in that low, almost savage whisper. "Put your hands behind your back! And keep your feet *still!*"

As Sheppard turned slowly, stiffly, White-Gloves Wally decided on the course he must take.

The door was heavily draped in blue; and the drape-cord hung within easy reach. . . .

In his voice, when he spoke again, trembled all the uncompromising fury of a desperately determined man. He ordered Sheppard to stand against the wall, facing it, with his arms extended behind him.

"I'm going to tie you up," he snapped, "and if you make any sound—any move—I'll shoot!"

His automatic never relinquished its aim as he stepped backward to the drapes. With his left hand he finally secured the cord, drew it out of its rings. And the silence with which he worked was a mute tribute to his skill.

Inwardly Sheppard was raging, quivering. Yet, when he felt steel again jammed into his back, he knew it would be folly to stir. His wrists were tightly bound behind him. Two loops of the cord encircled his forearms, so that they almost met at the elbows. And still fully six feet of cord remained. . . .

To himself Wally grimly smiled as he contemplated further use for that remainder.

Meanwhile, however, there were other things to accomplish. From a table he snatched a long runner. This he rolled and suddenly swung around Sheppard's mouth.

The detective started, stepped back—"Don't!" Wally rapped out. "Stand still, I warned you!"

Again the automatic pressed against Sheppard—and the man, tingling, stood motionless while a secure gag was affixed about his mouth. His eyes were circles of fury. Yet he understood the deadly peril of any rebellious attempts.

When it was done, White-Gloves Wally stood listening a second, his own breath crushed. The entire encounter had been achieved in whispers. And the house was still silent. . . .

Nevertheless, after switching off the lights, he devoted fully a minute to reassuring himself. He stood at the door, steadying his own jangled nerves, his ears strained.

But the house still slept.

On his toes he went back to the man in butler's livery. Sheppard, bound and gagged, stood against the wall, facing it.

"Stay as you are!" Wally cautioned him in that menacing whisper. "If you make a single sound—" There was no need to finish the phrase, for Sheppard comprehended.

White-Gloves Wally returned to the tapestry and lifted its corner. Once more his flashlight threw a golden circlet on the safe dial. With almost uncanny skill his gloved fingers resumed their delicate, searching task.

As he worked, his eyes glowed. He breathed rapidly.

His ear was close to the dial. Obliquely he continued to watch the man at the opposite wall. And though his revolver was back in his pocket, he could have drawn it in an instant to prevent any betraying sound on the "butler's" part.

Fifteen minutes later Wally's deftness achieved its end. The safe door swung open!

And when he closed it again—the Thatcher diamonds lay in his hand!

His whole being thundered as he pocketed the gems. Under the mask, he was flushed. Perhaps it was fortunate that he did not know that Detective Sheppard still held another trump card—one he had dealt to himself earlier in the evening. . . .

CHAPTER VII

Fair Exchange

ARMAND DESCARTES felt wretchedly uncomfortable.

For three and a half hours the little valet had patiently sat behind roadside bushes, his bicycle on the ground beside him. He was tired, disgruntled, and perplexed. Moreover, the night, despite the brilliance of the moonlight, had brought a penetrating chill, and Armand frequently shuddered.

Consequently he felt vastly relieved—and exhilarated, too—when he heard quick, familiar steps on the road. He

peered over the bushes; and recognizing his employer, he softly called,

"Voici, m'sieu'! I am here!"

White-Gloves Wally had pocketed his mask and wig. His movements now were brisk and determined.

"Come along, Armand!" he whispered. "You'll have to help me just a little while longer!"

"But certainly, m'sieu'." With willing alacrity the valet stepped from behind the bushes. He stood at polite attention, as if he were in a drawing room. "M'sieu' desires—?"

"Back there, Armand," said Wally, nodding in the direction of the iron fence. "I have tied a man to a tree. He is gagged. I wish him to remain that way until I return."

The valet's brows arched in astonishment. Precisely what his employer's purpose was, he did not understand. Indeed, he had long ago decided that it would perhaps be wisest not to attempt any analysis of Monsieur's occasional lapses into odd and incomprehensible behavior. An appearance of abject ignorance, he told himself—even in the face of possible police investigation—would assuredly be his most tactful and safest recourse. So now Armand stood silently surprised but not too inquisitive.

"I want you to remain behind him," Wally pressed on quickly, "so that he'll have no glimpse of you. But whisper to him from time to time. Caution him not to move. Let him know he is being guarded, so that he'll make no effort to free his mouth from the gag. Is that clear, Armand?"

"Perfectly, m'sieu'."

"Take this." Wally extended his automatic. "You might prod him with it whenever he becomes restless."

"But m'sieu'!" The valet's eyes widened in consternation. "Never—" he gasped. "—never in my life have I discharged a revolver!"

"Neither," drily answered Wally. "have I. . . . But as long as the man doesn't know it, we both seem dangerous. Come!"

He led his servant across the road. Together they scaled the iron fence. And presently Armand stood behind the tree to which Detective Sheppard had been bound with the remainder of the drape-cord.

He grinned reassuringly as he assumed his position.

"If he gives any trouble," Armand rasped, "I'll shoot and run!"

White-Gloves Wally curtly nodded and turned away. Two minutes later he was pedalling toward Roslyn Gardens. He went quickly, crouching low over the handle-bars; and his eyes gleamed.

For he was visioning the climax of the most ambitious venture in his career. . . .

IT was scarcely four o'clock in the morning when Nicky Silotta suddenly sat up in bed, blinking.

"Who's there?" he called, his voice hoarse, sleep-laden. From beyond the door, on which a persistent knocking had roused him, came the answer:

"Deever, sir."

"Deever? What d'you want? Come in!"

The door opened, and Silotta's servant, looking far from dignified in a frayed dressing gown, said,

"Mr. Gayard is downstairs, sir."

"Gayard!"

"Yes, sir. He insists on seeing you immediately, sir. He says it is most urgent."

"Oh!" Instantly alert, Silotta swung out of bed. "All right. Tell him I'll be down in a minute . . . One second!"

Deever, having already turned, looked back. "Sir?"

"Better wake Mr. Junnitt and Mr. Lisio. Tell 'em I want 'em."

"Very good, sir."

When Silotta rose, he was smiling queerly. He switched on his lights and shrugged into an ornate dressing gown. A moment he stood before the mirror, studying himself. Then he chuckled. His muscular countenance was swollen with sleep. His hair hung disarrayed.

Hastily he smoothed it, but a recalcitrant lock immediately fell back over his right eyebrow.

Silotta, however, had no concern with his appearance. He opened a drawer in the small table beside his bed. From it he drew a revolver which he dropped into his pocket.

When his two assistants arrived, with bewildered queries, he was ready. Downstairs, he guessed, half a million dollars awaited him. . . .

They found White-Gloves Wally in the drawing room.

He seemed unusually pale, but his eyes were strangely bright. And his tones, when he went directly to business, were calm and controlled and decisive.

"I've brought the Thatcher diamonds," he announced crisply. "Let's get through with this!"

His head lowered like a bull's, Nicky Silotta did not stir. Only his eyes moved, narrowing in their pouches.

"Where," he demanded, "are they?"

"Where," countered Wally, "are the disc and the picture?"

That odd smile returned to the thick-set man's features. He muttered something over his shoulder, and one of his companions vanished from the room. Silotta glanced back at his untimely caller, and his smile persisted.

"He's bringing them," he said. "They're yours when you produce your end of the bargain."

Wally promptly pulled Mrs. Thatcher's brooch from his pocket. He placed the dazzling thing on the table, and its blazing radiance seemed reflected in Silotta's eyes. Yet the man picked it up quite casually and nodded as he examined it.

"I don't suppose," he said interrogatively, "that you've brought the rest of the stuff into the house?"

"No."

"H'm . . . Well, I guess you're right. I wouldn't myself. Where is it?"

"Outside," quietly answered Wally.

"To be handed over to me, I take it," said Silotta, with a faint grin, "when

you've got the disc and the picture, eh?"

"Exactly."

The heavy man chuckled and tossed the brooch back to the table.

"Fair enough," he agreed. "I'd do the same thing myself, under the circumstances."

His assistant reappeared, carrying the peculiar box and an envelope. Without hesitation, Nicky Silotta opened the machine and extracted from it a disc. Then, on reconsideration, he replace it, turned the switch.

"Perhaps," he suggested, with a hint of sarcasm, "you want to listen to be sure it's yours."

Wally did; then he said: "I take it this is the *only* disc you have of that conversation?"

Immediately Silotta frowned, gravely.

"Gayard," he said, "I may do a lot of queer things, but I never double-cross a man! When you get this disc and these pictures, you've got everything!"

"Very well," said White-Gloves Wally, without emotion. "You're trusting me to produce the rest of the gems; I'll take your word on this. . . . Let me have the disc."

Silotta proffered it as casually as he might have offered a cigarette. And Wally smashed the thing on the floor—smashed it into a thousand pieces that flew like shrapnel.

"The picture?" he asked.

He received the envelope and found it to contain four prints as well as a plate. The latter he broke as he had shattered the disc. And the photographs he tore into minute shreds which he dropped into his pocket.

Then he drew a long breath.

"If you'll come outside with me—" he suggested.

In the cool night air Nicky Silotta shivered slightly, yet he and his aids silently followed the visitor to the very gates of his grounds. There Wally knelt and, after groping among bushes, he produced the silk handkerchief.

He unfolded it to reveal Mrs. Thatcher's amazing necklace and bracelet—gems which sparkled so miraculously in the moonlight that one of the men involuntarily ejaculated his astonishment. As White-Gloves Wally surrendered the jewels, he commented,

"I appreciate your trusting me, Silotta."

"Oh—" the man shrugged. "I've had you covered with my gun ever since you came. You couldn't have got away without handing these over."

"I see." Grimly Wally smiled. Then, abruptly, he straightened. "Well, that's that!" He turned toward the road. "Good night, Silotta."

Nicky Silotta bowed with mock gravity.

"I am sorry," he said, "to break so profitable a partnership. Good night, Gayard!"

And that was all . . . all save the fact that Detective Sheppard still held that trump card of his. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Sheppard's Inning

ARMAND, awaiting Wally's return, felt both apprehensive and impatient.

His uneasy eyes constantly darted about the darkness, and he listened eagerly to every sound coming from the road. Of his employer, however, he heard nothing. He shuddered a little. There was something unnerving in this hushed vigil among the trees. What if Monsieur did not return before daylight? . . .

He stiffened as the detective bound to the trees stirred. A low mumble issued from under the gag. Immediately Armand jabbed the automatic into his prisoner's back.

"Quiet!" he snarled. "You—"

Then he stopped. Also his heart seemed to stop. He whirled around, wide-eyed, and felt his very blood run cold.

For rapid steps were approaching him. They came not from the direc-

tion of the road but—*from the house!*

"*Bon Dieu!*" gasped Armand. Desperately he looked around and then sprang into the concealment of black shadow. There, behind a tree, he waited, his whole being thumping; and instinctively he raised the automatic.

But his terror was futile. A minute later a slim figure materialized out of the blackness. And Armand recognized White-Gloves Wally!

Inexpressibly delighted, he leaped out with a relieved little cry. But Wally cautioned him to silence.

"Come!" he whispered.

He led Armand to the fence, where he gave him a bundle. It was his black handkerchief in which he had wrapped every item of his disguise, every appurtenance of his trade.

"On your way home," he said, somewhat breathlessly, "drop this into the river! You may weight it down with the revolver. I—I shall have no further use for any of them, Armand—*ever!*"

The servant stared.

"Then I am to go home now, m'sieu'?"

"Yes! You will find the bicycle behind the bushes. And Armand—"

"M'sieu'?"

"I want to—thank you." Wally eyed the little man earnestly. "You have helped me more than I can—"

"Poof!" The valet snapped deprecating fingers. "It is nothing, m'sieu'. Nothing at all!" Then he grinned. "That man at the tree, in the morning he will find his poor back full of blue circles!"

Wally stood still while he watched the little Frenchmen scramble over the iron fence. He waited until the hiss of bicycle tires had subsided in the silence of the night. Then he spun around briskly and ran toward the house.

The first gray flow of dawn had poured into the east before Detective Sheppard's mighty struggles finally dislodged the gag. He drew a great breath. He tried to steady himself, to control his fury.

Then he began lustily to yell.

And he yelled until a dumfounded groundkeeper, half dressed, came running to free him.

"What's happened?" the man gasped. But Sheppard was too profoundly agitated to waste time in answering useless questions. He snapped something indistinguishable and raced back to the house.

His bones ached. His muscles were stiff, painful. Yet he granted his feelings no heed. There was too much to be done. . . .

In the Thatcher corridor he halted to telephone Police Headquarters. And while he awaited the connection, he turned to glare at the panting groundkeeper who had entered the house in his wake.

"Do you know which is Mr. Thatcher's room?" he snapped.

"Sure! It's —"

"Go wake him! Tell him there's been a robbery!"

While the semi-dressed man rushed up the stairs, Sheppard made his report to Headquarters. Then he jammed the instrument on its hook with vicious force.

He was enraged—enraged with himself and with the thief who had tricked him. For he knew that Detective Sergeant Blaine would indubitably hold him responsible for the disappearance of the gems he had been detailed to guard.

Sheppard ran up the stairs, two at each bound, and encountered Anderson Thatcher on the upper landing. The white-haired banker was blinking excitedly, and the hands that bound the cord of his dressing gown visibly shook.

"What's happened?" he whispered.

"He got the jewels in the safe!" Sheppard shot back.

Thatcher grew rigid.

"Who —?" he gasped.

"I'll know in a minute!"

Detective Sheppard went directly to White-Gloves Wally's door.

And though Thatcher wanted to rush

down to examine his safe, something in the policeman's grimly determined attitude arrested the impulse. He waited, following the officer in bewilderment. Behind him trailed the open-mouthed groundkeeper.

Without hesitation Sheppard pushed open the door to Wally's room. He saw the young man start up in bed, startled. Wally lay in pajamas, his hair disheveled. Ostensibly he had been jerked out of sleep.

"Hello!" he muttered in surprise. "What's up?"

Sheppard did not immediately answer. His narrow eyes darted about the floor in quest of something. Failing to see it, however, he proceeded boldly to the closet, which he opened. In a moment he drew out of it—Wally's tennis shoes!

"I say!" the young man in bed protested. "What on earth is all this?"

"Will you be good enough," Sheppard snapped coldly, "to come downstairs?"

But Wally refused to stir out of bed; amazed, he turned to Anderson Thatcher.

"Has this butler gone mad?" he demanded.

"This—this butler," faltered the banker, "happens to be a detective. . . . I'm sorry, Gayard. I think you had better do as he asks."

Wally's eyes widened. But now he hastily swung out of bed and drew on an exquisite silken dressing gown of his own.

"What's wrong?" he exclaimed. "What have my tennis shoes to do with—"

"There's been a robbery," said Thatcher. "Come along, please, Gayard! I—I don't want to wake everybody if we can help it!"

In the glowering eyes of Detective Sheppard there lay unmistakable accusation. Wally could not avoid noticing it. And so he stiffened.

"See here," he demanded suddenly, "is this man intimating that I have anything to do with—"

"I am!" icily answered Sheppard. "And the blond wig won't help you, Mr. Gayard!"

"The—*what?*"

"Let's drop the pretense and the acting. A wig couldn't prevent my recognizing your figure!"

Until now White-Gloves Wally's demeanor had been one of mingled bewilderment and outrage. But the stabbing hostility in the detective's tones changed that attitude. Wally straightened, frowned. His calm poise returned to him, and his voice became steady and crackling.

"What you say," he told Sheppard, "is too offensive to be even puzzling."

"Will you come downstairs?" the officer retorted.

They went down, Wally preceding them. He walked erect, self-contained, aloof.

In the chamber which contained the tapestry, Anderson Thatcher started for the safe. But Sheppard motioned him back with a quick, startled gesture.

"One moment, Mr. Thatcher!" he exclaimed. "Don't step on that floor until I'm finished, if you please!"

"But I want to see—" the banker began to protest.

"In a minute!"

And then Detective Sheppard proceeded to play his trump card. . . .

He turned to the frowning White-Gloves Wally, and a shrewed, hard smile illumined his narrow eyes.

"You will notice," he said softly, "that there is a strip of uncarpeted floor just below that tapestry. Whoever opened the safe stood on that floor. . . . Last night I waxed it!"

"I'm afraid I don't understand," flatly answered Wally.

"You will," Sheppard ominously promised. "The thief wore tennis shoes. That's why I brought these down. The imprint of those shoes are in the wax. . . . And I'm going to place your shoes, Mr. Gayard, on those prints!"

Sheppard dropped to his knees. Still smiling in that queer manner, he stu-

died the highly polished strip of floor. That wax had been a precaution of his own invention. And what he sought in it he immediately discovered: the clear-cut impressions of tennis slippers!

They were criss-crossed with the peculiar markings of rubber soles—an individual and complicated pattern. Sheppard glanced at Wally's shoes; and a grin, satisfied grunt fell from him.

The sole-markings were identical!

All this Wally had observed with a cold, unchanging frown. But now he suddenly exclaimed, almost irascibly.

"Look here, that's all insignificant! There must be thousands of men with shoes like mine—of the same make and even the same size!"

"Yes?" snapped Sheppard. "That's quite true. But there's nobody in the world who *stands* exactly as you do, Mr. Gayard! The distribution of weight on the foot is an individual characteristic. All I'm going to do is show you that your shoes fit these prints. Experts from the anthropometrical department will prove that the prints were made by you. Watch!"

Carefully the detective placed Wally's left shoe on the left print.

Every man in the room bent forward, staring, tingling. No one dared even breathe in that critical moment. There was absolute hush. . . . The shoe rested on the mark.

And then—

Detective Sheppard gaped, dumb-founded. His brows arched in incredulity, in consternation. A choked cry escaped Anderson Thatcher as he jerked himself erect. Only Wally stood unshaking and unaffected.

For the shoes were fully an inch smaller than the prints on the floor!

In the ensuing few seconds, while Sheppard squatted there, gaping downward in a kind of spell, Thatcher could no longer restrain himself.

He sprang to the safe. With nervous, quivering fingers he spun its dial. His features were colorless, the eyes

flaming. And because of that nervousness, he worked for an inordinately long time before he finally yanked the little steel door open. He peered into the safe and—

"Good heavens!" he gasped.

He spun around. First he stared blankly at Detective Sheppard. Then he looked up at White-Gloves Wally—as imperturbable as ever. And at last, feeling beyond words, he gestured mutely toward the little vault.

Sheppard leaped up to gaze into it—and what he saw stunned him.

The Thatcher diamonds—necklace, brooch, and bracelet—were in the safe!

"What," Wally asked in a puzzled tone, "seems to be the matter? . . ."

CHAPTER IX

"And Now?"

WHEN he returned from the Saratoga races, a week later, White-Gloves Wally confided to his corpulent friend, Ernest Borodine,

"Really, it was absurd, that matter of the tennis shoes. I never worked in the same slippers I used for play. Sheppard might have realized that he couldn't count on so elementary an oversight. The very danger of some day leaving footprints was what originally impelled me to buy shoes half a size too large—for work."

Borodine chuckled so that his fat body quivered.

"How did you get rid of the slippers?" he asked.

"They were among the things I gave Armand to drop into the river."

"Oh, of course! I'd forgotten. . . . And the return of the diamonds?"

Wally shrugged as he regarded the tip of his cigarette.

"I had decided to go straight," he explained, "and I couldn't allow Silotta to change the decision with blackmail. . . . After I had given him the gems, he went into his house. I lingered. In fact, I was peering into his window when he deposited them in the safe in his study. Later, when Silotta had gone back to sleep, I opened my second safe of the night. Rather fortunate, too, for I found in it the evidence that he had attempted to provide himself with material for the future. There was another disc, Borodine; and another photograph lay beside it!"

The stout fence frowned, shook his head.

"Double-crossing you, eh? Well, one might have expected it of Nicky Silotta!"

"One did," drily agreed Wally. "I took the diamonds, the disc, and the picture. The jewels, of course, I returned to Thatcher's safe before I went out to relieve Armand of his vigil."

"The police have nothing against you?"

"Nothing but ill-will," said Wally, smiling. "Sheppard could not, of course, positively identify me as the blond, masked thief who gave him so uncomfortable a night."

Borodine nodded and slowly his smile returned as he softly asked,

"And now—?"

"Now?" White-Glove Wally bent forward to crush his cigarette in a tray. His brows arched. "Now," he said, "I'll continue along that straight path into which I turned last week. I—I rather imagine I'm going to like it!"





THE SNOW EMPEROR

A FOUR-PART SERIAL

By Frederick Harper

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

Caught

REGAN stopped his sedan at the curb, turned the ignition off, and held his wrist watch close to the lighted instrument panel. The time was nine thirty-seven. He nodded, pulled the key from the ignition lock, switched the lights off, and stepped from the car.

In his late twenties, Regan hadn't lost his football physique. A slouch hat pulled down low over his forehead did not hide a lean tightness of the jaw. His stride was long and springy as he walked briskly away.

He had parked in a side street, not too well lighted. Half a block to the west he turned into a wide boulevard lined with spacious tree-and-shrubbery-dotted grounds, and big houses.

In some houses lights were gleaming; others were dark. Regan strolled slowly along. In the middle of the block he looked furtively about, and then placed hands on the top rail of the cast iron fence at his elbow and vaulted over the fence and the hedge that grew on the other side.

Crouching where his feet had struck the sod, he waited for some sign that his movements had been seen and suspected. The neighborhood, however, remained as quiet as ever. An automobile sped along the street, but the purr of its motor and the whine of its tires died away in the distance.

The landscaped grounds that Regan had entered were unlighted. The large house, set well back from the street, loomed rather darkly and gloomily.

From one of the rear downstairs windows a beam of light drifted. Regan

eyed the light calculatingly, and then walked across the lawn to the front of the house.

No dog barked in warning, no one challenged him; not even when the crepe rubber soles of his shoes drifted up the front steps and trod silently across the front porch to the door.

Regan stood there by the front door like a dark shadow, listening, and pulling on a pair of soft leather gloves at the same time.

Gloves on, he fumbled in the right pocket of his coat and brought out a key. Slowly, carefully, cautiously, he fitted the key into the door lock and turned it.

The latch slid back without a click. Regan rested his gloved fingers on the doorknob and turned it carefully. Like a drifting shadow the door swung inward; like another shadow Regan entered the front hall, drawing a fountain pen flashlight from the inside pocket of his coat.

The tiny powerful beam roved about for a moment, and then centered on a wide curving Georgian stairway leading up to the second floor. Regan walked to it and started up.

Somewhere in the rear of the house a door opened. Footsteps became audible. For an instant Regan hesitated and then went on up the stairs. The footsteps, it turned out, did not come into the front of the house. By the time he reached the upper floor silence reigned again.

A hall ran by the top of the stairs. The little flashlight beam danced along the walls, picking out the different doors. Regan walked to the right, to the second door, and turned the knob. The door swung in. He slipped inside.

A smile of grim satisfaction flickered over his face as the flashlight beam picked out the contents of the room. Bed, chairs, table, smoking stand, masculine slippers; and a long bureau whose main feature was half a dozen silver-framed portraits of young women scattered over the top.

Regan went to the bureau and ex-

amined the pictures carefully. The light jabbed into the faces in turn. All were beautiful; the inscriptions written on them betokened warm sentiments, to say the least.

Regan examined them all and then proceeded in a swift businesslike manner. He went through the drawers of the bureau, examining the contents. Taking care also to see that they showed no signs of being disturbed when he was through. In one of the small top drawers he found a diamond ring; in another drawer a packet of yellow-backed bank notes. He let them lay. Money and diamonds, it seemed, were not what he was after.

He looked behind the pictures on the wall for a wall safe, and finally opened the door of a large wardrobe closet and stepped in.

Inside, sounds were somewhat muffled. To that was due the fact that he did not notice the soft purr of an automobile motor entering the grounds and stopping beside the house.

The wardrobe, in reality a small room, contained enough clothes to have stocked a haberdasher's shop. Suits of every kind and weight, color and pattern. Racks of shoes. Topcoats. Hats. And built-in drawers, full of shirts, handkerchiefs, socks and silk underwear, not to speak of ties, and a rack of assorted sticks.

The apparent seriousness of his quest did not deter Regan from smiling somewhat grimly at the sight of all this wearing apparel. It was as though he found it hard to understand how any man could devote so much thought and expense to clothes.

He began to search swiftly through the built-in drawers. In one he found a medium sized cedar box with a hinged lid. It was locked. He tipped it back, lock face up, fumbled in his pocket, and brought out a small piece of well-tempered wire and a tiny pair of pliers.

Bending the end of the wire carefully, he inserted it in the lock. A sharp little twist, and the lock gave.

Pocketing the wire and pliers he opened the box. It was packed with letters. The faint scent of mixed perfumes drifted up to his nostrils. Swiftly he leafed through the letters. Some of the envelopes were tinted in delicate colors. Some were plain. There were different kinds of handwriting on the outside. All seemed feminine.

In the bottom, held together by a rubber band, was a packet of seven letters, cream white, addressed to James Drake in fine sweeping strokes.

Regan grunted with satisfaction, pocketed the letters, and then went through the box again to make sure he had overlooked no others.

He had not.

He closed the lid again and locked it with the wire, and replaced the box and closed the drawer.

His interest was satisfied. He went to the room door and started out into the hall. But halfway through the doorway he stopped in his tracks and stood rigid. The hall flooded with light. Steps came running lightly up the stairs.

There was no time to slip down the hall; he'd be discovered. Regan stepped swiftly back into the room and closed the door softly. It was still dark in there. His flashlight stabbed about. He made a move toward the door of the wardrobe closet, and then veered off. It would be the first place anyone entering the room would go.

A large heavily curtained bay-window, three windows in actuality, was on the other side of the room. The curtains came clear down to the floor.

Steps were coming along the hall. Regan strode swiftly to the window and slipped behind a curtain. He was hardly there when the door opened. Someone entered. The light switch clicked. The room filled with light.

Regan glanced down and assured himself that his feet were not showing beneath the curtains, and then stood motionless, hardly breathing.

A coat was tossed on the bed. Feet started to pace up and down.

Someone rapped on the door. "Come in," a voice said sharply, and the pacing stopped. •

Regan moved the curtain cautiously until he had a narrow slit through which he could view the room.

A somewhat elderly, thinnish, dried-up man in butler's black entered. The man who had been pacing up and down was about thirty. At one time he might have been an athlete. Life had softened him. His frame was well padded with flesh. Under the searching rays of the electric light sagging muscles, puffed circles under the eyes, and a general patina of dissipation were cruelly evident on his face. And that dissipation had brought disintegration of character with it; or perhaps the character had never been there. There was something artificial about the man; something repellent to Regan.

The man's hair was cut faultlessly, his face was close-shaven and well barbered, and the cream silk shirt he wore was custom made. But such details could not improve the personality that nature had etched on the face.

"Well, Biggers," the young man said sharply, "what is it?"

Biggers coughed drily, and held out a pink envelope that he had been holding on a tray behind his back. "This," he said apologetically, "was overlooked when I was sorting the afternoon mail, Mr. Drake. It must have fallen behind the table. I thought you would want to see it now, sir."

Drake took the pink envelope from the tray and stared at the address. His left side was to Regan and the expression on his face was visible. He frowned. The well barbered pinkishness of his face drained away, leaving it pale and somewhat haggard. It seemed to Regan there was an expression of dread also.

Biggers noticed it.

Drake suddenly became aware of the butler's scrutiny and snapped: "Haven't you anything else to do besides stand there and gape at me? I have the letter. That is all."

"Yes, sir. Beg pardon, sir." Biggers retreated hastily.

When the door had closed behind the man, Drake's shoulders sagged as though a great burden had suddenly been imposed on them. The letter in his fingers trembled slightly. Then he did a curious thing. He raised the envelope to his nose and sniffed. And his nostrils quivered slightly as though recognizing some odor.

Drake slit the envelope open with a finger and drew out a folded sheet of paper.

As he read, the pallor on his face deepened. He must have read the letter over two or three times by the length of time he looked at it, and then folding it he replaced it in the envelope and walked over to the bureau and laid it on the top. There were cigarettes there and a chased gold table lighter. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply, and stood with head bowed, evidently pondering something.

Finally he went to the wall beside the door, pressed a button there, and waited. Biggers returned.

"Yes, sir?"

Drake asked: "Did that letter come in this afternoon's post?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Because, sir, I found it behind the table where the post is always put."

"How do you know it didn't come yesterday or the day before?"

"The maid cleans the hall every morning, sir. She moves the table out. If it had been there yesterday she would have found it."

"Very well," said Drake heavily. "That will be all."

Biggers retired again.

Drake walked over and stared at the pictures on the bureau, puffing absently on the cigarette. His gaze wandered to the mirror.

He stared, and then shook his head, dropped a hand to one of the drawers, opened it and took out a nicked revolver.

Regan had noted the weapon and let

it remain where it was. Now however, as he saw Drake lift it out, he wished that he had not. The pink letter had evidently made a great impression on the man. So great an impression that it looked as if he was intending to commit suicide.

Regan frowned at the thought. If Drake did that the house would be aroused, thus making it difficult to get away. The police would be summoned. If found on the spot or seen escaping there'd be awkward explanations to make. Very awkward. Perhaps the question of murder would be raised.

Drake examined the revolver, and then remarked aloud: "I suppose I might as well shoot myself."

Regan tensed himself. He'd have to prevent such a thing at any cost.

Drake walked across the room toward the window, eyes on the revolver in his hand. A few feet away he stopped abruptly and leveled the revolver.

"Come out from behind that curtain, or I'll shoot!" he ordered loudly.

CHAPTER II

Two of a Kind

TAKEN aback, Regan realized that Drake had only been acting. The spoken words had been a ruse to disarm suspicion while coming close to the curtains with the revolver. Regan himself had brought no weapon with him. Drake could shoot him down with perfect immunity.

"Come out!" Drake snapped.

Regan pushed the curtain aside and stepped out into the lighted room.

"Put your hands up!" Drake ordered swiftly. He made a slight gesture with the revolver to emphasize the words.

Regan raised both hands over his head.

Drake watched him narrowly, and commented with a trace of sarcasm: "The next time you try to hide behind curtains in my room don't look out. It shows up so plainly in the mirror."

"So that's how you knew I was there," Regan said.

"Yes. What the devil are you doing in my house?"

"Right now I'm holding my hands over my head."

"Don't try to be funny about the matter. What are you, a crook, a burglar? Or did you come here to. . . ." Drake hesitated. "Did you come here to try to kill me?" he snarled suddenly.

Regan had to smile slightly at that. "Hardly. I'd have brought a gun with me if that had been on my mind. I'm unarmed."

"Sure about that?"

"Search me and see."

"I will. Turn around."

Regan faced about. Drake stepped behind him and ran a hand quickly over his pockets and under his armpits. Some of the passion left Drake's voice when he found nothing. "So," he sneered, "you're just a common burglar. A second story man. A sneak thief."

Regan's face darkened. Still holding his hands carefully over his head he turned. "I wouldn't go so far as to say that," he answered coolly.

"You're not much of a burglar," Drake said contemptuously. "If you were, you'd have known better than to have been caught like this."

"You seem to know the fine points," Regan told him.

Drake started. In the back of his eyes an expression akin to fear flickered. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"What could I mean by it?"

Drake's eyes narrowed. "I think you're lying to me," he said through his teeth. "By God, if you came here to— to settle any scores I'll settle you right where you stand."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Regan said coolly. "You sound a little mad. I haven't any scores to settle with you. How could I? I've never seen you before."

Drake glared at him for a moment, and then his glance shifted away. "Never mind," he said. "But what did you come here for? What were you after?"

Regan shrugged. "What have you?" "Nothing worth your while."

"Then," said Regan, "why get all worked up about it? Perhaps I picked the wrong house. You keep, if I may say so, a rather poor house from a burglar's standpoint."

"From your standpoint, yes. I suppose you know there's a prison sentence for this?"

"Yes."

"How'd you get in?"

"Front door."

"Wasn't it locked?"

Regan did not answer.

"By heavens! It wasn't!" Drake remembered. "It was unlocked when I came in. I'll fire the whole damn' staff of servants! They've had their orders about that."

"Don't bother them. The door was locked. I opened it with a key."

"Let's see the key."

"In my right coat pocket." Too late Regan remembered that the packet of letters was in that pocket also. He said hastily: "I'll give it to you."

"Keep your hands up! Turn your back again! I'll get it."

Regan had no choice but to obey. Drake's hand fumbled in the pocket while the muzzle of the revolver pressed tightly against Regan's back. Drake pulled out the key, the wire, the pliers and the letters. He recognized the letters instantly and uttered an oath. "So *these* are what you came for!"

"Those are what I got."

"By heavens! And this key is one of the house keys! Who are you?"

"That doesn't matter," said Regan.

"It does to me. Let's see what you have in your other pockets." Drake's hand probed further. And brought out Regan's wallet. It held his driver's license.

"James Regan," Drake read aloud with satisfaction. "1812 Orchid Street. Well, that's something. And so Caroline sent you for the letters?"

Regan raised his eyebrows. "Caroline? Who is she?"

"Don't try to act innocent. I have you cold on a burglary charge."

After all, Regan thought, there was no point in trying to lie any more about the matter. Caroline Bentley had been the motivating force behind his visit to this house. She it was who had come to the Regan Detective Agency and confessed with stifled sobs an escapade where love had been stronger than reason, and caution.

Her trust had been misplaced. Now she was really in love and was going to get married. Drake held certain letters that were damning and compromising. He refused to give them up, and threatened to mail them, one at a time, to her fiancé. That is, unless she was prepared to buy them back. Plain blackmail.

Drake, it appeared, was the last of a family of some wealth and position. His father and mother had died while he was quite young, and he had grown up wild and wilful.

And the girl, Caroline Bentley, had said a curious thing as she sat by Regan's desk those several days before. "You—you look quite like James Drake."

Regan eyed the man now. Perhaps their features did have some points of resemblance. Certainly their height and build were about the same, although Regan had more muscle than fat. He hoped his face didn't show the marks of dissipation that were on the other's features. They couldn't very well; he had never dissipated.

Drake's eyes narrowed. A hard smile quirked the loose corners of his mouth.

"Suppose," he suggested, "I shoot you and swear that I found a prowler in the room and shot in self defense?"

"You couldn't very well," Regan retorted. "I'm not carrying any weapons for you to defend yourself from."

"I can swear this is your gun and that I was trying to take it away from you when it went off. Nobody would know the difference."

"I wouldn't advise you to try it,"

Regan said drily. "You'd be surprised how much detectives can know when there's a death to be cleared up."

Drake stared at him. A puzzled expression crept over his face. "Say," Drake observed suddenly, "I've seen you somewhere before, haven't I? Your face looks mighty familiar to me."

Regan smiled at that also. "It ought to if the young lady you referred to is right," he said. "She told me there was quite a bit of resemblance between you and me. I don't like to think so, but if she was right you've probably seen me every time you stepped in front of a mirror."

"I'll be damned! Say, I wonder. . . ." Drake stopped, struck by an idea. "Come over here to the mirror," he ordered. "We'll see how right she was. Keep your arms up, remember."

The mirror hanging behind the pictures on the bureau top was rather large. Side by side they stood before it, and their reflections stared back at them. There was a hovering uncanny ghost of resemblance. Feature by feature the resemblance was not there, but if one took the effect as a whole it was quite remarkable. One had to allow for the difference in their physical conditions however.

"I wouldn't believe it if I didn't see it with my own eyes," Drake commented.

Regan, his hand still held over his head, retorted coolly: "Not at all flattered, I assure you, but we do look somewhat alike. We'd never be taken for twins though."

Drake was thoughtful. He said nothing for a moment, and then slowly: "I can use a man who looks like me."

Their eyes met in the mirror. "What for?"

Drake's expression changed to calculation. "To take my place," he said slowly.

"In what way? Blackmail?"

It was a keen stab. Drake flushed. "No," he said shortly. "Don't use that word again. I don't like it."

"You're rather touchy for a person who engages in it. I've been wondering why anyone in your position should stoop to blackmail."

"As long as we're here alone," Drake muttered, "it won't do any harm to tell you that I need money and I don't give a damn how I get it. I've had money all my life and I'm going to keep on having it. If certain women want to make fools of themselves it's up to them to pay for it."

Regan said nothing.

Drake went on after a minute. "A word from me and the police will come immediately. It will be easy enough to swear you took a packet of bills from me and some jewelry. It will be a plain case of housebreaking. First offense or not, I imagine you'll go over the road for a few years."

The man was right. Devilishly right. Regan had known it from the beginning, and, out of sheer softness of heart, had chanced it. He had suggested to the distraught girl that they bait a trap for the blackmailer and catch him. Rather hysterically she had rejected the suggestion because of the publicity that must inevitably ensue.

Publicity was the last thing in the world she wanted. It seemed that the young man she was going to marry was not the type who would condone her mistake. Whether Drake was convicted or not, the unsavory details that would come to light would be plastered over the newspapers of the country. The very effect that she wished to avert would be carried out.

Since she could not raise the sum that Drake demanded, and in any case feared that he would not deliver all the letters and would continue to bleed her, there was only one thing to do. Steal the letters.

It was not fair to detail such a job to anyone else. Regan had taken it over out of sheer pity for her. The girl had a key to Drake's house, and had been certain the letters were in his bedroom. So Regan had come to get them. Now, this was the result. . . .

Still keeping the pistol trained on him, Drake stepped over to the door and pressed the button that had summoned the butler before. It did so again. Biggers stepped into the room and looked at the two of them, wide-eyed.

Drake said carelessly: "Biggers, take a good look at this man. He has broken into the house. I caught him rummaging my room. Do you see him clearly?"

Biggers stared at Regan, and then nodded. "Yes, sir," he said. "Quite, sir. And if I may be pardoned for saying so, sir, it appears to me that he bears a slight resemblance to you, sir. In fact quite a resemblance."

Drake nodded. "I had noticed that. You are certain now, are you, that you could get up in court and identify this man, and swear that he is the one who broke into the house? Here is his name and address."

"Quite, sir," said Biggers after reading the license. "Shall I call the police, sir?"

"Not yet," Drake told him. "You wait down in the hall at the head of the stairs, Biggers. I may have to call the police and I may not. But wait within call. I wish to talk to this intruder."

"Yes, sir," said Biggers, and went out.

"Now then," said Drake, "I guess you see how it is. I've got you and got you cold."

"I see," said Regan.

Drake shifted his gun to the other hand; his eyes narrowed. "All right then. I'll give you your choice. Arrest and prosecution, or performing a little service for me."

Regan raised his eyebrows. "A little service for you? What kind of a service?"

"A letter has come," said Drake slowly, "informing me of an appointment I must keep to-night, before midnight. I do not find it convenient to do so. You look a great deal like me. I want you to take my place."

CHAPTER III

The Rendezvous

"WHY don't you find it convenient to keep the appointment?" Regan asked the man bluntly.

Drake scowled. "That's none of your business. Will you do it, or not?"

"And if I don't?"

"I'll have Biggers send for the police instantly."

Regan hardly needed to think about the matter. He was trapped. Drake's evidence and Biggers' evidence would make things so hot that it was entirely possible that he would draw down a prison term. Burglary, even by the head of a private detective agency, was no light matter. He nodded. "I'll do it," he agreed, "provided I get those letters also."

Drake considered. "All right," he agreed. "Do it and you can have them." He glanced at his wrist watch. "It's getting pretty late. You'll have to hurry. We're about the same build, but I never wear the style of suit you have on. Go in the wardrobe there and get one of the small checks, a shirt, a collar, a tie, a hat and a stick. If you're going to take my place you'll want to look as much like me as possible."

Regan shrugged. "I don't want to, but I suppose I'd better." He went into the wardrobe, selected the articles of clothing and brought them out into the room. Under the threatening muzzle of the gun he changed swiftly. And was forced to admit, as he stood in front of the mirror tying the expensive silk tie, that the clothes did make a difference. And when he set the soft panama hat on his head and turned the brim down slightly, he looked more like a wealthy dilettante than he had ever imagined possible.

Drake surveyed him carefully. "Pretty good," he approved. "Now I suppose you'd better take my car, too. You can drive, can't you?"

"Yes,"

"All right. How are you fixed for

money? Here, better take my wallet."

Drake produced a pigskin wallet, took the personal papers out, leafed through the bills inside, and handed it over.

Regan found almost a hundred dollars inside; noted also that the name James W. Drake was stamped in gold letters on the leather. He put the wallet in the inside pocket of the coat and said: "As long as I'm going to be you, you'd better give me your cigarette lighter and your cigarette case."

"Good idea," Drake approved again. He handed over a gold cigarette case and a gold lighter, and on second thought slipped a ring from a finger of his left hand. "Better wear this, too," he said.

Regan eyed it. It was unusual. A massive seal ring, made in the form of a twining serpent with the seal engraved on the top of the serpent's head. It slipped on his finger easily. He looked regretfully at his clothes lying across the bed. "You'll take good care of those?" he said to Drake.

"Very good care," Drake assured him. "And I don't think I have to tell you the same about mine. You realize of course, that any failure to return with the car and a report of what happens will only make things worse for you. Easy enough to claim, you know, that you broke in the house, stole the clothes and my car and escaped. And of course we can always get on track of you, now that we know your name and address."

"I realize all that. Don't think I'd be doing this if I didn't," Regan assured him shortly. "Now about the appointment. Where is it? Whom am I to see? What am I to do?"

"You are to go," Drake directed, "to the Nanking Restaurant. It's a chop suey and dancing place down on the edge of Chinatown; a second floor joint. You won't have any trouble finding it. Perhaps you know the place?"

"I know where it is. Never been in it, but I can find it all right."

"All right. Go there. Say to the

headwaiter, or whoever meets you when you go in, 'Drake.' That's all. Just 'Drake.' He'll do the rest."

"What is the rest?"

Drake shrugged. "I don't know myself."

"Don't you know who I'm to see?" Regan demanded in amazement.

"I have an idea," Drake admitted. "But I don't know what you'll have to say, or what will be said to you. Just be careful and act as though you are me. If a subject is introduced that you don't know anything about, look wise and stall. Keep your eyes and ears open. I want to know everything that happens."

"It's all mighty funny," Regan said thoughtfully.

"Don't worry about that part of it," Drake ordered impatiently. "You're getting off mighty easy. Most men would have called the police as soon as they found you."

"Am I to come back here as soon as the interview is over?"

Drake looked at him queerly. "Yes," he said slowly. "Come here. I'll wait up for you. Drive the car in, ring the front door bell, and I'll look after you myself. Better take the door key. If no one answers, come right on up. I may fall asleep."

Regan took the front door key that Drake returned to him.

Drake went out in the hall with him. Biggers was standing near the top of the stairs. The butler's eyes widened in amazement when he saw Regan dressed in his master's clothes.

"It's all right, Biggers," Drake told him. "You may go to bed. I have settled matters with this man. He may be back sometime later to-night. If you hear the car come in and the door open you needn't get up unless I ring."

"Very good, sir," said Biggers, and stepped aside.

Drake went only part way down the stairs. "Here's the key to my car," he said, stopping on the landing and passing the key over. "I think that's all now. Be careful."

Chinatown was still awake when Regan parked Drake's expensive car down the block from the Nanking Restaurant. As he stepped out, he became conscious more fully than he ever had before, of the peculiar atmosphere that hovered over this section of slant-eyed Orientals.

The soul of the Orient seemed to be present, standing out apart from the occidental world into which it had been transplanted. One could very easily imagine strange things happening behind the shuttered windows, the closed doors, and the hidden subterranean world that lurked behind the mazes of narrow, dimly-lit streets, black passageways and hidden courts.

The surface that men looked upon was only a veneer, showing as little of what lay behind as the saffron skin of an Oriental face gave clue to the hidden thoughts. One saw shabby buildings, queer little shops, slippered Orientals padding silently along the street. One heard, perhaps, the thin wail of a flute, or haunting strains from a one-stringed instrument. Heard sing-song conversation, or came upon a bit of the West merged in with the Oriental background, such as the Nanking Restaurant, where one might dance to jazz music and sit among ones own countrymen.

Regan locked the car and walked to the lighted entrance where one mounted steps to the Nanking Restaurant above. The strains of jazz came down to meet him.

At the top of the stairs he passed through a door and stopped on the carpet inside, by the cashier's desk, looking about the discreetly lighted room.

It occupied most of the second floor of a respectably-sized building, and was arranged in such a way that one could not see all of the room at once. It was in fact a series of rooms interconnected by large arches. In the center was a polished dance floor. Five Orientals on a dais at one side struggled with the intricacies of American jazz.

Fully half the tables were occupied, practically all by Occidentals.

A slant-eyed Chinese behind the cash register looked at him curiously. Regan paid no attention; did as he had been told, and waited.

A little black-clad man with sleek pomaded hair, and a towel over one arm, came briskly to him and said in excellent English: "Do you wish a table, sir?"

"Drake," said Regan briefly.

The waiter hesitated, eyeing him as though he misunderstood.

"Do you wish a table?" he repeated.

"Drake," said Regan again, briefly.

"Ah," said the waiter. "This way, sir." Without another word he faced about and led Regan to a table over in a far corner. "You wish something to eat?" he inquired blandly.

Regan seated himself, laid his hat and stick across the next chair, and took a sip of water from the glass left by the waiter. He had done as he had been told, and had no idea what was to come of it. Wasn't even sure that his twice-repeated use of the word "Drake" had meant anything at all to the waiter. Certainly no indication of it had appeared on the inscrutable face. However, Drake had told him to speak and then wait.

Regan said to the waiter: "I'll have tea and a light sandwich. Oh yes, and bring me a few *lichee* nuts also."

The waiter nodded and withdrew.

Regan took another sip of water and looked about the room. He saw no one that he knew, and fell to wondering what it was all about.

He had had, he was forced to acknowledge, a very narrow escape from arrest and unwelcome publicity at the hands of James Drake. And still he did not regret that part of it. He would do it all over again. This interview he had been forced into was most queer and unusual. Why, he wondered thoughtfully, had Drake asked him to substitute? Why didn't he want to come himself? Regan had more than a suspicion that this was connected in

some way with the pink letter that Drake had received unexpectedly. What was in that letter? It had affected the man strangely. In what way did his life among the wealthy, ultra-respectable element of the city touch the subterranean secretive existence of Chinatown?

No logical answers offered themselves. There was nothing to do but wait.

The events that did follow were not long in coming. They were fully as startling as the evening had been so far.

The waiter returned presently, the towel still over his arm, and without Regan's order. Impassively he said: "Will you please follow me?"

Regan stood up. Second thought made him retrieve his hat and stick. He had no idea where he was going. It might be that he would not return to this table. The Oriental made no comment on the action. Silently he turned and led the way, skirting the dance floor, across the big room.

No one paid any attention to them. They passed through a door in the opposite wall, walked along a narrow hallway, descended a flight of steps, passed in quick succession three locked doors that opened at a peculiar knock from the guide, and then went down more steps.

Regan kept track of the steps and estimated that now they must be below the level of the first floor, burrowing somewhere into the maze of subterranean passages and rooms that the police well knew lay below Chinatown, and seldom if ever came across.

They were, unless his directions were all mixed up, some distance from the building where the Nanking Restaurant was located when the guide stopped before a heavy teak door. He paused and then quietly pushed against it. The door opened noiselessly and the two entered a large, dimly lighted room.

At first Regan could merely blink in amazement.

CHAPTER IV

The Sentence

FROM the garishness of the restaurant and the plainness of the narrow passages and walled-in stairs that they had traversed, they stepped as though by magic into another world. Into magnificence and luxury that only an Oriental mind could conceive and execute.

The walls of the room were hung with exotic golden tapestries, across which fantastic dragons of old China crawled in black silken embroidery. The floor was of polished hardwood on which lay priceless rugs. There were chairs of ebony, inlaid with gleaming mother-of-pearl; fantastically carved and lacquered tables; stools which held exquisite vases, overflowing with bunches of riotously colored pansies.

One lone table lamp, a vase of clear translucent jadeite, with a parchment shade of gold, diffused a mellow golden light throughout the room.

At first, Regan thought there was no one in the room but the saffron-faced guide and himself. And then, on the rich brocaded cover of a couch against the end wall, he saw a figure sitting cross-legged. And he caught his breath and his eyes widened. For never had Regan viewed such a sight as now confronted him.

It was a young woman. A girl. Of mortal flesh and blood, although it took a second look to really make sure of the fact.

Like some exquisite fragile bit of statuary out of the romantic past, she sat straight and immovable. A poem in soft lines and curves. A song in exotic beauty.

A lovely kimono of pool-green silk, embroidered with lotus flowers, enfolded the curves of her figure. Dark hair drawn sleekly back into little whorls on each side of her head balanced the delicately chiseled features of her face. The soft flow of golden light through the parchment lampshade painted an ethereal glow over

cheeks in which the faint color of life lay softly.

Her mouth was small and very red. Her cheekbones a little high, as they usually are in women of her race. And back of her ethereal beauty was the serenity and calmness of a passionate being under perfect control. Long dark lashes veiled the steady gaze that she directed on him.

Regan stood there and stared, not knowing what to make of her or what to do. And the saffron-faced Oriental who had brought him remained there also, waiting.

She spoke in Chinese. The words were very like the delicate tinkle of temple bells in a spring breeze. What she said was so much Greek to Regan, but the guide bowed low and departed, closing the teakwood door carefully.

Regan waited, growing more bewildered every moment.

Their eyes met, and held for a moment. And then she addressed him in perfect English.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Drake. It is"—she glanced at a small jeweled wrist watch on her left wrist—"just lacking forty-five minutes of midnight. I have been wondering whether you would be foolish enough not to come."

Regan drew a breath, and spoke the truth: "If I had known what I was coming to, I would have been here sooner."

Too late he saw that the words were not in keeping with the character he had assumed. Her eyebrows lifted slightly.

"Surely," she said evenly, in that fascinating bell-like voice, "you were not unaware that you would see me?"

"I was hoping so," Regan assured her cautiously.

"I wonder," she commented, "how much hoping you really did."

He made no answer to that.

"Sit down, please." She indicated a massive inlaid chair a few feet away.

Regan went to it and sat down, laying his hat and stick on the floor beside the chair. His eyes kept straying back

to her. He could not help it. Who was she? What was his business with her? Whatever it was, it suddenly assumed fascinating interest. How was it, he marveled, that Drake could have passed up a meeting with this young woman?

Regan waited to see what her reaction to his presence would be. Would she detect his substitution for Drake?

The soft golden glow that filled the room was not conducive to a sharp scrutiny of suspected features. In the bright glare of unshaded electric bulbs or the merciless light of the sun the difference between him and the real Drake would be far more easily detected.

Regan became conscious of her intent scrutiny. She said abruptly: "You have changed."

It was what he had feared. He looked a great deal like Drake, but not enough to fool one who knew Drake well. It was possible, of course, to state flatly that he was Drake, and that she was mistaken. The lie did not come easily; did not come at all, in fact.

He merely said noncommittally: "Do you think so?"

"I do," she answered. "The more I look at you the greater seems the change."

"I suppose," said Regan in the same noncommittal tone, "we all change more or less. I've lost some weight lately"—which was the truth. "Been doing some exercise also." Which was also the truth.

"Perhaps that explains it," she said slowly. "You look leaner, more fit. You look more like," she hesitated, and then finished, "the man your mother would have liked you to be."

"Mothers," said Regan, "expect a great deal."

"And fathers, too." Her eyes seemed for the moment to raise above his head and stare into space, as though she was seeing something beyond the room, beyond the moment.

Regan became aware of the soft *flap-flap* of slipped feet. He looked

around quickly, saw that the teakwood door had been opened silently, and an Oriental was coming across the floor bearing a tray.

"I took the liberty," the girl said, "of having your order brought here. You can eat while we talk. It will, I hope, be agreeable to you."

Regan answered the politeness in her voice with courtesy equally as great. "It will be a pleasure."

No muscle of her face or change of glance showed that she noticed. She spoke in singsong Chinese to the waiter. Regan had to admire again the crystal clarity of her voice. It was very noticeable when she shifted from flat English to the delicate tonal syllables of Chinese.

The bearer of the tray deposited his burden on one of the lacquer tables against the wall and *slapped-slapped* across the room to a smaller table. He brought this over and set it beside the couch, and then put the tray on it.

The tray held tea, a small sandwich, a dish of *lichee* nuts, another of little almond cakes, and two fragile cups.

The girl nodded imperceptibly. The man withdrew.

With delicate, birdlike motions she poured tea for both of them, and passed the almond cakes.

Regan added a little lemon to his pale tea and found it good.

"Good tea," he observed, "is one of the blessings of mankind."

She raised her eyes to him. "My people have a saying," she said gravely, "that good words are like a string of pearls."

Regan smiled. "Does that mean that I've just given you a string of pearls?"

Still gravely she returned: "'He shall reap hemp who sows hemp, and beans who sows beans.' Your own heart knows the value of your words."

This fencing with words was agreeable to Regan. He would have liked to continue it all night. But she changed the subject.

"Did you tell anyone you were coming here to-night?"

"No," said Regan.

The soft scent of perfume was in his nostrils; the rich quiet of the room was pleasant. This task he had been forced into was suddenly interesting, intriguing. Regan marveled that Drake should have passed it up. What was there between the two, he wondered. Who was this young woman? What did she want with him? Or rather with the real Drake, whose place he was taking.

Nothing to do but sit quiet, say as little as possible, and wait for what might come. It took a distinct effort of will not to ask questions, however.

Her eyes regarded him steadily as she drank her tea. Regan, meeting the glance, smiled at her.

She did not return the smile. A hint of chill crept into her voice as she observed: "My father has been dead three months to-day."

Regan felt a twinge of pity that this lovely girl should be desolated by the contact of death. He said to her, and meant it: "I am sorry."

She set her cup down slowly. "It has been my intention that you should be," she stated distinctly.

Regan was puzzled. What did she mean? Why should Drake be sorry?

Little more was said as they finished their tea and he ate part of the sandwich and munched a few *lichee* nuts. Vaguely he sensed that there was something he should know about and did not. Something she supposed he knew. But what was it?

A moment came when she set her cup on the tray with a gesture of finality, folded her hands in her lap, and stared at him silently.

Regan also put his cup aside, and met her gaze. He had no feeling of being rude. She seemed to will it. His uneasiness and curiosity grew.

The hour, he judged, was after midnight. How much longer was he expected to stay? What else was going to happen? Surely he had not come here merely to sit and look at her, to drink tea and eat almond cakes? Something else was behind the visit. Was it, he wondered, with a feeling that approached distaste, a love affair? Not with Drake, he hoped. Anything but that.

Long seconds passed as they looked at each other. Her eyes were weighing him, studying him, probing behind his features. She spoke suddenly, and her words were as crisp and cold as the contact of ice against cut glass.

"It is now after midnight," she declared. "Three months since my father died." She looked at her jeweled wrist watch. "Twelve minutes after midnight, to be precise. I have been informed that this is the moment when he departed from this life."

"Yes," said Regan politely, wondering what could be behind all this.

"It is my pleasure, Mr. James Drake, to inform you that you have just five minutes to live."

(To be continued in the next issue.)



To a glamorous, uncharted wilderness came a man with a fortune—to hide. There came another man—to steal.



HOOKED

By Roland Phillips

FROM the doorway of his shack, some distance back from the shore, Gilson watched the approach of the unknown dinghy. It made a sluggish passage through the drifting, cloudlike masses of purple hyacinths that all but choked the mouth of the lagoon. A hulk of a man squatted at the wheel. He wore a coat, a Panama hat was pulled down over his face, shading it from the fierce white glare of sun and water.

Both hat and coat, incongruous to the district, instantly caught and held Gilson's attention. When he saw that the stranger intended to land, his lean form stiffened and grimness settled upon his tanned countenance.

Few visitors traveled his way. Occasional fishermen went past at intervals, their boats heaped with nets. Now

and again a lone Seminole was seen, clad in gaudy skirts, poling himself toward some distant camp in the 'Glades. Once a revenue cutter had ventured to the very mouth of the lagoon. Shots had been fired, too; but Gilson had not learned of the business at hand. Smuggling, no doubt. Not rum or dope, but Chinamen—"pieces of silk" in the vernacular of the trade.

A glamorous, uncharted wilderness of land and water, this strip of lower Florida West coast, with its fringe of countless mangrove keys sprinkled like emeralds upon the azure bosom of the Gulf: a paradise for sportsmen, an enchanted playground for bored yachtsmen who preferred white flannels to red and followed the sun when winter came to the North; a refuge for those who stood not upon the order of their going.

Into this haven, a few months before, Gilson had made his leisured way, quite familiar with the country from other visits during the season. To hunt a little, fish a great deal, read, marvel at the glories of sunrise and sunset—and to wait. All of that he sought, and found. Only the last was difficult.

Now, long and speculatively, he stared at the oncoming craft. Within a dozen yards of shore the engine of the dinghy began to sputter. The helmsman turned and bent over it. Gilson saw him sway, then suddenly sprawl headlong, his shoulder striking the wheel. The boat, still under way, swung about, nosed into the mangroves and disappeared.

Gilson waited. There were no further sounds except the croak of wheeling gulls along the shore and the chatter of mockingbirds that infested the bamboo thickets nearby. Half an hour later, puzzled by the continued silence, he left the shack and descended to the beach. He swung along the sand, a lithe, bronzed figure in none too white trousers and sleeveless jersey, heading toward the spot where the boat and its apparently stricken occupant had vanished.

Pushing through the mangroves he blundered upon the boat almost before he was aware of it; halted. The man lay outstretched below the wheel. His crushed hat concealed one side of his face. One arm was doubled under him, the other hung over the gunwale, rocking to the almost imperceptible lift of the tide. Its hand was pudge, dead white, and a diamond flashed on one of the fingers.

Gilson stood motionless a long time, contemplating the prostrate form. In the silence, the brown army of fiddler crabs that had scuttled off at his approach, returned. After the moment of deliberation, he stepped forward, reached down and took hold of the man's shoulder. And swiftly, as if he had come to life at the touch, the man uncoiled, barked a sharp command.

"Stay put, Gilson! Hands up!"

Gilson drew back as a gun, whipped into view, menaced him. His mouth went dry and his pulse drummed; but only for an instant. As his hands slowly ascended, his mind cleared. Recognition steadied him. He had often anticipated just this situation. . . .

"Got you!" The man laughed triumphantly as he heaved himself erect. "About face till I frisk you! Lively now!"

Gilson obeyed without hesitation or protest. He felt the man's hands pawing over his body.

"All right. Thought you'd be packing a rod."

Turning back with lowered arms, Gilson's gray eyes probed his captor's white, flabby face. The man returned the steady scrutiny with a provocative grin.

"Maybe you've seen me before, eh?" he queried.

"Maybe I have," Gilson responded. Bitter, unsavory recollections stirred in his mind. "The name's—Freer. You shot at me one night, six months ago."

"And missed."

"Intentionally."

The other shrugged. "Think so?"

"You had a lot to say—afterward. It was good copy for the newspapers and it backed up Spangler's story. As a member of the New York detective force—"

"I've resigned," Freer inserted.

"By request," Gilson supplemented.

"I'm in the racket for myself now," the detective rejoined, his thick lips smiling. "Private practice. There's more in it, for a smart man like me."

"So I imagine. You've made a long jump from Broadway."

"That's your fault, Gilson. You're some little jumper yourself. The trouble is," Freer went on easily, "you didn't jump far enough and didn't think it necessary to take a new moniker. Finding you was nothing but a holiday for me. Now you'll be taking one—a long one—in a resort where you ain't likely to get sunburned.

"What was your idea of the play acting?"

"Just to outsmart you. I knew you'd be shy of visitors and likely take a run-out powder if you saw some one land here. So I played dead, figuring you'd come prowling around, in due time, and save me a lot of leg work. I'm not so good at that these days."

"You wouldn't be," Gilson said, surveying the man's paunchy figure. "But you might have saved yourself the dramatics. I'm not running away."

"No?" Freer taunted. "Well, you did once. You certainly made a snappy getaway with old man Bradley's Liberties, after all but croaking Spangler and—"

"And completely spoiling your setup," Gilson broke in. "That's what hurt the most, wasn't it?"

Freer laughed. "What do you think you know?"

"Plenty."

"And what good'll it do you now?"

"You may be surprised," Gilson answered.

"Yeah? Well, go ahead and surprise me. It's been a long time coming. You been buried here since you left New York?"

"Most of the time," Gilson admitted.

"A neat place for a hideout. Lots of fresh air and sunshine and nobody to bother you. Fishing's good, ain't it? I'd like to catch me a tarpon. Bradley and Spangler claim it's hard to do." The detective laughed. "But they told me you'd be hard to catch, too. Wasn't. Never even got one jump out of you."

Freer continued to chuckle as he mopped at his perspiring face, although the snout of the revolver, held level with Gilson's waist, did not waver.

But Gilson had no eyes for the gun. A new and disturbing problem had suddenly confronted him.

"How did you get down here?" he demanded.

"On Bradley's yacht. Some swell scow, all right. We come down from New Orleans. Anchored a couple

miles above here—Flamingo Cove, I think they call it. The old man's itching to send you up for a rap and get back his property. That's why he engaged me. I'm high priced, but I usually get results."

"And Spangler's aboard?"

"Sure; him and Bradley's daughter."

Gilson's breath quickened. "Gwen—Miss Bradley?"

"That's what I'm telling you. The girl's the one who tipped us off—put me on your trail."

Gilson's hands clenched. "I don't believe that."

"How'd you suppose we got a line on you, then?" Freer shrugged. "You wrote the girl a letter—that's how dumb you was. Postmarked Marco. Never thought of that, eh? Our job was just a matter of visiting the few settlements below there and asking questions. I got the old man to do that—nobody would mistake him for a dick. They don't travel in private yachts. Besides, Bradley's known in this section, fishing here every winter."

"When we got down as far as Flamingo, the first guy we bumped into put us wise. He offered to bring me here, but I always do the fancy work alone. After I got the directions, I rented this tug and—"

The detective left his sentence unfinished, suddenly aware that his prisoner wasn't listening. Gilson stood looking off, far off beyond the high, mop-headed palms that lifted themselves against the hot, turquoise blue of sky. His eyes were curiously alight, his body taut.

"Come out of it!" Freer snapped crossly. "We've done enough chinning. Let's push off. You got the bonds cached around here, ain't you?"

Gilson nodded absently, without looking at the speaker.

"Good. Dig 'em up and we'll be traveling."

Now Gilson's eyes swung down to the level of Freer's bleak, heavy-lidded ones. "It won't go any harder for me without them."

"It might. You got a fifteen-twenty year stretch ahead of you. Better come across with the stuff. Maybe the old man would weaken a little if he got back his engravings."

"Think so?" Gilson ventured.

"Sure. And I guess I could talk Spangler into cooling off, too. We're friendly."

Gilson did not seem to be impressed. He studied the matted green of the jungle; watched the snow-white herons that winged lazily above it. Freer eyed him narrowly.

"You got nothing out of this trick so far's I can see," he intimated. "You ought to think of yourself a little."

"That's what I'm doing," Gilson answered.

"I'm damned if I can make you out." The detective scowled and shifted his weight from one foot to another. "You grab off fifty thousand, make a clean getaway and then bury yourself in this stinking hole—"

"I've found it most desirable here," Gilson interrupted.

"Yeah? Well, maybe so, if you're fed up on the white lights. The bonds aren't registered," Freer went on, switching the conversation into more pertinent channels, "and Spangler tells me there's no record of the numbers."

"He was assured of that," Gilson said. "He meant to play safe."

"You don't seem a bad sort," the detective pursued, choosing to overlook the barbed remark. "Tough to see a young chap like you doing time. Fifty grand's just chicken feed to Bradley. Maybe—maybe we could come to an understanding," he added pointedly.

"Understanding?" Gilson repeated.

"Sure. Just between the two of us. Get me, don't you? Needn't play dumb. Bradley hasn't much hope of recovering his property. I guess he's already written it off. What's a little in the red to him? I ain't getting much out of this trick myself and I ain't got nothing against you personally."

"That's a great load off my mind," Gilson observed cynically.

Freer scowled. "I'm collecting so much—win, lose or draw," he admitted. "It won't sugar no bread for me, packing you back to the yacht and handing over the Liberties."

"But you'll collect the glory—add to your already enviable reputation," Gilson reminded him. "You always get your man. Isn't that sufficient reward?"

"Aw, forget it," Freer snapped. "You know what I'm driving at. I could go back to Bradley and tell him you'd vanished, leaving no trail. Tell him there was no use trying to find you now. He'd take my word for it all right. You keep one of the bonds and beat it to Cuba. I'll pocket the rest."

"I've been waiting for you to come out with that proposition," Gilson said quietly. "Come along to the shack."

The detective, apparently amazed by his easy victory, stiffened.

"No tricks, now," he warned.

"What can I do?" Gilson asked mildly. "I'm unarmed."

"You might have a rod at the house."

"I haven't. Nothing but a shotgun and I'm out of shells."

Freer edged forward, suspicion lurking in his agatelike eyes.

"I'm warning you," he repeated. "You keep close and watch your step. Try anything funny with me and I'll bore you sure."

He fell in step behind his prisoner. Gilson did not once turn around. When they reached the shack, buried deep among the palms and creepers, he stepped briskly into the single room it contained.

Freer hesitated in the doorway, swiftly scanning the interior. On a shelf beside the cot was a photograph. The detective's gaze lingered upon it. "Ain't that Bradley's daughter?" he inquired.

"It is," Gilson answered.

"Huh, still soft on the girl?" Freer grimaced. "Fat chance you got! She's marrying Spangler."

Gilson made no comment. He crossed the room, reached into a niche above

the palmetto log rafters, and from a recess there, deliberate and unhurried, extracted a large, bulging envelope.

He returned to the table where Freer stood and pitched the envelope upon it, as casually as he would have tossed a discarded newspaper.

"There you are," he announced. "Five of them—ten thousand each. You better count them—make sure of what you're getting this time. If Spangler had taken that precaution six months ago," he added, smiling a little, "you would have been spared a trip down here."

The detective did not seem to hear. His glistening, covetous eyes swept to the envelope. His lips parted and his left hand went out to close upon the wealth that had been tossed before him.

In that brief, unguarded moment, Gilson acted. He launched himself across the rickety table and imprisoned Freer's lax gun hand. The gun exploded harmlessly. Before it could be fired again, he had wrenched the weapon from the detective's fingers and sent it spinning through the window.

Simultaneously the two crashed to the floor, the table splintering beneath them. The struggle that followed might have been brief and swiftly decisive, had not Gilson's head, as he fell, crashed against the iron leg of the cot. The impact gashed his flesh, stunned him momentarily. Blood spurted.

Freer bellowed, disentangled himself and spat a fist into the wound. Unhurt, the detective lurched to his feet, looked hopefully about him for the gun.

Pawing the blood from his eyes, Gilson reared and closed again with his enemy. They clinched, broke away, lashing savagely at one another. Gilson was the taller, stronger and younger; but the blow he had received weakened his punches. He was half blinded, groggy, yet he continued to hammer away at the puffy white face that swam before him.

Freer, soft and flabby, apparently unused to physical encounter, grew winded. He wheezed and panted at each thrust, bubbling oaths, and his huge fists dealt punishment. Gilson realized that but a fraction of his own blows landed. The detective seemed unusually agile for one of his bulk.

They staggered about the little room, overturning the furniture, bringing up against the frail walls with a thud that jarred the shack. Gilson grew weaker, fainter. Freer's bobbing face, runneled with sweat and blood, seemed blurred. Gilson swore and gritted his teeth. He couldn't go under now. That would be the end. He knew what to expect at Freer's hands.

The detective crowded him into a corner, sank his fists low. Gilson, writhing, aware that his knees were sagging under him, managed to whip a knotted, despairing fist through the other's guard. His knuckles smacked against bone. He saw Freer's head snap back, saw him totter and spin half around. Stumbling forward, putting everything he had in the next effort, Gilson delivered a second blow at the same elusive target.

Freer's chin cracked as the knuckles landed again. He went over backward, clawing at the air. His fall shook the floor. Gilson keeled over against the wall, slipped down it. He lay there a moment, the breath sawing between his clenched teeth, fighting desperately against the nausea that threatened to engulf him.

He succeeded, presently, in getting upon his feet, wiping the red mist from his eyes. Freer sprawled where he had fallen and gave no sign of life. With a mind that functioned jerkily, Gilson stared about him for the gun. It wasn't in sight. He decided it had been pitched through the window into the thicket beyond. He was too groggy, too near spent now to search for it. Another, greater task confronted him.

He dropped to his knees beside the senseless man and began to explore Freer's pockets. He came upon a pair

of handcuffs and a moment later found the key to them. Slowly and with infinite effort he reached for the detective's wrist, snapped one of the bracelets upon it; but now he discovered that the man's other arm was doubled beneath him, the whole of his two hundred pounds of dead weight upon it.

Gilson tugged and wrenched. The arm refused to budge. He gripped the man's shoulder and attempted to roll him over, but that was equally impossible. Gilson swore at his ebbing strength, sank back exhausted.

Now he found himself staring at the key on the floor. His hand reached out to cover the bit of shining metal. He must get rid of it. The room, through which the hot sunlight poured, blurred steadily, like a picture out of focus. Something must be done—done quickly. Freer mustn't have another chance. There was too much at stake.

If he went under—if the detective came to his senses first—Panic swept him, whipped his lagging pulse. His dimming eyes made out, almost beside him amid the wreckage of the table, the envelope containing the bonds. Fifty thousand there! He couldn't hide them now—couldn't even get up. Still he reached toward the valuables, felt them beneath his shaky fingers.

The room was spinning. In another minute he would be gone. He fancied he heard Freer groan, heard his foot scrape across the floor. Again panic touched him. Out of it was birthed a daring plan.

Turning, he groped for the unsprung cuff, lifted it, and with a supreme effort, snapped it about his left wrist. As the lock clicked, his lips framed a wry smile; and still smiling, he sank back resignedly, welcoming the curtain of oblivion that shut out the blazing, sunlit world.

II

A SHARP tug at his wrist, a rumbling voice, brought Gilson to his senses again. His eyes snapped open.

He struggled erect, drew in a breath and passed a hand across his face. He winced as his finger encountered raw flesh—and instantly remembered things. Except for a throbbing head, he did not feel so badly. His mind was clearing. Sitting there, he contemplated his skinned knuckles; looked up presently to meet the detective's wrathful countenance.

"W-what the hell's this mean?" Freer exploded truculently, shaking his fettered wrist as if to dislodge its ornament.

"What does it look like?" Gilson returned placidly. "You're hooked, that's all. Didn't want you to stray off while I napped."

Freer gasped and sputtered, apparently still dazed. He glared dully at the cuff that pinched the white flesh of his wrist, and at the short length of chilled steel chain that linked it to Gilson's. He fell quiet; and presently his left hand edged stealthily toward his waistband pocket.

"No use, Freer!" Gilson exclaimed. "The key's gone!"

"Where?"

"I got rid of it."

The detective lunged swiftly, his shaking fingers reaching for Gilson's throat. "You fork it over or—"

Gilson struck the hand aside. "Easy now," he admonished. "I'm not fool enough to have the key on me. The gun's gone, too. That puts us on a fairly equal footing, doesn't it?"

Freer sank back, breathing hard. "What do you mean to do?"

"We'll stick together for a while."

"What for? What good—?"

"My own good. Because I don't trust you."

The man's perplexed, glowering eyes swept from Gilson's stern face; they traveled over the wreckage on the floor and became fixed upon the envelope that lay inviting within arm's reach.

"I don't get your idea," he mumbled at length.

"I said I didn't trust you," Gilson repeated steadily. "Don't you get that?"

You're a cheap, grafting, double-dealing rat, Freer. You're lower than a crook. You don't want me—never wanted me. You want these securities. That's what you've been after all the time. You thought you'd played me for a sucker—baited me. Looked easy, didn't it? If I hadn't hopped you when I did, you'd have emptied your gun into me. You'd have pocketed the bonds and gone back to Bradley with a fairy story about not being able to find me. A neat morning's job—and profitable!"

Freer broke into a contemptuous laugh. "Rot! I sprung that bribe to get you to produce the stuff. That's my system—and most of the time it works. You fell hard and plenty. Your sort do when cornered. I was all set to put the bracelets on you and take you back to the yacht, when—"

"Yeah? Gilson broke in. "Well, you'll have the chance. I'm making it easy for you, Freer. The only difference is that we're going fifty-fifty on the bracelets. That won't be any great hardship, will it?"

The detective stared incredulously at his companion. "What's that? You mean you—you're going back to the yacht?"

"I do. I'm fairly certain of getting there—alive—hooked to you," Gilson added.

"What's your racket?" Freer eyed him skeptically. "It's something. You ain't crazy enough to give yourself up now."

"If I hadn't been, why didn't I polish you off when I had a chance? Why didn't I clear out with the fifty thousand? Why did I hitch myself to you?"

Freer scowled, unable to solve the riddle. "Just the same," he mumbled, "there's something wrong."

"There's a great deal that's wrong," Gilson assured him promptly. "Maybe that's where you're right."

The cryptic statement brought a shrug from the detective. He let his fingers stray over his cut and battered

cheek, touched them to his swollen, plum-colored jaw.

"We better start traveling," Gilson said. He got upon his feet. To ease the sudden strain of his wrist, Freer scrambled erect. The men stood a moment, stretching their cramped limbs.

"What about—these?" Freer asked. His heavy, square-toed shoes nudged the package of bonds on the floor.

"They're going with us, of course," said Gilson. "Put them in your pocket."

The detective did so. His hand was shaking. He wet his lips and glanced searchingly at his companion. "I'd like to know what you're up to," he growled.

"I told you, didn't I?"

"You're lying."

Gilson ignored that, turned and started through the doorway. Freer trotted after him, the chain clinking between them. When they descended to the shore and followed it along to where the boat had been left among the mangroves, they saw no trace of it.

"Tide's carried it out," Gilson said, unperturbed.

"You got one, haven't you?" Freer asked quickly.

Gilson did not commit himself. "We'll walk. It's shorter around by land. Besides"—he glanced at the detective's bulky form—"the exercise will do you good. Sweat off some of the lard."

"How far's Flamingo from here?"

"Maybe five miles."

"I can't walk that far," the detective grumbled.

Gilson didn't seem to hear. Without a word he started off along the beach. Freer struggled after him, protesting. When they left the sand, and Gilson plunged into what seemed to be a sheer wall of jungle, the detective cried out:

"Wait! I got something in my shoe."

Freer sank down in the brush and Gilson sat beside him, so that the man could have the use of both hands. The shoe was unlaced, removed. Gilson

seemed preoccupied, indifferent; looked away. Freer, holding the shoe by the toe, shook it out. Suddenly his grip upon it tightened and he swung the thing viciously through the air. The thick, heavy heel caught Gilson squarely back of the ear. He went over as if a bullet had flattened him.

With an exultant snarl, Freer dropped the improvised bludgeon, flung himself upon his prostrate victim and began turning out his pockets. There were none in Gilson's thin jersey, and but two in his trousers. Freer raked them swiftly, frantically, spilled their contents upon the ground. No key came to light. He swore and ripped off Gilson's canvas shoes, probed them. They gave up nothing.

The detective sank back, trembling, bathed in sweat. Then presently, glancing down at Gilson, he saw the man was awake, watching him intently.

"Satisfied, are you?" Gilson inquired. "Found out I spoke the truth, didn't you? I told you I didn't have the key."

Apparently little worse for the blow he had received, Gilson drew on his shoes. That done, he stood up, yanking the sullen detective erect.

"Now get this, Freer!" he snapped ominously. "You can't break away from me. Don't try it again. It might be serious. This hardware is on us to stay till we reach the yacht. You're a long way from help. You don't want to be linked to a cripple or a corpse. You couldn't pack me far. Just think that over."

Freer's mottled face darkened, but he must have realized that Gilson spoke the truth. "What are you up to?" he choked wrathfully. "Where are you heading? You're not making for the yacht."

"We'll be aboard before dark."

"Stop bluffing. You ain't giving yourself up."

"We're going back—both of us."

"If I don't show up"—the detective leered, seeming to find a crumb of comfort in the thought—"they'll be sending after me."

"I'll save them the trouble."

Gilson looked down to spy the shoe Freer had removed. With a kick he sent it sailing far into the underbrush. The detective let out a cry and began cursing.

"I—I can't walk like this," he protested vehemently.

"You'll get used to it. Come along."

Gilson started ahead. Freer, still protesting, hobbled after him, his short legs endeavoring to keep pace with those of the tall man beside him. When he dared lag, the steady, relentless pull on the chain drove the rim of the cuff into his soft wrist.

The going became more and more difficult. They plowed through an endless tangle of jungle growth that raked at their flesh and tore at their clothes; splashed through stagnant, slimy pools. Clouds of insects swarmed about them, followed them greedily. In the thick hummocks the sun was obscured, the air stifling; but in the open spaces it beat down upon them fiercely, fairly crackling against their bodies.

When, some immeasurable time later, they came to a broad lagoon that threatened to bar their passage, Gilson unhesitatingly plunged in, waist-deep, neck-deep, finally resorted to swimming, towing Freer after him.

The frightened detective bellowed and gurgled, his arms and legs thrashing in sheer panic. The water closed his mouth. He left a stream of bubbles behind him. They emerged on the opposite bank, clothes dripping, caked with slime and weeds. There Freer, choking and exhausted, went down, sprawling in the mud.

"Buck up!" Gilson ordered. "We're nearly half way."

Unmindful of the other's protestations, he jerked the groaning man erect and the journey was resumed. Gilson seemed immune to fatigue, to the sweltering heat and insects. But not so Freer. His oaths became threats, changed finally into whimperings. His shoeless foot was cut and bleeding. He hobbled painfully, weaving from side

to side. The steel cuff had chafed his wrist to the quick. Blood oozed from it, trickling along his fingers.

On and on, Gilson set the pace. They scrambled over fallen logs, struggled through high sawgrass, crawled beneath matted vines. The detective's face grew dead white, his eyes were half closed, his head lolled drunkenly, his breath rasped and rattled in his fat throat. Repeatedly he stumbled and fell; repeatedly he was jerked to his feet, dragged ahead.

Ages later, it must have seemed to Freer, his tortured, middle-aged knees buckled under him and he collapsed. This time Gilson sank beside him, his eyes straying off among the thinning trees.

A long time afterward the detective shuddered. His eyes twitched open and he rolled them toward Gilson.

"I'm—through," he wheezed faintly. "If you want to go on you—you'll have to pack me."

Gilson smiled. "You should have thought of that before," he replied. "It's too late now."

"Too—late?" the other croaked vaguely.

Gilson pointed off through the slanted, gray-boled coconuts whose feathery heads were tossing. Beyond them lay open water that gleamed in the afternoon sunlight. "There's the yacht."

Freer jerked himself erect to verify that incredible announcement. He stared a moment at the trim, white yacht, then cut his eyes sharply toward Gilson. Doubt and confoundment lurked back of their heavy lids.

"You going through with this—this thing?" he demanded.

"I told you so."

"Don't be a fool! You still got a chance. You know what's coming to you when we get aboard. Take these damned cuffs off before we're spotted and—"

"You know I haven't the key."

"You're lying!" Freer flung back.

Without answering, Gilson gripped the chain and yanked the tottering man

to his feet; and still without words, he led him down to the beach.

"You'll sweat for this," Freer ground between his teeth.

He bellowed lustily, waved his arm. Figures appeared on the deck of the yacht beyond. Two men, running aft, dropped into a small boat and put off. The one at the wheel, in uniform, looked to be a ship's officer. The other man Gilson recognized as Mr. Bradley's secretary, Spangler.

The dinghy grounded. Freer splashed toward it.

"Got him, did you?" Spangler sang out; but he scowled as he spoke, as if the spectacle of chain-linked detective and prisoner was somewhat disquieting.

"Looks that way, don't it?" Freer responded and jerked on the chain. "Step lively, you!"

Gilson, amused by the other's suddenly authoritative tone and behavior, needed no urging. He climbed over the gunwale and found himself confronting the thin, sallow-faced secretary who, clad in immaculate linen, surveyed him with an insolent grin.

"Glad to see you again, Gilson," Spangler remarked. "Have an enjoyable vacation down here?"

"Most enjoyable," Gilson assured him pleasantly. "It's turned out to be ideal." He smiled, his teeth showing white in his brown face.

"Sit down!" barked Freer.

Still smiling, Gilson obeyed. His eyes swung toward the distant yacht and rested upon the two figures—a man and a girl—who stood at the rail.

Freer and Spangler were talking together—the secretary bubbling with questions; but the prisoner, his heart racing, was oblivious to the conversation.

The boat shot across the placid, sun-drenched bay and reached the landing platform that swung at the yacht's aft.

"Get up," Freer ordered.

Gilson did not hesitate. He fairly dragged the lumbering detective out of the boat and up the ladder. Spangler and the officer followed more leisurely.

REACHING the deck, Gilson halted, a curious tightening in his throat. Mr. Bradley, tall, gray haired, freshly sunburned, favored him with a prolonged cynical glance that traveled slowly from head to foot. There was an unmistakable glint of satisfaction in his dark eyes, a touch of grim pleasure on his thin, hard lips.

A ruthless, implacable man, Bradley; a fighter in business and out of it, despite his years.

But Gilson's hungry eyes swept past him to the girl—a slim, radiant girl in sports clothes, who stood uncertainly back of her father. Her hands were clenched, a wistful, almost frightened look upon her blanched countenance. The sight of her, so long denied him, aroused a longing in his tired body.

Out of the pregnant silence that had fallen, Freer spoke.

"Here's your man, Mr. Bradley," he announced. "Told you I'd get him, if he was gettable. Had a rotten time of it. My dinghy drifted off while I was subduing this bird—so I had to make him bring me back by land. It was a slow, tough trip," he added, as if suddenly aware of his unprepossessing appearance.

"And the bonds?" Bradley demanded sharply.

The detective shook his head. "Sorry. Gilson claims he got rid of them long ago. Don't believe it. I searched his premises carefully, what a time I had. Didn't find anything. Chances are he's cached them somewhere."

Gilson heard that amazing falsehood without a perceptible change of expression. He still had eyes only for the silent, bewildered girl; gazed with a rapt, breathless intensity into her white face, seeking to read what must have been passing through her mind.

"That's most unfortunate," Bradley observed. "No doubt we can get hold of the securities later. Better remove those handcuffs, Freer," he advised. "Your wrist looks badly."

"Afraid we'll have to use a file, if we can't pick the lock," the detective ex-

plained glibly. "I got rid of the key—pitched it into the water—once the irons were on. Taking no chances of the prisoner maybe getting the best of me and escaping on the way here."

"Smart idea," agreed Spangler. Gilson said nothing.

"Didn't you have a gun?" Bradley asked.

"I lost it overboard. Made no difference," Freer added.

Gilson still said nothing, seemed uninterested.

"Anything to say for yourself, Gilson?" Bradley turned upon him.

"A little." The prisoner looked up. "I'd like to know how you got trace of me here."

"Freer located you."

"Freer claimed Gwen supplied the information, after receiving my letter."

"Letter?" Bradley repeated, and glanced questioningly at his daughter.

"I've never received a word from you, Robert," the girl spoke up quickly. Color mounted into her cheeks.

Gilson smiled. "I knew you hadn't. I told Freer as much."

"We never discussed the matter," the detective shot back.

"Then how did you get track of me?"

"That's part of my business," Freer said evasively.

"You shouldn't have committed yourself this morning. However, I did write to Miss Bradley in New York. The letter was mailed, as you said, in Marco. Obviously it fell into other hands and was made prompt use of. In no other way could you have learned of my whereabouts. I'm quoting you, Freer."

"Rot," Freer flung out.

"In that letter," Gilson pursued, ignoring the retort, "I told Miss Bradley I had the bonds and would see they were returned as soon—"

"You—what?" Bradley exclaimed.

"I hesitated to return them to your New York address, until I was assured you would receive them personally, Mr. Bradley. I hoped Gwen would answer my letter, let me know you

were back home. As she did not—for the very good reason she never received the letter—there was nothing for me to do but mark time. I knew you would be in these waters soon, so I waited. It was not until Freer showed up today that I learned of your arrival.”

“You confess to slugging Spangler, taking the bonds and running off here?” Freer charged.

“I admit punishing Spangler, taking the securities and coming here,” Gilson acknowledged calmly.

“And on top of that you expect us to swallow a yarn about how you meant to return the stolen property later?” the detective jeered. “That’s rich, that is.”

Miss Bradley moved uncertainly toward the prisoner. “Robert,” she faltered. “What are you saying? I—I can’t believe—” her voice wavered and broke and her eyes filled with sudden tears.

“If you’ll let me explain—” Gilson began.

“Why bother?” Freer snapped. “You can’t talk yourself out of this. I’ll take him below, Mr. Bradley, and work on these irons.”

“Perhaps it will be just as well to hear what the accused has to say first,” Bradley said quietly, his eyes searching Gilson’s brown face. “Go on.”

“It’s a waste of time,” Spangler protested.

“You will permit me to be the judge of that,” the yacht owner returned. “Go ahead, Gilson. We’re listening.”

“I’ll be as brief as possible,” Gilson began. “After I said good-bye to you and Gwen at the pier the night you sailed, I discovered I’d left an envelope containing some important data at your house. As I was to leave for the South early the next morning, and needed the papers, I decided to return for them. It was considerably after midnight when I reached your house, but I saw a dim light in your study and wondered at it. I went to the service entrance, aroused one of the servants, explained my errand, and after being ad-

mitted, told the man I would get my property without him bothering to accompany me.

“I found the envelope where I had left it in the library, and was on my way out, when I suddenly recalled the light I had seen burning in the study. I went along the lower hall and quietly opened the door. There I saw Spangler in front of the safe. He saw me at the same time, but I closed with him, knocked the gun from his hand, and in the struggle that followed, gave him a severe drubbing. When I discovered the package of bonds on the floor, I at once suspected what the man had been up to and—”

“This—this is preposterous,” Spangler cried, bolting from his chair.

“When I charged him with attempted robbery,” Gilson went on, undeterred, “he at first denied it, but when I threatened to phone the police, he weakened—confessed that he’d planned to hide the bonds, fire a shot to arouse the house, claim he had been compelled to open the safe at the point of a gun and that the culprit had escaped. My appearance had ruined his scheme.

“He begged me not to expose him, and seemed so contrite that I finally agreed to say nothing. However, I was not trusting him. I was not willing to turn over the bonds to him again. But how I was to return them to Mr. Bradley later, without explaining my part in the affair, puzzled me.

“I was debating the matter, and off guard, when Spangler pounced upon the gun that lay on the floor and covered me. He at once demanded the bonds. They were in an envelope that I had thrust into my inside coat pocket. In my outside coat pocket was a similar envelope that contained the papers I had found in the library. I handed that envelope to him. He snatched it from me, unsuspectingly, and without stopping to examine its contents, ordered me to clear out. I saw then that he hoped to put his original plan into operation.”

“Are you going to listen to this ri-

diculous story?" the secretary protested wrathfully.

"Go on," Mr. Bradley directed.

"I cleared out promptly enough," Gilson resumed, "because I wanted to get away before Spangler discovered the trick I had played on him. I dropped from the window, as he ordered, and he fired a shot as I landed on the terrace below. Of course, the gun wasn't aimed in my direction. He didn't want to stop me, or have me caught. That would have upset his plans.

"I had scarcely landed on the terrace, when I collided with Freer. I recognized him as a detective friend of Spangler's. He had me cold. I was wondering how to escape this new dilemma, when Spangler, who saw what had happened from the window, called to Freer to let me go. I twigged that bit of conniving, but there was nothing for me to do except take to my heels. I still had the bonds and meant to hang on to them at all cost. That was all important now. Both men made a bluff at pursuit, firing again and again.

"I got away without any trouble, but I hadn't gone far before I realized the predicament that confronted me. I saw clearly enough that this detective must have been in on the original conspiracy from the beginning; that he intended to be near the house when Spangler fired the prearranged shot and raised an alarm. He was scheduled to appear on the scene, fire a few shots of his own and give chase to an imaginary fugitive—all in corroboration of the story Spangler had manufactured. Had it been otherwise, I reasoned, Freer wouldn't have released me."

"Released you?" Freer echoed derisively. "I didn't lay eyes on you in time, that's all. You hit out for the shadows and vanished before I knew what it was all about."

Gilson did not bother to argue that point.

"Although things hadn't turned out as planned," he resumed, "the conspirators must have been aware, at first, that

the unforeseen developments were agreeably in their favor. They had something more than a phantom fugitive upon which to fasten the alleged crime; they were given an opportunity to compare notes and concoct a perfect story between them. And Spangler could display a battered countenance to back it up. The prospect must have looked ideal—until they discovered what the envelope actually contained."

"Do you expect any one to believe this—this rubbish?" Spangler gibed.

"I didn't expect it at the time," Gilson admitted. "I saw where I was licked—temporarily. With you and Freer arrayed against me, my story wouldn't get far. I had the bonds in my pocket, and I couldn't explain that away. I knew what arrest would mean, and I didn't propose to invite it—not just then. My bags were packed, my ticket already bought. I saw no reason for not leaving town as I had planned. In fact, I began to see numerous arguments in favor of it, even though flight would seem to brand me guilty."

"Undoubtedly," Bradley agreed, his voice edged.

"In view of the story the newspapers carried the next morning," Gilson defended, "you must admit I did the sensible thing. The trumped up evidence against me was overwhelming. Telling the truth wouldn't clear me.

"Your servant had testified to my visiting the premises late that night, of my making an excuse to go through the house alone. Spangler, of course, swore that I had forced him, at the point of a gun, to open the safe; that afterwards I had beat him up and escaped. Freer claimed he had been passing the house, heard the outcry and shot, and saw me running across the lawn. If—"

"If you've any evidence to the contrary," Spangler challenged, "now's the time to produce it." The secretary was smirking, his confidence apparently restored.

"I haven't finished yet," Gilson replied quietly. "I saw it was impossible

to get in touch with Mr. Bradley," he went on, "or to return the bonds to him. But I knew he always visited this coast each winter, so being down here—where I'd planned to be long before this emergency arose—I wisely decided to prolong my vacation, await his arrival, lay the facts before him and—"

"You decided that after I'd nabbed you," Freer broke in. "You had to cook up some sort of a likely yarn. If I hadn't dragged you back—"

"Perhaps Mr. Bradley will be able to judge, from appearances, who did the dragging," Gilson returned, smiling.

The yacht owner glanced appraisingly at the two men. Gilson was erect, confident and apparently fresh, his face unmarred save for the wound on his temple. Freer was bespattered with mud and slime, one shoe missing, his fettered wrist runneled with crimson, his face battered and rapidly discoloring. His tired body sagged forlornly.

The detective winced under the prolonged scrutiny. "I ain't used to hiking," he grumbled. "Maybe it's done me up some, but I made this bird step along just the same."

A flicker of doubt showed in Bradley's leveled eyes. "How were you sure, without a gun to back you up, that Gilson would bring you here?" he inquired.

"Why, he was scared not to," Freer answered. "Once I had him shackled, he knew he was sunk."

Gilson surveyed the detective with a tight-lipped smile. "Isn't it customary to shackle a prisoner's right wrist, Freer?"

"Didn't make much difference this time."

"Oh, I see. So after you had put the bracelet on me and tossed away the key, losing your gun in the process," Gilson summed up briefly, "and in spite of your threats I refused to produce the bonds, you forced me to guide you five miles through the jungle to this yacht. Is that what you want Mr. Bradley to believe?"

"It's the truth, isn't it?" Freer

snapped. "What's the sense of all this talking? We're getting nowhere."

"We may in time," Gilson responded.

"Wouldn't it have been easier," Bradley queried, "if you had handcuffed the prisoner and kept your own hands free?"

"I was afraid he'd duck off—make for his friends. I hadn't a gun, and that lousy jungle we plowed through—"

"Then you experienced no trouble at all?"

"A little," Freer admitted. "That was when I nabbed him. He started to put up a fight."

Bradley's contemplative glance rested on the detective's swollen jaw. "I rather suspected that," he observed.

Freer mopped at his perspiring face. "Well, you're satisfied, ain't you?" he charged querulously. "I got your man. That's what I promised to do, wasn't it? Any need of pinning me down to a lot of fool details?" He lifted his manacled wrist and brought Gilson's with it. "I want to get this bracelet off. It's—"

"You'll be rid of it presently," Gilson advised him.

Freer started. Bradley's narrowed eyes jumped to the prisoner. Gilson's glance traveled obliquely to where Spangler rocked on his heels and smiled derisively.

"What's that you said?" Bradley demanded.

"Perhaps I'm a little ahead of my story," Gilson replied complacently. "Perhaps my version of what happened this morning will sound more convincing than Freer's."

"We've heard enough versions," Freer growled. "You can save the rest for a jury."

"We'll hear it," Bradley said.

"I admitted having your bonds when Freer arrested me," Gilson began; "but when I hesitated to produce them on demand, anticipating what he had in mind, he offered to compromise. I was to turn over four of the bonds to him, he was to set me at liberty and report back to you that I'd vanished. I saw

readily enough, that once in possession of the securities, he would make short shift of me. I would vanish, all right, his trail would be covered, and he and Spangler would divide the fifty thousand between them—precisely what they had planned to do before I interfered six months ago.

"Neither of these men wanted me apprehended or brought here. They sought what I had, that's all. So I resolved to queer their game, see that your property was restored at once and accept the consequences, although I hadn't an atom of proof to support my story. But now that you were on the scene, Mr. Bradley, and Gwen, too, I felt I had a fighting chance. I'd played fugitive long enough. It was time for a showdown."

Freer let out a raucous laugh. "With a gun in your ribs you couldn't do nothing else."

But Gilson went on coolly. "I pretended to fall in with Freer's suggestion, produced the bonds and tackled him at the same time. He fired at me—missed. I sent the gun spinning through an open window. It fell in the brush beyond, and you'll find it there. I knocked Freer out, took the irons from his pocket and intended to shackle him. But in the mix-up I had struck my head, found myself growing faint, and so weak I could get at but one of Freer's wrists. I realized that if I passed out then, and he came to first, he'd finish me off and pocket the bonds. So I did this."

Gilson lifted his fettered arm. "I had strength enough to snap the other cuff on my own wrist and dispose of the key before going under. I knew I was safe then. Whatever happened, Freer couldn't get rid of me. I knew I'd get here—alive."

"And the bonds?" Bradley asked quickly.

"I permitted Freer to carry them."

"That's a lie!" the detective cried. "I tell you I never laid eyes on them, Mr. Bradley. I done the shackling myself and—"

"And pitched the key into the water?" Gilson finished. "Isn't that what you told us a moment ago?"

"Yes, that's what I did," Freer asserted.

Gilson smiled and shook his head. "But you didn't. You didn't do that at all, Freer. The key was in your possession from the time we left my shack."

The detective glowered. Denial trembled on his lips, but there was something in Gilson's amused glance that squelched it.

"You might have played in luck, the time you clubbed me with your shoe, Freer. You were so sure I had the key—raked my pockets for it. I wanted you to find out I'd spoken the truth in the beginning. I told you I'd gotten rid of it, and I had. But you could have found it easily enough, if you had looked into your own pocket."

"You—you're talking nonsense," the detective floundered, his voice thick with rage and consternation. "Go ahead and search me if you want. I haven't—"

"No; not now," Gilson whipped out. "I was assured of that when you sprung your first lie—when you told Mr. Bradley you hadn't seen the bonds. Of course, you had disposed of them. You took a long, desperate chance, didn't you? There was fifty thousand at stake and you wanted it. You'd let it slip through your fingers once, but you weren't going to have it repeated. You figured it would be your word against mine and that it would be sufficient. It might have been, too, under other circumstances. But not now, Freer. Your story's blown up—sunk you deep—you and your partner."

"Where's that key?" Bradley stormed excitedly. "Where is it—if you know?"

"In Spangler's pocket," Gilson answered.

An oath escaped Freer. Bradley stared at the prisoner.

"What are you trying to tell me?" he demanded.

"In Spangler's pocket," Gilson repeated steadily. "And he doesn't suspect it."

Bradley turned upon the secretary, who stood as if paralyzed, rooted to the deck, his face drained of color. With exploring fingers he swiftly probed the man's pockets. From an inside coat pocket that Spangler suddenly endeavored to protect but was unable to, Bradley drew out a soiled, bulging envelope.

Spangler fell back with a cry and Freer, glaring at him, swore again. The yacht owner surveyed the envelope, abruptly dug out its contents and for a

moment stared incredulously at his find.

"Why—these are my bonds," he gasped.

"Freer slipped them to Spangler while we were crossing over in the dinghy," Gilson explained. "It was a final, despairing move on his part. I suspected what had happened, but decided to let it pass temporarily. I saw where I had the men trapped—convicted. You'll find the key to the bracelets in the envelope," he added, smiling at the girl who came happily toward him. "I thought that would be the safest hiding place."

A SUCCESSFUL RAID

GAMBLING dens are usually common enough in most of our big cities, and as often as not are patronized by well-to-do men and women. One such did a big business in a certain American city some years ago, and the proprietor was known to be making a fortune. However as he was wanted by the police in connection with troubles in other towns, he lived in constant apprehension of a raid, and finally decided to close the place and leave the country. He laid his plans accordingly.

But suddenly one night when play was in full swing and the roulette tables were covered with money, a cry of "Police!" arose, and most of the players made a dash for the exits. Some tried to recover their money, but the lights were switched off suddenly and in the darkness there was nothing but confusion. However, the great majority of the players, well known people in the town, did not bother about the money, but were glad enough to get away safely. The bag of prisoners was assumed to have been a small one.

Next day most of the wealthy patrons of the place got a letter from the proprietor,

asking for financial aid to enable him to fight the police and pay the cost of counsel for the law-suit which was about to be started against him. He had every hope, he said, of emerging safely from the proceedings, but it would take a considerable sum of "hush" money and legal expenses to get things straightened out and keep the affair from getting too much publicity. Most of the people appealed to, prominent townfolk who did not wish their names to appear in the matter, subscribed handsomely to the fund, and a considerable sum of money was raised.

Then and not till then did the proprietor show his hand and the truth of the matter come to light. The raid had been a fake from first to last, and the men who raised the scare and switched off the lights were simply hired for the purpose by the owner and paid \$25 each for their services. The money on the tables at the time of the alarm and the fund subsequently raised all went into the proprietor's pockets, and he faded away from the town quietly before the facts came to light. From his point of view it was one of the most successful "raids" on record.



As soon as the High Collar Kid saw the man enter the telephone booth he prepared himself against an underworld surprise party.



THE SURPRISE PARTY

By Erle Stanley Gardner

THE High Collar Kid noticed two things as he left the rooming house. One was that it was raining. And it took no particular powers of observation to note that fact. The second thing was that a figure lurking within the interior of a corner cigar store, turned rather abruptly from the counter and paused before a telephone booth, right hand resting on the door knob.

Only a man with unusual powers of observation would have noticed the latter fact. The High Collar Kid had unusual powers of observation. Otherwise he would not have been alive. Ten years is a long time for a man to play a lone hand in gangdom. But the High Collar Kid had seen 'em come and he'd seen 'em go.

Yet by not so much as the flicker of

conscious gesture did he apprise the man at the cigar stand that shrewd eyes had observed him.

The Kid went directly to his enclosed car, jerked open the door, searched the damp interior with a swift flash of his flickering eyes, and climbed inside.

The pavements were swimming. Street lights gave wavy reflections which, in turn, were broken by the miniature geysers of water spattering the cement.

The starter whined, the motor purred, the gears clicked, the wheels turned. If any one was intending to follow the High Collar Kid he had better get busy and travel fast.

The dark, round eyes of the Kid flickered to the mirror over the windshield. As he snapped the gear shift back into high he watched the street

behind. He passed the second corner at forty miles per hour, nor did he slow very much as he came to the third corner.

Headlights showed behind him. He swung the wheel. The wet pavements helped him around the corner. The windshield wiper beat a monotonous rhythm as it swung back and forth. Yet the rain descended faster than the rubber wiper could remove it.

He turned right again at the next corner, came back to the boulevard, pressed the throttle lower and lower.

The lighted business district dropped behind, gave place to a residential street upon which drab houses hid darkly behind dripping trees. A rubber coated policeman raised a whistle, then thought better of it. The car was going fifty miles an hour, no chance for pursuit.

Traffic laws meant nothing to the High Collar Kid—not when he had work to do and when a figure lurking across the street had gone to the telephone to notify some one of the Kid's departure.

The dark surfaced streets of the city gave way to the white concrete of the state highway. Good going here, not so much chance for a skid. The rain was beating with tree lashing fury. There was some wind. All in all, it was a bad night for speed. But the High Collar Kid was accustomed to taking chances.

He glanced at the clock on the illuminated dial of the car. Eleven forty. He'd be in Clarksburg at midnight. There wouldn't be much traffic on the road, not on a night like this. It would be a wild ride. And he'd leave the highway before he came to Clarksburg, circle the city and come in from the other direction. That was just in case that telephone. . . .

He gently eased the foot brake down upon the spinning, water throwing wheels. The windshield wiper increased its beat. Through the tapering section of windshield it cleared he saw a figure walking along the highway.

A quick glance at the speedometer showed it was eight miles from his starting point. The Kid noticed such things. It had been said of him that he noticed everything.

He slowed the car.

She was trim, comely. And she didn't have on so much as a raincoat. The dress was of some pale material which showed out well in the headlights. It was wet, but not soaking. The stockings were white. The shoes were mere slippers.

The headlights picked out her slender, young figure, showed the rhythm of the swinging hips, the steady swing of the walking legs.

She'd turn to see what the machine was going to do about it, and then the Kid could get a glance at her face.

But she did not turn.

The Kid slowed the car almost to a stop.

Rigid in her studied unconcern, the girl walked straight on. There was nothing ahead of her except mile after mile of dripping, rain splashed pavement, yet she utterly ignored the automobile almost at her side.

Abruptly the Kid thought of that hand on the knob of the telephone booth. Almost unconsciously, his foot snapped down on the throttle. The car skidded slightly, responded with a whine of acceleration.

The girl was behind, she had not so much as glanced at the car.

"Walking home," muttered the Kid.

Half a mile of wet pavement slipped beneath the glistening wheels of his car. He could not get the thought out of his mind of the solitary figure, striding so utterly alone in the storm tossed night.

If it should be a trap they'd know he'd passed. There would be ambushers waiting, concealed in a car somewhere near, or, perhaps, hiding behind the trees. If she kept on walking after he'd passed, it would be a good sign the thing was on the level.

A side street showed, unpaved and muddy.

The Kid switched his lights over to the dim, slowed the car, skidded up the muddy side street, managed to turn the car without getting bogged down, and switched off both lights and motor.

Then his fingers crept beneath the pit of his left arm and snuggled about the hard butt of a deadly automatic.

He waited. The rain beat down on the car. He could even hear the whish of the trees, the spatter of water on the running boards as it dripped off the roof of the sedan. The drops gave forth a drumming sound as they lashed the enameled hood.

Minutes passed. He grinned. The girl had evidently vanished. She'd have been here by now.

He reached forward for the ignition switch.

At that moment something indistinct showed out on the highway, a blurry something of bedraggled white. He snapped on the lights.

As the twin pencils of glaring white stabbed the darkness and caught the girl fairly in the center of their rays, the High Collar Kid could see her scream. He saw the lips part, saw the terror in the eyes, saw the pearly teeth. But the wind swept the sound away. Such noise as she made failed to penetrate past the heavy plate glass upon which the rain slithered in rivulets.

The High Collar Kid started the motor.

She stood still while he drove alongside. When he stopped the car she started to walk again, steadily, rhythmically, utterly ignoring the car at her side.

The Kid had a way with women. Also he knew something about them. Far be it from the High Collar Kid to sit snugly behind the steering wheel and call out an invitation to ride.

He was out in the rain, hat in hand, the drops streaking down the starched surface of his glossy collar.

"I beg your pardon, but wouldn't you care to ride?"

The answer came without so much as the turn of a head.

"No!"

After a minute of rain spattered silence between them, she added "thank you." But she hadn't looked at him and she strode on into the night.

The Kid sighed and took his fingers from the butt of his gun.

"But it's storming. You'll catch cold. I won't bite."

She strode on in silent indifference.

The Kid saw that she was pretty, with the type of beauty which had always appealed to him. If she had been hand picked at his specification it couldn't have been a better job. Slender, young, alert, not too curvy, yet well moulded. There was a firmness to the chin, a wideness to the eye, and a general air of complete sophistication.

He looked at the swirl of skirts where the wind had its way, and the headlights revealed what the wind disclosed. Then he climbed back in his car, drove on a hundred yards and waited for her to come up.

"I can't let you walk this road alone. It's nearly midnight. There's no shelter. Either you get in and ride with me, or I get out and walk with you."

He knew the moment she weakened.

There was a slight hesitancy, a wistful glance at the long lines of the massive, speedy car.

"It's warm in there," he coaxed, then was silent.

She smiled at him.

"You win. I guess I'm foolish," she said, and climbed in.

The High Collar Kid chuckled. He closed the door on her, careful to see that her skirt was not caught in the closing of that door, walked around the machine and opened the other door.

It was such little touches of gallantry that characterized the kid.

She was strangely silent as he settled himself into the seat. He glanced at her clothes. Strange they were not more rain soaked. Her hand was fluttering at her breast.

He stiffened abruptly. Those clothes hadn't been out in the storm very long.

His hand streaked to his left armpit.

By the time his fingers closed on the hard butt of the automatic he could feel the cold ring of steel at his neck.

"Bring that hand away empty," she said.

The Kid hesitated for a long second. Had there been any one with her he would have taken a chance, come out shooting. It was always the way, go with smoke in his nostrils, and he wouldn't mind dying. But she was alone. Certainly there was no one in ambush. She had walked into the path of his lights. He sighed and brought his hand away—empty.

"Hold your hands on the steering wheel, tight!"

He grinned at her.

"Don't put me out, sister. I ain't got my roller skates. What say we split the roll fifty fifty and be friends?"

She darted a wet arm under his chin. He stiffened as his automatic was taken from its holster, tossed in the back of the car. But her gun was pushed into his neck, and women are nervous at such times.

She lifted her feet to the seat, threw one leg over the back and jumped into the rear of her car.

"Drive ahead, slowly."

He complied with the order. Would she shoot? Could she hit? Suppose he threw the car into a devil of a skid? There'd be a mud patch along the road somewhere soon.

In the meantime there was her purse, lying on the seat at his side, a rain-spattered affair of gray leather.

He drove with one hand, half turned, the better to talk with her over his shoulder.

"What is it, hold-up?"

There was a catch in her voice then.

"You. . . you're going for a ride!"

The Kid knew as much, had known it from the moment that ring of steel was in his neck, but he merely smiled. As he smiled, his right hand dropped surreptitiously to the catch of the purse.

"What's the big idea? You got something against me?"

She shook her head. The violet eyes were wide with some emotion. The face was set and white. But the lips were firm.

"Not me. I'm making a piece of jack. They figured you'd fall for me."

"Baby!" he said, as his fingers flipped the catch on the purse and started exploring the contents, "they figured right! Anybody'd fall for you, unless he was blind or over ninety. And I'd fall for you twice!"

She snapped her lips together.

"Turn around and drive. And. . . and quit talkin'."

The Kid figured she was weakening fast. He kept his face toward her.

"So you're takin' me for a ride, eh? When do you pull the trigger?"

"I. . . I don't pull the trigger. . . . Oh, I wish they'd come!"

The Kid eased half way around, preparing to make a grab at that gun. Then, of a sudden, he knew he was too late. A car was following, a car that ran without lights.

He turned back in the seat. He heard the girl give a sob of relief. Lights switched on, bored into the interior of the car. Another machine drew alongside. The Kid could see the profile of the man on his side. Pete Pelton! Pete, the killer, dapper, cold, cynical, envious. And there was Smile Dugan in beside him. Dugan! The feature-battered ex-pug; raised from the gutter to become an expert in dirty work. His clock had struck.

The door of the other car was opening. Pete Pelton's dapper form was sliding to the running board of his car.

He could twist the steering wheel—perhaps. But Smile Dugan had a big automatic, and the look in Dugan's eyes told its own story. He could wait to shoot later, but he'd rather shoot now.

Yet, even in that moment of tense suspense, the High Collar Kid was noticing things. His right hand remained within the rain-soaked purse. His fingers encountered a stiff paper oblong, the envelope of a letter.

And that letter was moist. How did

it get moist there within that purse?

The Kid slipped that letter from the purse even as he turned to greet killer Pete. His right hand flipped the letter in a side coat pocket, the fingers snapped the purse shut.

"Well, well, if it ain't Pete. Planning a little party, Pete?"

"Yeah. Planning a nice party for you, a little surprise party."

"I like surprises."

"Maybe you'll like this one. Move over. I'll drive. Get the gat, Myrtle?"

She nodded, mutely. In the back, her white face seemed cold as marble as it was outlined against the back drop of the rear window, the rain filled night.

Smile Dugan was on the ground.

Would he get in back with the girl, or would he crowd three in the front? If he came in front and the girl was left in the back with a gun there was a chance, a bare chance that the Kid might arouse her sympathies.

Dugan opened the front door.

Pete Pelton jerked his head back, without moving over.

"Naw. Get in back with the broad. He's got a way with the women an' I don't trust him with her, nor her with him."

"That's not fair!" she blazed. "I did everything according to instructions. I memorized every word. . . ."

"Shut up!" said Pete.

The car swayed as Dugan's huge bulk swung on the running board. The rear door slammed.

"Let's go."

The car, under the guidance of Pete Pelton, swung toward the center of the highway. The other car backed and turned.

"Going to use my own car for the job, eh? Walk home afterward?" asked the Kid, making conversation.

"Not us," sneered Pete. "But tires leave a track out where we're goin'. If there's goin' to be any tracks left we don't want 'em to be our car. We'll leave this car where your estate can find it."

"What's the idea?"

"You know?"

"Hell no. Jealous, Pete?"

"Never mind the chatter. You've got a good line. You might talk me out of it if you got started. Might. Ha, ha! This is once your line of salve won't grease anything except the skids of hell!"

The Kid fell silent.

The girl in the back seat was sobbing.

"We gotta ditch the broad before we pull the job."

It was Smile Dugan's heavy voice.

Pete agreed with him without so much as turning his head.

"Sure."

The Kid thought rapidly, which was the manner in which he was accustomed to think.

"You know who these men are, of course," purred the High Collar Kid as he half turned toward the girl. "The glib one with the slicked hair is Pete Pelton. The *gentleman* seated beside you is Smile Dugan."

"Say," demanded Pete, what's the idea of all that?"

Smile Dugan twisted his thick, battered lips in the sneering smile that had earned him his underworld nickname.

"Let 'm talk. He won't talk long. But let's ditch the jane."

"Town coming. We'll get through that. Then Harry will follow along and pick her up."

The car speeded up.

The lights of a hamlet glowed ahead, ribboned themselves on the cement, shone into the sedan, and flashed past.

The kid turned, slipped his hand from his right hand coat pocket. As the street lights whisked by he read the address upon the envelope. "MISS MYRTLE MANLEY — HOTEL CRACKEN" The envelope had evidently been left with the clerk, for there was no stamp upon it, and a penciled figure in the lower corner showed "717."

The Kid half swung, dropped the letter in his pocket, looked at the girl.

She was returning the gun she had used to hold him up with, dropping it back into the front of her wet waist. The curves of her body failed to entirely conceal the outline of the weapon.

"Why so silent," jeered Pete.

"I was thinking, Pete."

"Yeah. You'd better think. You was the smart kid that thought his way out of the Manser scrape when Finney went to the stir. You was the chap that thought up a lie that sprung you from the Carter case."

"That's not so and you know it," said the Kid. "Probably you've used that line to get Dugan started on this trip. But you know it's a lie."

"Shut up!" yelled Pete. "Don't you believe him, Dugan."

"But it's a fact," purred the Kid. "I'll give you the lowdown on that case, Dugan. When Carter was arrested somebody squealed to the D. A. It was a telephone conversation, and I can tell you who. . . ."

The car skidded to a stop.

"By God, I'm going to finish it right here. I'm tired of all this yap, yap, yap."

Dugan grunted, the girl half screamed, "No, no, no!"

Pete slipped to the rain soaked pavement, reached in his arm, yanked the Kid out. Dugan's eyes glinted with a light which comes only to the face of a killer about to gratify his lust for blood. The girl screamed. Dugan half flung her to the ground. She hit the wet cement, slipped, fell into the mud.

She arose, muddled, white, frightened. Dugan was leering at her.

"Want your map changed?" he asked.

"Shut up," said Pete.

The Kid spoke rapidly, conscious of the half raised weapon in Dugan's hand, conscious of the sneering lips of Pelton.

"I hate to have you take the girl to the chair with you. You owe it to her to give her a break. For you fellows I've got no sympathy. It serves you right. You bungled the whole thing.

You saps! The idea of writing a letter of instructions telling her just what to do, just where you'd meet her, just what to say."

Pete's eyes snapped wide. Dugan started. The girl half screamed.

"Bluff!" sneered Pete.

"Perhaps. But when the District Attorney introduces a letter addressed to Miss Myrtle Manley at the Motel Cracken and asks that it be marked Exhibit A for the people, well, just think of me, will you?"

"What the hell do you know of that letter?"

Pete's voice was strained, lacked its old time assurance.

The girl was crying now, openly sobbing.

The High Collar Kid, standing in the rain, face to face with death, smiled patronizingly.

"You guys are boobs. I frisked the girl's purse while you were taking me for a ride. I found the letter, knew what it was. She said she'd memorized her instructions. That letter had rain drops on it. So I flipped it out when we went through the town back there.

"You know how these small town constables are. One of 'em was on the corner. He saw the letter come out. That'll get 'em in touch with the girl, room seven seventeen. Finding my body will be all they need to put two and two together."

Pete Pelton glanced at Smile Dugan.

"The damned liar. The car window was closed. There wasn't any constable standing there."

But Dugan wasn't so sure, and Pete's voice held an element of doubt.

"You have the letter in your purse, Myrtle?"

She nodded, dry-eyed with alarm now.

Pete reached into the car, opened the purse.

"Gone now," he swore, and launched into a stream of abuse.

"The damned broad's no good, bump her off too and she won't squeal."

Pete's voice was almost hysterical.

Dugan half turned. His left fist came up, a jabbing blow of the ring, a savage, ripping blow. The girl staggered back under the impact of that blow.

The High Collar Kid opened his arms.

"You poor kid," he said.

There was something masculine, protecting in his gesture, she slumped into his arms.

"Baloney!" said Pete.

The Kid's hand flashed to the girl's throat, plunged downward. The spitting streak of flame that stabbed from his fist seemed to dart directly into Pete's breast.

He staggered back, cursed, spun on one heel, dropped his gun, clutched at his breast.

"You, too?" asked The Kid, his eyes narrowed to twin slits, the gun boring into Dugan's stomach.

Dugan hastily elevated his hands.

"Get the gats, Myrtle," said the Kid.

The girl scooped them up.

"Your gang will be along pretty quick in the follow car," said the Kid. "I guess Pete got it in the shoulder. He'll probably take some more killing another time.

"And don't think I'm a squealer. I've got that letter in my pocket. I just ran a shindy on you guys. So long."

The car purred away into the darkness. The two figures in the front seat showed silhouetted against the driving lights. The girl was leaned over, snuggled against the High Collar Kid.

Pete coughed weakly. Dugan bent over him.

"They'll be along in a minute or two."

"Damn him," groaned Pete. "He always did have a way with the women! A hell of a surprise party! And I combed the town to get a broad that'd appeal to him first time he saw her. Stick a handkerchief in this damned bullet hole, will yuh?"

STRANGER THAN FICTION

By LEMUEL DE BRA

A STRANGE story of murder, circumstantial evidence, mistaken identity, and clerical error with an amazing sequel came to light during the recent session of the Florida state legislature. The case sounds like fiction—but is all fact.

Some years ago, J. S. Brown, a negro, aged about forty, then employed on a certain railroad as fireman, was arrested for the murder of his engineer, a white man. The details of the murder were of no particular interest except that all the evidence was purely circumstantial. That evidence, however, was so strong that despite his vehement assertions of innocence, Brown was convicted and sentenced to be hanged.

There the story begins. The clerk of the court, in making out the death warrant for J. S. Brown, negro, made an almost incredible error. The clerk had not the slightest interest in the negro, and, unbelievable as it was, every one concerned readily accepted the clerk's explanation that the error was in fact an error—just a slip of the pen.

For in making out the death warrant, the clerk ordered the sheriff to hang the foreman of the jury!

Immediately the attorneys for the negro jumped on to that clerical error and after a legal fight succeeded in having their client's sentence changed from hanging to life imprisonment.

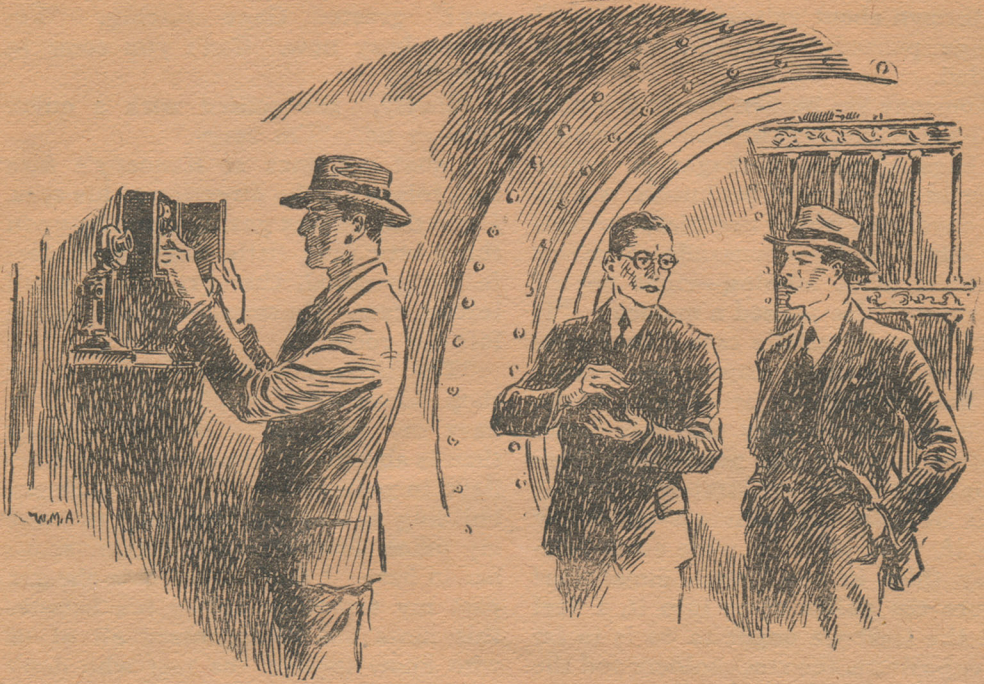
Still protesting his innocence, but elated that a clerk's mistake had saved his life, Brown was taken to Raiford, and later leased out with other convicts working in the turpentine camps.

So, seventeen years passed. Then one day, on his death-bed, the man who had murdered the engineer made a full confession. This confession was carefully investigated and absolute proof obtained that J. S. Brown, the negro who had served seventeen years for the crime, was innocent.

Brown, a broken old man over sixty, was immediately released. For his wrongful imprisonment, Florida voted him \$2,500—an indemnity for his long years of servitude which could never be regained.

"Hit was de han' ob de Lawd!" the old negro declared, referring to the strange error that had saved him from hanging. "But now what's a ol' nigger gwine to do wit' all dat money?"

"Kennedy, the new vault, theft-proof in every way, has been entered and robbed—without a clue being left!"



THE MYSTERY OF THE VAULT

A CRAIG KENNEDY STORY

By Arthur B. Reeve

"RENNEDY, the impossible has happened; only Houdini come back to life or Einstein turned crook could have done it!"

Craig and I were seated beside the big double mahogany desk of James Gage, president of the Broad-Wall Trust Company, in his sumptuously furnished office with its thick carpets, easy chairs and general aspect of affluence.

"The impossible?" echoed Kennedy. "What do you mean?"

James Gage hitched his chair a bit closer, laid his hands on the edge of the desk, one over the other, and leaned forward as he lowered his voice. "The new vault of the Broad-Wall Trust

Company has been entered and robbed—and there is apparently not a clue!"

I saw Kennedy drop his eyes from the face of the man to the hands on the desk edge. "Not a clue?" repeated Kennedy keenly, his eyes fixed on the hands as if in abstraction. "No idea how?"

"None of us has any idea," reiterated Gage positively rising and pacing the floor.

Kennedy's eyes shifted from the hands no longer on the desk edge to a photograph in a gold frame on the desk top. I knew that beautiful face. It was Ethel Wynne, late of the Follies, now Mrs. Gage.

"Of course, being the detective you are, you must be acquainted at least in

a general way with the safeguards that are thrown about valuables nowadays."

Gage paused before Kennedy who nodded.

"Someone has broken them all down! We have found bags of lead substituted for bags of gold, packages of brown paper in the place of banknotes, worthless envelopes where negotiable securities ought to be—thousands of shares of stock, even, missing—right out of the vault!" He paused a moment. "It is the most incredible case I have ever heard of, positively staggering. Someone has avoided the network of wires, has been able to defy the half dozen massive bolts on the ponderous doors of our vault, has penetrated the thick walls of steel and concrete—somehow—as if, well, as if he were some relativity thief in the fourth dimension! Before the police come into it, I feel that the least we ought to do is to let the depositors, the stockholders and the public know that we were instantly on the job the moment we discovered it. Therefore I sent for you."

Kennedy acknowledged the compliment but for the moment was silent as if doing a rapid calculation in elimination to decide where best to begin. I tried to reason it out. Here was a burglar-proof, fire-proof, bomb-proof, mob-proof, earthquake-proof vault with all the human, mechanical and electrical safeguards that modern science could devise. Yet it had been entered!

"Has a trusted employee gone wrong?" I suggested.

Gage shook his head. "No single employee could get in there alone for an instant. We have the double custody system. It takes at least two to get in."

"A conspiracy, then?" I suggested.

Gage shook his head as he turned back to Kennedy. "I am one of the two," he said quietly.

Just then the door opened. Gage wheeled about quickly. A woman, young, demure, dainty, chic, had entered. She stood hesitating, as if not quite knowing what to do inasmuch as we were there.

"You will excuse me—ah—Miss Cronney?" greeted Gage quickly. "I'm rather busy now. Can't you come in later?"

"Surely," she smiled with a quick look at us. "I'm sorry."

I shot a glance at Kennedy's face and, following the direction of his eyes, I saw that he was gazing intently upon the pretty pink little finger tips, perfectly groomed, that grasped a small leather case. He turned to Gage as she left the room.

"The little manicure in the barber shop downstairs," explained Gage. "I have my nails done perhaps oftener than is absolutely necessary. But I believe in patronizing the tenants in our building and as I'm too busy to leave my office, Schwartz, the barber, sends her in here. I don't know how she got past my secretary unless it's because this news has disorganized all of us who know it—and the rest who don't but suspect something is in the wind."

I was wondering why Kennedy had looked at her so curiously. Might it be one of those many irrelevant things that one runs across in a case, or might it be pertinent? Somehow I could not get out of my mind that picture on the desk. There was something of the same daintiness and chicness about this girl as about the Follies beauty. Was Gage, like so many bankers, a connoisseur? Even if he were, did that have anything to do with it except as a personal matter which he himself alone must answer for? What would personal morality have to do with business morality, anyhow?

I turned as Kennedy asked some question about the company's system and Gage pressed a button under his desk by way of answer.

"Ask Mr. Ingraham to come in a moment," he directed the boy who answered, then added to Kennedy, "—the cashier. When I said we had the double custody system, I didn't mean that I was the one who had part of the combination of the outside doors, for instance. But we have what we call a

'custody trust'—a department for those who do not want to bother with their actual securities. It is a sort of vault within a vault where securities and other valuables are kept. The Broad-Wall handles everything for such customers. Ingraham and I have the combination for that inner vault. Ingraham and Walker, his assistant, have the outside combination for the big door. But it is that inside vault that has been robbed—which makes it all the more impossible to understand. Mr. Ingraham, this is Mr. Kennedy, of whom you have undoubtedly heard, and Walter Jameson of the 'Star.' You remember I spoke of getting Mr. Kennedy on the job?"

Ingraham nodded and shook hands. He was a quiet-spoken man, one who showed that he had long been accustomed to handling other people's money. "You can well imagine, Mr. Kennedy, the consternation we felt when we opened the vault this morning to get some papers for the Vanderdam estate and found such a condition as Mr. Gage has told you. Even yet we do not know the extent of the loss. It will take time to go over everything and check up—to say nothing of finding out how it happened."

Again I saw Kennedy looking at the hands of Ingraham, this time. Of what was he thinking? Had he something in mind like the matter of sensitiveness of finger tips that might actually feel the fall of the tumblers in a lock, feel when they were right and open a lock by the sense of touch? I had heard also of the microphone used in a similar way to enable the opening by the sense of hearing. Perhaps I was not on the trail of Craig's mind at all.

"Trace a robbery," he suggested abruptly, "supposing it possible, from the street to the securities, after night-fall."

"We shall be delighted to go over the ground with you," answered Gage, now leading the way and talking as he went. "First there are the locked bronze doors from the street. They

close some time after eight and no one of the tenants of the building or anyone to see them can get by without being observed."

We came to the flight of steps that led down to the vaults themselves. "Next there is another iron door," pointed out Gage, "leading to the stairs. At the foot of the stairs is a heavy barred steel door and a mirror placed at an angle so that a night watchman here can see in either direction."

Kennedy looked quickly about. I did the same. There, in the antechamber, I saw in a rack two shiny guns ready for emergency.

"At last," added Gage, "we come to the main door of the vault." He paused before the ponderous mechanism which now was swung open for the day's business. "The door of a modern vault is a very complex affair. This one contains several thousand different pieces, each ground accurately to the thousandth of an inch. It is over a foot thick, as you can see, and weighs perhaps ten tons. Yet a child can swing it on its specially designed and balanced hinges."

"H'm," mused Kennedy. "Four complicated locks to be picked—one of them of latest pattern shielded by impregnable armor." It seemed as if an idea flashed over him. He bent over and examined the time lock. It was in perfect order. "I recall a case where the time lock on a safe had been rendered inoperative and it was never discovered until after the robbery because no one ever tried to get in until the correct time. But this lock seems to be all right."

"To say nothing of the other locks inside," put in Gage "and a network of sensitive electric wires, the burglar alarms, concealed in the walls and floors, the location of which is not generally known."

We had passed the door, the last line of defense. There was a treasure house to make Croesus look like a cheap skate. Everywhere was money in every conceivable shape and form, as

though a modern Midas had by his magic touch transformed everything beyond the wildest dreams of avarice.

"And the vault itself—the walls?" Kennedy tapped them.

"The body of this vault," answered Ingraham quickly, "is built up of steel plates bound together by screws from the inside of the vaults so that the screws cannot be reached from the outside. The plates themselves are of two classes, those of hard and those of softer steel, set alternately, so that they are both shock and drill proof. The steel of high tensile strength is used to resist the effect of explosives while the other has great resisting power against drilling. It will wear smooth the best drills and only unlimited time would suffice to get through that way.

"Then there is a layer of twisted steel bars added to the plates, another network to break any drill that may have survived the attack on the steel plates. That also adds to the power of resisting explosives. In fact, the amount of explosive necessary and the shocks it would produce simply put that method out of the question. Why, where the outside plates come together to form the angles and corners massive angles of steel are welded over the joint. The result is a solid steel box, all embedded in a wall of rock concrete—impregnable—absolutely impregnable!"

He paused, then finished, "The door is the only possible chance, in my opinion. That is water-tight, gas-tight, ground to the minutest fraction of an inch, with seven steps in it. The most expert yeggman who ever lived would have no chance at that—unless he were a lock expert endowed with omniscience and unlimited time. So, you see why it is that we say that the impossible has happened!"

Inside the huge vault were various other protections, tiers of safety deposit boxes for which an elaborate system of safety had been built up, safes for various purposes, and in the far corner a vault within a vault, the vault

of the "Custody Trust Department."

Gage opened it with Ingraham's aid, each knowing only part of the combination and neither being able to work it in such a way as to be seen by the other.

In this inner vault were rows and rows of fat packages tied with little belts of red tape. Gage picked up one and opened it. Instead of crinkly examples of engraving that represented a fortune, there was nothing inside but common brown paper!

"Just stuffed in merely to satisfy a casual glance that the envelope has not been tampered with," he explained. "Now, here's something else."

He opened a small, heavy money bag which he took from a little safe in one corner. We looked in, too. Instead of bright, gleaming gold pieces apparently salted away against the remote possibility of a panic when gold might be at a premium, there was a mass of dull dross lead!

"What do you make of it, Mr. Kennedy?" inquired Ingraham helplessly.

I felt that a plan was already forming in Kennedy's mind but he said nothing about it. Instead, he merely shook his head. "I shall have to do some outside work before I can even attempt to answer that, Mr. Ingraham."

I looked from Kennedy to Ingraham and Gage. Neither of them apparently even laid claim to having an explanation. As I learned afterwards, as Craig told me how he reasoned it out, only one idea was uppermost in his thoughts at that moment. Why had the robber been so careful on the surface to conceal his stealings? Clearly, he was not through. He had carried on his thefts for some time; not all at once. He intended evidently to come back. And surely the temptation of what remained still would be strong.

As we turned to pass out, Craig noted a telephone on the wall. "That, I suppose," he observed, "is to communicate with the outside in case anyone is shut up here?"

Ingraham nodded.

"I am going uptown," remarked Kennedy. "After I have been to my laboratory I shall want to come down here again. I shall find someone to let me in down here?"

"Certainly," answered Gage quickly. "You—you are not laying any plans to stay in the vault?"

"Of course not," hastened Kennedy.

"Yes; I gave you credit for that intelligence," smiled Gage. "You would be suffocated, you know."

"Surely. But will you do one thing to-night—have the time lock on the outside door left inoperative?"

Gage thought a moment. "It's an unprecedented thing, but—do that, Ingraham."

Instead of leaving the building immediately after we parted from them, Kennedy looked about carefully keeping in mind the location of the vaults. We were passing the barber shop in the basement when his eye caught the trim figure of the little manicure, Miss Croney. She smiled at him and he caught my arm.

"Let's go in, Walter," he decided. "You can get a shave. As for me, time spent talking to a pretty girl is not wasted."

In a moment he was chatting with her across the little white table while I had the luck to obtain the proprietor, a middle-aged man, rather good looking, a man with those eyes that seem to bulge as if with exophthalmic goitre. I saw Kennedy taking us all in, the boss barber whom everyone called Schwartz, and all the other customers and barbers.

"I suppose you have some well-known people in a building like this, Miss Croney," Craig ventured. "Queer experiences, too."

"Yes," she answered apparently engrossed in her work, "but I like it. I take it all as it comes. It interests me. Do you know, you can read character in finger nails, just as well as in hands?"

"I suppose so," prompted Kennedy. "How, for instance?"

"Oh, I have quite a philosophy of finger tips. I have studied actual people, some men prominent in various ways."

"How about mine?" he asked, taking a sudden interest in her.

"Well, for instance, you have the scientific temperament, I would say. You'll pardon me—but it is usually known by one of the worst nails and cuticles the manicure encounters. See—a nail of ordinary size, rather discolored, the cuticle so erratic that it takes a great deal of skillful work to make it look beautiful."

"And our friend, James Gage?"

"He has a large, broad nail, the nail of a good liver, a good spender, a man of good nature."

"You know Mr. Ingraham?"

"He comes in once in a while. He has an aristocratic nail."

"How about Mr. Walker, his assistant?"

She looked up quickly. "You know them all, don't you?"

"Oh, slightly."

"They seldom come in here. Besides, I don't like to talk too much about my customers. You wouldn't appreciate my talking to them about you, would you?"

Kennedy turned the subject and as we left the shop he was unusually thoughtful. "A clever girl, that Miss Croney," he remarked to me. "Somehow, I'm thinking about another girl. It's surprising how much you learn by studying girls. Now, how can we get the low-down on Ethel Wynne Gage?"

"Drop by at the *Star*," I answered promptly. "If Burton, who does our Broadway stuff, is there he will know. He knows all the Follies and Gardens and Scandals, everything."

Burton was there, and it was not many minutes that he neglected the sheet of paper sticking in his typewriter before he had spilled enough to intrigue us.

It concerned the notorious afternoon dance and night club known as the Golden Glades. It was there that Gage

had often gone with pretty Ethel Wynne of the Follies and it was there that she still was seen sometimes with her husband, sometimes with a friend.

"I see her with another girl often, Madeline Croney," he added, where-upon Kennedy's interest was suddenly aroused. "She's a manicure downtown. That might be just a cover for the daytime, for I often see her with Dave Wharton, the proprietor of the Golden Glades, sometimes the four of them, but more often just the three—Ethel Wynne, Gage and Wharton, at night; Ethel Wynne, Wharton and Madeline late afternoons. I hear the four, though, have sometimes made up a week-end party on a fast cruiser, the *Sea Vamp*, that Wharton owns."

Kennedy asked a few questions of Burton before we ran along. I was unable to decide whether Dave Wharton might be the "other man" to Ethel Wynne, or just the "boy friend" of Madeline Croney. However, there was not time to pursue the inquiry, for Kennedy's chief concern seemed to be his visit uptown to the laboratory and getting back again to the Trust Company before it was too late.

He did not stay long in the laboratory, but from a cabinet where he kept his various contrivances developed in his warfare of science against crime he took a queer little arrangement, somewhat like a simple coil of coated wire.

"To-night, Walter," he said as we returned downtown, "I shall probably have you scouting around the outside. I will provide some way so that you can keep in touch with me by calling up from pay stations or other phones."

It was nearing closing time when Kennedy was back again at the vaults and Gage directed his secretary to accompany Craig on a second visit to the custody vault which had been left open but under guard for him. As they passed down together through all the various safeguards, Craig remarked, "And yet all this did not protect!"

"No," observed the secretary, "the system has fallen down, somewhere."

"Who is this Walker?" inquired Kennedy casually.

"The assistant," replied the secretary. "Rather a clever fellow—always on the job."

"I wonder if he knows anything more than has been told," remarked Kennedy, apparently merely thinking out loud.

"Impossible," exclaimed the secretary catching the drift of the remark but not noticing as I did that Kennedy's mind was not really on it.

I had caught the fact that Craig was talking really to divert the attention of the secretary from what he was doing, for in the meantime, while he was taking down and putting back the wall telephone in the custody vault in an inconspicuous corner, he had actually closed the circuit cutting out the telephone but cutting in the peculiar little arrangement he had brought from the laboratory in such a way that, although it was exposed, it was not noticeable.

"Now, is there a little office upstairs that I may use?" Craig asked the secretary, sure that he had not comprehended the change that he had made.

The secretary nodded and a few moments later Kennedy was settled with a desk of his own, telephone, key to the door, able to come and go as he pleased in the building and acquainted with the switchboard that connected all the interior departments as well as the outside wires.

For another hour he was busy and I noted that it was a comparatively simple arrangement that he placed on the top of the desk. It consisted of nothing, apparently, but an ordinary electric buzzer with a relay and dry cells.

During the rest of the afternoon Kennedy stuck pretty close to his improvised office, getting acquainted with such of the employees of the building as he would find it necessary and useful to know at night, and instructing me what to do and how to keep in touch with him from the outside.

Nothing further developed around the Broad-Wall Trust Company during

the day and as closing time approached Kennedy sought out James Gage to decide exactly how he might keep in touch with him during the evening, as well as with Ingraham and Walker. "I may need you at any time," he remarked, "and when I do I shall want you all quickly."

"Where?" asked Gage.

Kennedy thought a moment. "I can't say yet. But I shall depend on you to keep in touch with Ingraham and Walker."

"Very well, then. You'll find me at my club. I was going to the theater, but I shall cancel that. I'll instruct them to be on call, too. You may depend on it."

My own conjectures were considerably enlivened when I learned late in the afternoon on dropping in at the *Star* from Burton that he had just heard that the cruiser, *Sea Vamp*, always lying in readiness off Kip's Bay in the East River, had quietly slipped out in the Sound.

"Who's on it this trip?" I asked.

"No one but Dave Wharton. That's how I came to hear it. A couple of chaps with a Broadway racket dropped it in the course of a conversation and I immediately thought of you and Kennedy."

"What's it all about, do you think—Wharton alone? What's the racket?"

"Well, their racket is booze. Wharton's racket is night clubs. Maybe it's a little rum-running, or maybe it's something else. I thought you'd be interested."

"I am interested. So is Kennedy. Thanks awfully." I did not think it necessary to take Burton into my confidence to the extent of admitting to him that Kennedy was as usual as great an enigma to me as if I were not his most intimate friend.

It looked to me more like running to cover than rum-running. Kennedy was interested when I told him. But he did not appear to let it change his plans in any respect. Under his instructions I was in for a night on the

streets of lower New York with the prosaic job of shadowing the outside of a building.

Hour after hour the evening sped by as Kennedy waited in the little improvised office, turning over and over in his mind the facts that he had collected.

On my part I determined to let nothing escape me. Once I called up. "Craig, a car has just driven up to the curb around the corner from the entrance."

"Did anyone enter the building?" he asked quickly.

"No."

"Watch it, Walter; it may be important."

I myself had thought so. If the car was standing ready at a moment's notice for someone to slip into, throw in the clutch and whirl away, it might be just another instance where a motor was one of the efficient criminal instruments. I wondered if perhaps the trail might lead to some gangster garage, dark, unpretentious, whence came cars often stolen and repainted, in which racketeers traveled on missions of plunder or revenge.

Suddenly in his office the little buzzer on Kennedy's desk gave a faint buzz, then louder. There was no mistake about it. It settled down next into a continuous buzz.

Quickly Kennedy called Gage at his club. "Come down—immediately. Bring Ingraham and Walker."

Craig waited for my next periodical call. It had always been his rule that the fewer people he took into his confidence the fewer weak links there would be in forging his chain of evidence.

At last I called. "Walter," he fairly shouted back to me, "has anyone entered the building from that car or any other?"

"No."

"Then watch the door! Don't let anyone at all out—no one! Understand? I am arranging to have someone there to support you in—"

"Craig!" I interrupted. "From where I am standing I can see a big black closed car which has just drawn up to the door. Three men have got out and are going into the building. The car is waiting."

"Very well. Then get over by the door—quick. There will be someone there to help you out if anything should happen. Play safe—until you hear something suspicious from inside. Then pull your gun—and, Walter, remember, in these quiet streets downtown a police whistle may be better even than a gun—at night!"

Kennedy had scarcely finished the call when his door was flung open after a hasty shuffle of three pairs of feet down the market floor of the corridor. He was on his feet, his hand on his gat.

"What is it—what's the matter?" cried James Gage, who was the first to enter. "Where are they? Where have you got them?" He had seen Craig's automatic and quickly assumed he was holding someone.

Kennedy laughed and motioned to the still buzzing announcer.

"What is it?" inquired Gage. "What does it mean?"

"Down there in the custody vault I have placed what is known as a selenium cell and a relay, attached to the telephone wire leading up here. Now that you are all here," he added, turning to Ingraham and Walker, "let me open that vault. You see, now, why I left that time-lock inoperative. Something is going on down there. Come on!" he added, dashing for the stairs. "Selenium?" puffed Gage as he followed.

"Yes," called back Kennedy. "Hurry! It is a peculiar element, a poor conductor of electricity in the darkness, a good conductor in the light. I reasoned it out this way. Suppose someone should enter the vault. The first thing would be to switch on the lights. Light would act on the selenium cell, complete the circuit; then this buzzer would warn me."

It seemed incredible. Down below, hidden by impenetrable steel walls and doors, there was a light shining on that tiny selenium cell tucked away in the custody vault. Someone was there! It was weird, as if a phantom hand had reached through the cold steel and cement and turned on the lights!

One might have expected to see the heavy steel door open, perhaps the night watchman killed. But, no. The door was closed, just as Ingraham and Walker had left it; the night watchman was sitting there vigilantly on duty, more surprised than ever at seeing Gage and the rest at that time of night.

One after another, the heavy bolts were shot back as Ingraham and Walker worked the combination. Inside the big vault all was in darkness.

Next Gage and Ingraham began to work over the door of the smaller vault in the rear of the interior. Finally it, too, swung open.

There was burning a bright light!

What was it—an incandescent witness to man or devil? Unconsciously they drew back for an instant as the door swung noiselessly open. Yet no one was there, apparently.

"He must have escaped!" exclaimed Ingraham.

"Escaped?" rejected Walker looking at the thick walls and the doors. "It is impossible. It simply cannot be."

Kennedy was going over the interior of the vault carefully and quietly without a word. It seemed hopeless. No one could have got out. Yet someone must have got in. And there was no one there.

He had come to the small safe standing in the corner. He paused. "Come," he shouted, "give me a hand!"

Together they moved it. It rolled surprisingly easy on its well-oiled wheels.

"Look!" cried Kennedy who was nearest.

There in the smooth steel wall yawned a black hole, big enough for a man's body to wriggle through. The

wall had been penetrated by a careful calculation which brought the hole just behind the safe. Then with a lever the intruder had been able to move the little safe back and forth to hide the entrance through which, night after night, the treasure house had been visited.

Without a moment's hesitation, Kennedy plunged into the hole, wriggling his way along and calling back from time to time as he progressed. "It runs into the basement of the building," he panted, "and ends back of a closet in the barber shop. One of you come through after me; the other two hurry around to the barber shop."

He wriggled on through the tunnel. A moment later Walker followed. Ingraham and Gage started around the other way.

All was dark in the barber shop. Not a soul was there. Apparently both Schwartz and his pretty manicure had long ago shut up the shop and left it. Who, then, had used it during the long, silent hours?

Kennedy switched on the lights. In a closet he disclosed two large bolt-studded tanks, with dials and stop-cocks and tubes attached. He stooped and picked up a goose-necked instrument like a distorted double-U, with parallel tubes and nozzles at the end.

"What's that?" demanded Walker.

"This new cutter-burner, the improved oxyhydrogen blowpipe with which steel can be cut with scarcely more effort than slicing cheese with a knife. It's all the same to this thing—hard or soft, tempered, annealed, chrome, harveyized. It will cut cleanly through them all. It gives a temperature so high that if a cone of unconsumed gas, forced out under pressure, did not protect them, the nozzles themselves would be consumed!"

Walker looked at Kennedy aghast. "Robbery with this person must be an art as carefully planned as a promoter's strategy or a merchant's trade campaign!"

"It is! Night after night someone

must have worked patiently, noiselessly with the cutter-burner. Carefully it must have been calculated to come out just back of the little safe. It looks as if someone must have had inside knowledge to do that and avoid the network of wires!"

Suddenly Ingraham, pale and excited, broke in on them. "Mr. Kennedy!" he cried. "There's been an attempt on Mr. Gage's life!"

"What?" asked Craig, still unruffled. "How did it happen?"

"We were going through the hall as you directed. As we reached the door to the street I turned. For a moment I thought Mr. Gage was going out on the street instead of—"

"Yes—instead of what?" Kennedy was thinking of me and my probable action under the circumstances.

"Instead of coming here with me. But it was a woman facing him—a woman and a man, at the door. She drew a pistol, a little ivory-handled pistol, and fired squarely at him. I saw my chance. Before she could fire again, I seized her arm and wrenched the gun from her." He handed the pistol, still warm, to Kennedy. "The man was not armed, I think. But with Mr. Gage wounded, they were two to one against me. Hurry!"

"A woman?" repeated Kennedy following quickly. "Who?"

"I think it was that Miss Crony, the little manicure in the barber shop. The man I couldn't see very well in the dark. But outside, on the street, there seemed to be another man, holding the door!"

Indeed there was. It was I. No one was going to get out until I saw Kennedy.

Kennedy hurried to James Gage who was weak with the shock and the loss of blood from an ugly wound in his left shoulder on the arm. He was bracing himself gamely against an angle of the now deserted cigar stand in the lobby.

Kennedy tore a strip from the shirt of the wounded banker, hastily impro-

vising a tourniquet. "Here, Walter, twist that—tight," he directed as he opened the door and I stepped in. "It may stop the flow of blood, while I get help."

"Oh—it's nothing," groaned Gage.

Kennedy, with his own automatic in one hand and the little ivory revolver in the other, stood in the street door that was open. Outside I had been giving rapid blasts on my police whistle. The other doors were locked. Down the line of street doors that were locked a man was battering and storming at one.

"Let me out, I say! This is an outrage! Let me out!"

Shrinking into the corner was a girl.

"Come, Schwartz!" called Kennedy peremptorily. "Stop that noise—hands up—about face—now march into that corner with Miss Croney—straight ahead—and if you turn your face or move a muscle of your arms—I'll let you have the works—right in the back! Ingraham, Walker, someone, just watch Miss Croney. She's unarmed now—but don't let her take any poison or anything like that. Walter!"

"Yes, Craig!" I answered. "I've done the best I can with that tourniquet. I think I hear the police coming, around the corner."

"Good! Get the cars and the drivers you saw. Tell them to do it. We're perfectly able to take care of ourselves in here, now."

"All right!" I took his place at the unlocked door.

Craig turned toward the barber who was standing sullenly, his face in the corner. "Pop-eye Pete Schwartz," he said quickly, "I recognized you at once this forenoon in the barber shop. I thought you might have something to do with this affair but wasn't sure. You've been out of Dannemore a year now. I understood you had gone straight. But you couldn't keep straight, could you?"

"All was going straight—" The man was muttering something unintelligible, about "the girls."

"Yes, I know. You had two girls and a boy. Well, I gave you the benefit of the doubt. But I didn't propose to let you or any one else get away with anything without getting caught. If you hadn't been so avaricious for yourself, if you had been contented with doing only what you were set to do, you might have made it much harder for me. But I figured out you were coming back."

Gage, in spite of the pain, was glaring savagely at both Schwartz and Madeline Croney.

For the moment it seemed as if every roundsman below the dead line was pouring into the hall from the street door.

"I know—two girls and a boy," Kennedy was saying. "Madeline, Ethel and Dave. Dave's in the liquor racket on Broadway. One of your girls went in the show business."

"Miss Croney" was sobbing convulsively at the sight of the massing of so many cops.

"Don't be too hard on father," she cried looking about wildly and avoiding the savage glare of Gage. "He—we were to make a big haul—but it was—to save the name of another."

She paused, startled, as a bright steel gleam told of the slipping by Kennedy of a pair of bracelets over the wrists of Pop-eye Pete Schwartz.

"There was someone," she was biting the words off contemptuously, "who was a million dollars or more short in his accounts—lost every dollar in this market. He could not return it—and it was only a matter of a few days when he would be discovered. Running away was out of the question. So, he devised a plan for retaining his good name and at the same time recouping his fortune. He got the idea when he discovered by chance who my sister really was—Ethel Wynne—Schwartz. It was to have the Trust Company robbed. Enough was there, where he could direct the robbers, to re-establish him and to pay them well for their trouble. Then, when the rob-

bery was discovered, he said he would merely add to the loss what he had hypothecated—and make it the greatest robbery since the Manhattan Bank affair!

"He had heard about Pop-eye Pete, my father. So he came to him, put the plan up to him, begged him, threatened him. I told father he was a fool. We were happy—he had a good business—my sister had got in the Follies and was happily enough married. There was nothing they could get us for. But the man kept on. He knew the only vulnerable spot in the vault—knew how a cutter-burner could be used to reach it safely—had the whole plan worked out for making it seem like an inside job to the detectives—until the real way was discovered.

"I was installed as manicure, with my father as owner of the shop. Every night we worked. But it could not be for many hours, for fear someone might suspect why we kept the shop open so late when there were no customers downtown.

"At last the tunnel was complete. We did the trick. We were removing the traces of evidence, even. But the temptation was too great for my father. He wanted more! I told him that I suspected something—that I had read the hand of a man who came into the shop and that he was a scientific genius, that I suspected that man because I had seen him in an office upstairs—suspected that someone was not playing fair with us. It was no use. He took the chance. In the midst of the final clean-up, we heard the bolts shooting back in the big vault. We crept through the hole and fled. But the outside street door was locked and guarded—by one of those very men who came to the shop. We were trapped, like rats. Who has done it? Who played false? Why?"

She paused in her rhetorical treble. Kennedy turned.

"Pop-eye Pete," he said gravely, "I knew you could not be the man higher up. I knew this must be made possible only through someone on the inside. Your daughter Madeline has been loyal to you. To save you, she has betrayed the real robber—an officer of the company who was leading a double life."

"Yes—double, all right!" There was a fury in it as of a woman scorned. "Ethel didn't have to play his game—against us! What difference did it make if he was ruined—to her? There's just as good fish to be caught on Broadway as he was and she could have caught 'em, again! I don't know whether you'll get her, too, on this. But I'm going to turn state's evidence! I'm sorry I didn't have a machine gun instead of that damned little thing—and get him!" She hissed out the words venomously.

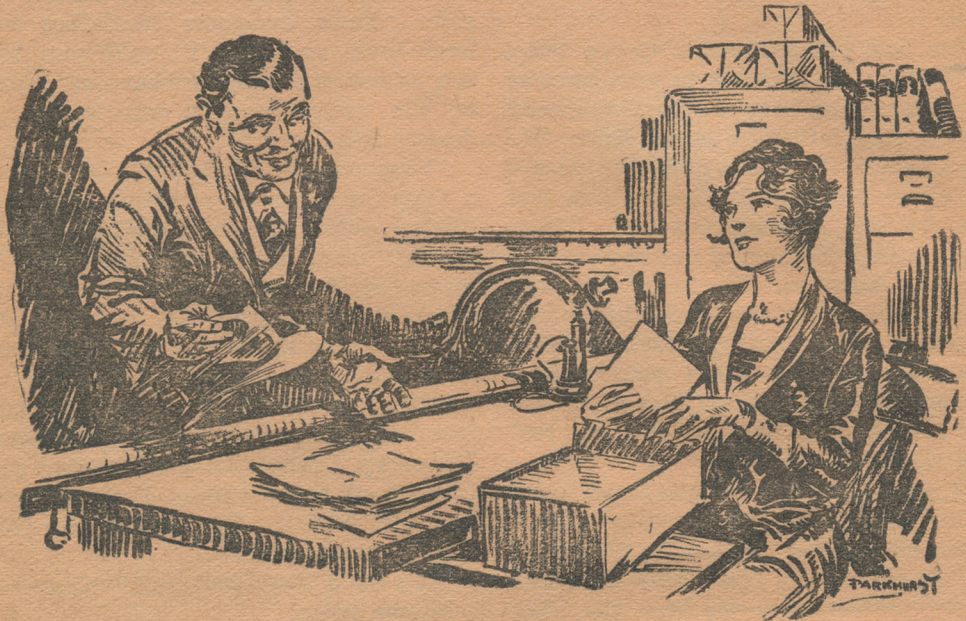
"It's all a lie—blackmail!" muttered a hoarse voice.

"That will easily be shown by an examination of the books," ground out Kennedy. "I suppose I myself was picked out for the rôle of the boob detective because I happened to be available. I suppose the idea was that I was to fail to discover the actual bank robbers—at least I was to let the real robber escape. But I took this case with the determination to let no one, big or little, slip through my fingers. No one has slipped through them. My first clue came in the studying of fingers—a man's finger nails—the clue to his character."

Kennedy paused. I thought of the little manicure and her philosophy of finger tips. Craig had beaten the manicure at her own game.

"No one can tamper with money and passions, flout the moral law—and get away with it—long." Kennedy turned on his heel. "Come, Walter, I think the police and the district attorney can take care of James Gage now!"

Nick Givoni, mob leader, decided on extreme measures to obtain the confession in the lawyer's files.



SETUP

By Eric Taylor

NICK GIVONI'S stall was a café he called Caesar's Grill. Upstairs were a dozen private dining rooms. Behind these rooms was Nick's office, which had a private stairway leading down to an alley. The affairs of the café were managed from the steward's office downstairs. Nick's office was for his private and most profitable business. It was also a meeting place and council chamber for Nick's mob.

In his youth Givoni had been a window washer. There was a certain organizing ability in the man and he became a contractor with some dozen window washers in his employ. While poised on the sills of office windows, Givoni's eyes had many times rested on shiny, black, fat safes. Ideas came to Givoni and in time he sold out his business.

Givoni was a rugged, powerful man. His hair was thick, wavy, and oily. He had a very wide head with florid cheeks. His eyes were calm, almost gentle in their depth of brown. They were partly screened by thick black eyebrows. He had a wide, thick-lipped mouth. He liked to grin, chiefly to flash the gold front teeth of which he was very proud.

He turned his brown eyes gently on "Stormy" Lake. "I sent Mario and Tony out to knock over some filling stations," he said. "You got to keep these young ones working. Mario, he won't be much good. But Tony is going to come up. I want you to watch him, Stormy. Next time we have something big, I think maybe you can take him along. That boy is made for better things than filling stations, you remember that. Next time you crack a

box, I think you take him, eh? Take him for target. He's not afraid to use a gun, but he's no fool. That's the trouble. They either turn yellow in a pinch, or they go killing a lot of people and get the whole town turned upside down."

Stormy Lake flipped a cigarette into a cuspidor. His blue eyes were suddenly strained. He started to speak, but Nick Givoni cut him off.

"Red has found us a box. I tell you there's another good one—Red. That boy hustles, and he's in the know. It is at the Murdock Mills. They pay off on Saturday, but draw the cash Friday afternoon. It is at the mill office all Friday night. There is a watchman. Johnny and Angelo will take care of him. Tony will go with you and stay outside. Phil will drive. You can make the safe very easy; it is a Reliance. . . ."

"I can't, Nick! That's why I wanted to see you. . . ."

"You can't!" Givoni leaned far back to laugh. "You're the quiet one, Stormy, the modest one. That's why I like you. There's no big talk. . . ."

"But I can't, Nick. I mean it. I'm through—quitting!"

"What!" Nick struck his hands to his thighs. He said in almost a whisper: "You do what?"

"I'm going to quit. Getting married, Nick. Going into business on the legit."

Nick laughed jovially. "Oh, is that it? Well, Stormy, that's O. K. What kind of business?"

"I'm buying a garage. Good stand."

"That's fine. You're the wise one, Stormy. A garage—that will give you a front, a stall. And besides it will be useful. If she is O. K., getting married is not so bad. You know better than to blab."

"You don't get me, Nick. This isn't a front. I'm quitting. Cutting the whole business out. The garage will be on the up-and-up. The girl won't stand for me being on the hook. You'll have to get somebody else."

Those gentle brown eyes clouded, then glowed with a sullen fire.

"Are you crazy? Do you know what you say? Gees, do you think being in a mob is like jerking soda water or slinging hash, that you can go to the boss and say, 'Get somebody else, I'm through?' What the hell are you trying to put over, Stormy? Is this some double-cross?" Givoni kicked his chair to the wall. He swaggered across the room, smashed a card table from his path, and stormed back with face blood red and eyes ablaze.

He halted suddenly. "Last year your cut was eighteen grand. This year it is twelve already. And you come to me and say, 'I quit.' Just when things go so smooth. Everybody satisfied. No bulls stirring us up. No trouble. I am thinking to-night—I am saying to Red when he tells me of this job, 'Stormy will open it. Stormy is the goods. No foolishness. Always ready. And never bungles. A man that can use a gun to open a getaway without leaving any meat behind.' That's what I say to Red. That's what I think of you. And now you have turned yellow for a twist. You're sure crazy, Stormy."

There is no quitting. When you are in a mob, you are in! You know that. Did you ever hear of anybody pulling out of a mob? If I tell the boys, you know what they will do. But I like you, Stormy. You're my right-hand man. We worked this bunch up together." Givoni's voice dropped to a whisper. "I don't say a word to anybody. We just forget it. Ditch this dame that is taking the stuff out of you."

He stopped to pat Stormy on the shoulder. "Tell me what you need for Friday night."

Stormy stood up. "You sure are making this tough, Nick. Yeh, I know I cut plenty dough with you. But who opened the cans and got the dough? I figure we're about even on that. As for all that tripe about nobody ever quitting a mob, that may go for some of these cheap guns you got out kick-

ing over filling stations, but not for me. I'm through with the racket. You can get somebody else for my end of your capers. You don't need to suppose I'm going to turn stool because I'm getting married. Where would I get off? I'm in as deep as anybody. You're a hell of a friend, you are. I thought you'd grab my mit and put on a banquet for me."

"Forget that cheese." Nick waved his arm to the door.

Stormy turned. "Good-by, Nick."

Givoni did not answer. Stormy stood in the door. Tall, blonde, blue eyed, he was good looking in a rather hard way. Givoni watched him for a long minute. Then he paced across the floor. He reached out his hand.

"All right, Stormy, we may as well be friends, I guess."

Stormy's face relaxed. He shook Givoni's hand vigorously.

"You'll get somebody else for Friday night?"

Givoni grunted. "But drop in before then, if you change your mind."

Givoni sat very still for a long time. At last he pressed a button for a waiter. "Is anybody here, Slats?"

The waiter nodded. "Johnny and Angelo are in seven wit' a couple. . . ."

"Chase Angelo in."

Angelo had been drinking. He slapped Nick on the back and called him "Big Boy."

Givoni scowled and waved Angelo to a chair.

"What's up? You look like there was a rope around your neck."

Givoni swore softly. "There is a rope around my neck. Around yours—and all of us."

Angelo's eyes lifted.

"It is Stormy," Nick said quietly.

"Gees! You mean he's been picked up an' squealed?"

Givoni shook his head. "It is not so bad, yet. But Stormy tells me he is through. He is getting married and quitting the racket."

Angelo lighted a cigarette. "Well?"

Givoni pressed a buzzer. "Bring a couple of shots for me and Angelo, Slats."

It was the first time Angelo had seen Nick drink whisky. . . .

"Who is this jane that makes us so much trouble?" Givoni asked hopelessly.

Angelo shook his head. "You know Stormy. He tells nobody nothing. He brings no women here."

"You remember Butch, Angelo?" Givoni asked.

Angelo nodded. "They dropped him through for some cigar store stand."

"You're right, Angelo. Butch and Scar Maloof and a kid named Strenger pulled it. Butch and Scar got topped. They caught them because some witness drove into a garage one day and seen this Strenger kid working there. The witness called the cops. The garage boss said Strenger had been working for him a year and was a fine kid. The witness must be mistaken. The cops took Strenger anyway. They worked on him. That stick-up was a year and a half before. The kid hadn't fired the shot that killed the sap. Now he was going straight. So he spilled and rapped Butch and Scar. They got topped. They held the kid for about six months. Then gave him probation.

"You see what happens when a guy goes straight? He turns yellow."

Angelo leaned forward. "What're you going to do? Put Stormy on the spot?"

Givoni grinned and shook his head. "There is another way. We try that first. Maybe then Stormy comes back to us. He is a good man, if this girl had not made him yellow. You know the Lincoln School? Well, on Fourth Street by the school is a little store. It is one of those stores near schools that are kept by old women and sell penny candy and pencils.

"This store is run by Mother Molloy. The store is a front. Mother Molloy is a fence. She is an old friend of Stormy. He told me once when we were all in a jam that she keeps his

money planted for him. That is so he can get it quickly and easily. Stormy has not yet bought this garage. Mother Molloy closes her place at nine o'clock. You and Tony will go there. You see that nobody but the old woman is in the store, then at nine o'clock you enter. Tony covers her. You lock the door and pull down the shades. Take her into the back room and make her tell you where her money is hidden.

"Tie her up and stuff something into her mouth so she can't yell. Take a candle with you. That would be a good way. Hold the candle to her foot. She will tell you. That way we get Stormy's dough and he can't buy his garage. Be careful what you do out there. I don't want any killing. You had better cover your faces. So long as you don't kill her everything will be fine. She can't holler copper."

TWICE Angelo and Tony went out and found men in the store at nine o'clock. The third night they caught her alone. Angelo told her to nod her head when she was ready to produce. Tony played with the candle. Angelo watched her face. She was a tough old woman and held out for a long time. The first time they stopped she tried to scream for help when they took the gag out. There was no fooling about the second time.

They found fourteen thousand dollars and a handfull of diamonds that had been torn from their settings.

Givoni was very pleased when they got back to Caesar's Grill. It was the best haul of the year, apart from the disciplinary effect on Stormy. Givoni took half, the rest was split two ways.

But Friday came and Stormy had not come back to the gang. And they could not try the safe without him.

Givoni waited two more days, then sent Angelo and Tony out to murder Stormy. There was nothing else to do. Givoni hated trouble. But you can't let a fellow live after he's turned yellow. One question from a cop and he'll fall apart and spill everything.

Givoni lay sprawled on a couch in his office while he waited for Angelo and Tony. There was a bottle of whisky at his elbow and a package of cigarettes.

Slats, the waiter, knocked at the door. Givoni asked what he wanted.

"O'Day and Schultz are downstairs. They asked for you and are coming up. What'll I tell them?"

God! Here was a break. Angelo and Tony had gone out to kill Stormy and were not back. And these two bulls had come. Givoni was sitting upright and wiping sweat from his face.

"What'll I say?" Slats hissed through the door.

From the lowered voice Givoni knew the detectives were coming up the stairs. Maybe it wasn't about Angelo and Tony. There was no use staving these dicks off. He'd have to see them eventually. "Let 'em in," Givoni growled.

He heard Slats' footsteps go and return. A knock on the door. "Come in!" Givoni boomed.

O'Day and Schultz came in.

"Hello, boys. Have a smoke?"

O'Day shook his head. "You been here all night, Givoni?" he asked.

Givoni glanced at his watch. "Since seven o'clock," he answered. "Why?"

"What are you sweating about, Givoni?" O'Day demanded.

"Nothing. It's hot up here."

The two detectives laughed.

No one spoke for a minute that seemed endless to Givoni. Then Schultz asked, "Where's Angelo and that fellow he's running with?"

Givoni opened his palms. "How would I know? Angelo, I think he was here to-night. He eats downstairs."

The two detectives laughed again. "They're friends of yours, ain't they?"

"Sure, they my friends. Quit stalling and tell me what you want. What's the matter with Angelo?"

"Oh, nothing much," Schultz said. "We picked him and that other kid up to-night."

"What for?" Givoni demanded breathlessly.

"They were trying to drive two ways on a one-way street," O'Day chuckled. "Traffic cop followed them. Thought they were drunk. They used the whole street from curb to curb. But they weren't drunk. They were just shot! Both of 'em. In the right arm. They got dizzy trying to drive some place to get their wounds dressed. The young kid had fainted. Angelo was at the wheel. Of course Angelo didn't know who did the shooting. They were out Lennark Avenue waiting for a couple of girls, Angelo said. Some fellow walked up to them and bang! bang! They both got it in the arm."

"That's too bad," Givoni said. "It's getting fierce the amount of lead that's slung around these days."

"You don't know who might have done it, Givoni?"

"How would I? They're young fellows. They been hornin' in on a tough guy's girl, maybe."

"Funny about them both getting it in the right arm," Schultz said.

They started for the door and Givoni sighed his relief.

O'Day turned. "Anyway, we'll cool those boys off for six months when they get out of the hospital. They were packing rods."

"Like hell you will," Givoni muttered when the door was closed.

Givoni stood helpless for a minute. There were a lot of things to be done. He must first learn what hospital they'd been taken to. Then he must get a lawyer to them. And he must send one of the boys over to put the fear of hell into Tony. It was his first pinch and he might get careless with his tongue. Angelo was all right. Angelo knew the ropes. Angelo was smart. But he hadn't been smart enough to give Stormy the bump!

Some one knocked on the door to the private stairway. Givoni glided across the room. "Who's that?"

"S-sh! Open up, Nick. It's me, Angelo!"

Nick wanted to laugh. Angelo was smart. A bolt slid back.

"Get a move on!"

"All right, all right," Givoni's answered. Angelo's voice sounded funny. Sounded like he was crying. Nick wanted to laugh again. Imagine Angelo crying. But that arm hurt, maybe. Givoni turned another lock and opened the door.

A revolver stuck its ugly mouth into the room. The white hand that held it. Then Stormy.

Givoni made one play for his revolver. Stormy's gun jumped six inches. Givoni dropped his hand and sighed.

Stormy reached a hand back, closed and locked the door. He crossed the room and slid a bolt on the other door that led to the hall.

Givoni's eyes followed that revolver around the room in a nauseating fascination. He suddenly felt old and weak. He was sick. There was a horrible hard ball in his stomach. He was icy cold and shaking. He tried to speak, but his throat was so dry he choked. At last he managed to curl his tongue into words. They came fast and in a whispering hiss.

"Stormy! For God's sake! We been pals. You'd give a fellow a break. . . ."

"Yeh, a fine break those hyenas of yours gave me!"

"Stormy. I swear it! I don't know what you mean. Why did you say you were Angelo? Why do you come like this with a gun to an old friend and say I gave you no break? I have done nothing to you. If you kill me this second, I die swearing I am your friend and have not hurt you."

"Well, don't fall apart. If I was going to kill you, would I have locked my getaway door? Where's your brains?"

Givoni sighed and relaxed. Of course, he had been a fool not to think of that.

Stormy's left hand was in his coat pocket. "Sit down at your desk," he said.

Givoni obeyed.

Stormy flung a package of type-written sheets before Givoni. "Read 'em."

Givoni picked up the papers. He saw they were carbon copies. He started to read, and gasped explosively.

He looked again and his jumping eyes followed the words:

"NORTHERN FUR ROBBERY
and
MURDER

Red Scanlan located job. Nick Givoni organized and led the raid on this warehouse. I, Stormy Lake, went along to open safe. Robbery netted furs valued at \$60,000, which were fenced to Joseph Bloom for \$12,000, and \$8,000 cash in safe.

Members of gang committing robbery were: Nick Givoni, Angelo Niccassio, Johnny Wills, and myself, with Skeets Murdock driving stolen truck.

The watchman was lured to a back door and slugged by Angelo. While the furs were being loaded watchman came to. Angelo saw the watchman's open eyes taking in the bunch, and slugged him again. The watchman was found dead.

The weak sisters in on this job are Johnny Wills and Bloom."

Givoni's knees were shaking. His fingers massaged his thick neck. "You had this on you when, when. . ."

"Yeh, when Angelo and Tony tried to bump me," Stormy finished. "Read some more. It's all there. Thirty-eight jobs. Three murders."

Givoni fingered the pages. "Well, what do you want, Stormy?"

"Not a thing. I just wanted you to see those sheets. The originals are in a sealed package in my lawyer's safe. They remain there as long as I live. When I pass out, the package goes to a relative of mine. He's on the level and you don't know him. If I die a natural death, the package will be burnt without the seal being broken. If I don't die a natural death, the package

is to be taken to the district attorney. Think that over, Nick."

Givoni thought it over for a full minute. "And these copies," he said at last. "You don't pack them around with you? Suppose you got picked up. . ."

Stormy grinned. "Don't look so sick, Nick. You can have the copies. I'll leave 'em with you now for a souvenir. So long, Nicky."

Stormy stuck his gun clear into a shoulder holster. He turned his back on Givoni and walked leisurely to the door. He walked down the stairs, his back still turned toward Givoni.

Givoni jumped up and ran to the door. He shot the bolt angrily. Those awful carbon sheets lay on his desk. Givoni lighted a match. He burned them one by one, crushed the charred fragments to ashes that he scattered on the evening breeze.

Givoni's brain was working fast. He already saw the fatal weakness in Stormy's scheme. Givoni would get the originals, then he'd pay Joe Santori, who wasn't in the gang, a grand to bump Stormy. And Joe would make no mistakes.

At one o'clock the next day, Givoni was in the offices of Charley Grange, criminal lawyer extraordinary. Miss Barlow, Grange's secretary smiled and said Mr. Grange was out to lunch, and that he wouldn't be back that day as he was going to court.

Givoni knew Miss Barlow slightly. He admired her, and respected her inaccessibility to a man of his type.

He grinned amiably now and said he didn't want to see Mr. Grange.

She showed him a surprised smile, and waited.

Givoni leaned over the railed partition. "I just wanted to see you, Miss Barlow. You can help me, we're old friends, eh?"

"Of course, Mr. Givoni," she laughed.

"Well," Givoni said with oily smoothness. "I just wanted to know if Stormy, Mr. Lake—you know Mr. Lake?"

"Of course, we know Mr. Lake. He's with you, isn't he? Or one of your friends, anyway."

"Yeh. Stormy's with me. And I just wanted to know if he left that package—that sealed package—for Mr. Grange to keep in his vault?"

"Oh, Mr. Givoni. I know Mr. Lake is a friend of yours, but I don't know if I should tell you anything like that. Won't you call Mr. Grange at his home this evening. I'm sure it's perfectly all right, or you wouldn't ask me. But Mr. Grange would think I was careless, or didn't have the proper respect for the confidence. . . ."

Givoni laughed heartily. "That's all right. You told me now. Because if he hadn't left it, you would just have said, 'No.'"

Miss Barlow bit her lip.

Givoni chuckled. "It is nothing. Don't look worried. Now I want to do you a big favor."

She looked puzzled.

"First I want you to come to dinner with me at the Ritz to-night."

"Oh, Mr. Givoni!"

"Well, why not?" Givoni asked. "I'm a harmless old fellow. It just happens that I could do you a big favor. I could put you in the way of making a lot of money. Don't ask me how. I'll tell you this evening. You'll come? If you don't want to go into it, no harm done. Shall we say six-thirty, or seven?"

She bit the end of a pencil, smiled doubtfully, but at length said, "Seven."

Givoni left the office satisfied. He had guessed shrewdly. Grange was the attorney of all the big shots in town. He was Givoni's lawyer. And naturally he was Stormy's lawyer. The thing that had puzzled Givoni for a time was how to reach that vault. His gang could break into Grange's office. But as well to contemplate the National City vaults as that one of the lawyer's.

Grange had built his practice through a reputation for squareness. He had never thrown down a client. Had never broken faith with one. That reputa-

tion was a fetish to Grange. He was a rich man and money would not tempt him. Givoni knew that once Grange accepted the custody of a package for Stormy, or anybody else, the attorney would defend it with his life.

But Miss Barlow was the weak spot in Stormy's armor. She was a fine young woman, Givoni conceded. But she was poor, and, he was confident, money—a lot of it, of course—would tempt her.

SHE was waiting for him at the hotel. He strode across the Palm Court with an easy grin on his florid face. She arose. Givoni saw she was nervous.

"Oh, Mr. Givoni, I've been so worried. I don't think I should have come. I think Mr. Grange might not think it right for me to have dinner with a client—at least without his permission."

He closed his big hand around her slender, soft arm. "Don't you be foolish, Miss Barlow. Grange wouldn't care. Besides, it's after office hours. You're not working for him now."

Reluctantly, she let him lead her to the dining room. Givoni knew how to buy favors. They had a sheltered table for two in a window. But the dinner was not a great success. Givoni felt out of it here. He was too big, too rough, for this fine place. Miss Barlow was nervous. She picked at her food and gave all her time to anxious glances about the dining room.

When nothing remained on the table but small blacks, Givoni got to business.

"You'll be wanting to know what I got up my sleeve, Miss Barlow?"

She nodded anxiously.

He laid his big elbows on the table and leaned toward her. "I don't stall, Miss Barlow. I want that package Stormy left with Grange. It's worth ten grand—ten thousand—to me."

He sat back and waited. He hated to pay that much, but Miss Barlow wasn't cheap. Nothing but real money would make a crook out of her.

She gasped and looked at him intently.

"That's impossible. Terrible. I must go. Why, you're insulting."

Givoni's arm shot out. He almost held her in the chair. "Listen. You won't be hurting Grange. You won't be hurting Stormy. There is nothing in that package that's worth a dime to Grange or Stormy. But it's worth ten thousand to me."

"No."

Givoni sighed. "Fifteen thousand," he offered.

"Please take me out of here. I don't want to create a scene."

"For God's sake, girl, you're mad! Twenty thousand. That's what I'll give you! Think of it. Twenty thousand in one lump. Do you know any other way you will ever get your hands on that much at one time? What can you do with that much coin? You're young, and smart. Think what it means!"

Givoni was holding her arm all the time. He felt a little quiver run through her body, then a slight relaxation. He let her play with the figures a while.

"Oh, but I couldn't. It would be betraying Mr. Grange."

"He'll never know," Givoni said quickly. "You get me that package. Then I'll fix it up and you can put it back in there. Nobody will ever know it's been opened. And you'll have your stake."

"No. I couldn't do it. I'm ashamed to stay and talk to you about it. It's wrong."

Her refusal was not quite so vigorous now. But Givoni was nearly crazy with worry. He couldn't sleep while that cursed history of the gang lay in Grange's vault. Suppose some other gang took a shot at Stormy? Suppose the damned snitch got himself killed in an automobile accident? Givoni and the gang would hang sure. He broke into a sweat. If it cost every dime he had in the world, he must get that package. He'd put the gang on the hustle to make up what he paid.

"Please call for the check and take me out of here," the girl begged again. "Please!"

Givoni smiled at her. He wanted to clamp his big fists around that slim white throat. For a minute the rage that boiled in his brain held him breathless. He made a last desperate plunge. "Thirty thousand dollars!" he whispered.

She moaned, and Givoni knew he had her. People nearby glanced up. "Smile!" he hissed.

Her eyes gleamed with tears; but her lips turned up in a miserable smile.

"Thirty thousand!" Givoni repeated.

She lowered her eyes from his. "Yes!" she sobbed.

Givoni wasted no more time. He pressed ten thousand into her palms right then. Safer to let her play with some of the money than with the idea. He made swift arrangements for the transfer of the package and the balance of the money. He took her to a taxi and drove home with her. He kept her jollied up with visions of what she could do with thirty thousand dollars.

Her decision made, she brightened a little. Givoni left her confident that she would live up to her bargain.

And for himself, he intended to live up to his. He hated to throw out that much money, but he had to shoot square with this girl. If he tried any double-cross at the final exchange, there was no telling what she would do. She might go and confess everything to Grange. Givoni would have the murderous papers, anyway. But there was no telling when you needed Grange. Why, it might be worth a hundred grand to have Grange with you.

Givoni chuckled as he dropped into his bed. If Stormy managed to keep alive for one more day, the gang was safe. And twenty-four hours after Givoni got that package, Stormy would be a dead man.

Givoni waited in the lobby of the La Salle. In two minutes she should come. He broke into a sweat as he

thought of the possibility of an accident to her. Now the package was nearly his, he was mad with anxiety. A wave of relief that left him weak passed through his body. She was coming.

He nearly dragged her to a secluded corner. She reached within her coat. Givoni watched her with wolfish eyes. Her fingers held a long white linen envelope.

Givoni smiled, and brought a wallet from his pocket. She passed him the envelope and took the wallet.

"Count the money," he urged.

She ran her fingertips across the edges of thirty one-thousand-dollar notes. Givoni was examining the envelope and its seal. He smiled.

"You better get that to a safe deposit box, if you have one."

She nodded. "Good-night, Mr. Givoni."

He walked downstairs to the wash-rooms.

His fingers tore futilely at the linen envelope. Luckily, he had a knife. In the envelope were many sheets of typewriter paper. On the first sheet, Givoni read the words:

"A gangster never squeals."

He turned over the other sheets. They were all blank.

"I be damned! I be damned!" Givoni stood for five minutes repeating the words. He couldn't think straight. Where did he stand? He felt the dazed freedom of an unfettered slave. Relief. Joy. Anger. He felt them all, but which was right?

He caught himself saying, "Good old Stormy." Then next second remembered he was going to murder Stormy. He hurried down to Caesar's Grill. Had a bottle of whisky sent up to the office and lay on the couch drinking. At midnight he dozed off in a drunken sleep. It was the third time in twenty years that Givoni had been drunk.

It was nine in the morning when Givoni came out of his sleep. He had a mean head and was ugly. After pressing the buzzer for five minutes

and roaring down the hall, a buss boy came up from the restaurant to see what was wanted.

Givoni told the boy to bring coffee. It was luke warm and bitter. He always hated the place at this hour of the morning. It was like a morgue. No waiters, no customers; nothing but a sour smell, a few of these sap boys, and a couple of cooks' helpers in the joint. He washed his face in cold water and stormed out of the place very much upset.

He'd been doing some thinking over that cup of bitter coffee. Nobody could sell Givoni a motto to hang on the bedroom wall for thirty grand and get away with it. He didn't give a hoot if the girl didn't know what was in the package. He'd get that dough back if he had to throw the girl and Grange both through their windows.

He had to wait in the corridor for twenty-five minutes, then Grange came in.

The lawyer unlocked the door. "Come on in."

Grange held a gate open for Givoni to precede him into the lawyer's private office.

Givoni shook his head. "I want to see Miss Barlow."

Grange was surprised. "She won't be down. She has left me."

Givoni gasped.

Grange looked puzzled as Givoni stood there rooted to the floor. "Miss Barlow has gone away," he added with a smile.

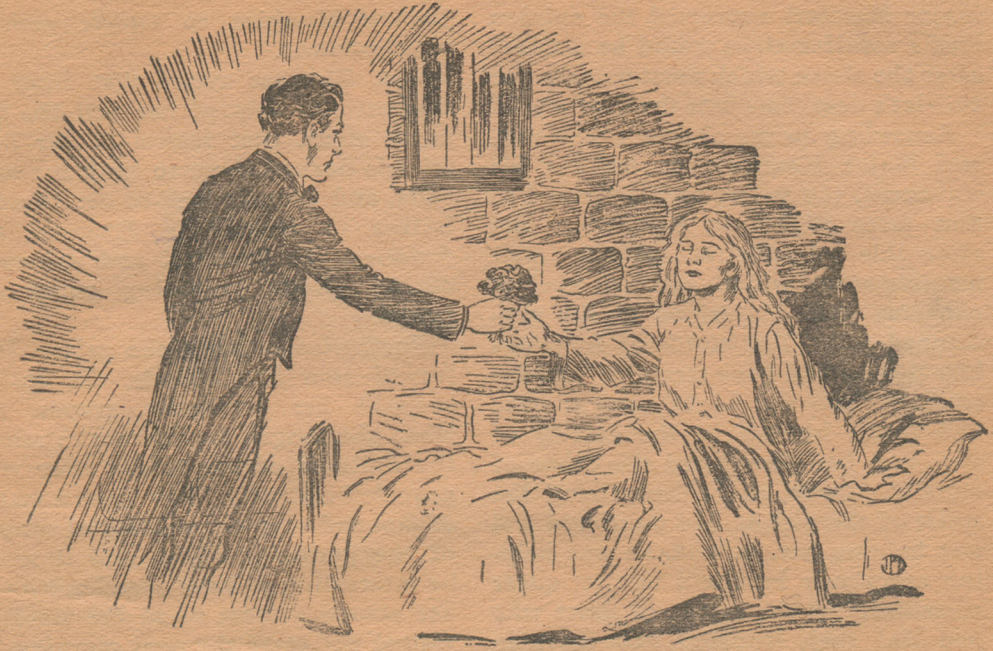
"Where?" Givoni snarled.

Grange laughed. "Well, she told me yesterday morning she was going to get a plane last night for San Francisco to catch a boat for Australia. But she told my wife yesterday afternoon that she was going to get a plane last night for New York to catch a boat for South America. She got married yesterday morning."

"Who?" Givoni roared. "Who did she marry?"

"Didn't you know?" said Grange. "Stormy Lake!"

The tenth of a series of true stories about English jails.



DRAMAS OF THE PRISON HOUSE

X—Jail Spooks

By Charles Kingston

SPIRITS in prison! There is something fantastic about that, for one would imagine that with more than one world in which to roam spirits would scarcely choose such a habitation, but even the most rabid unbelievers must admit that the evidence is worthy of consideration. Prison governors, chaplains and prisoners have testified that they have witnessed spiritual manifestations within the confines of the prison-house and though we deride the statements of the latter class of witnesses it is not so easy to dispose of the other evidence.

As recently as December, 1925, Major Marriott, formerly governor of Exeter Jail, told a very remarkable story of a prison chaplain's experience.

A young man was convicted of the murder of his sweetheart and sentenced to death, and in due course found his way into the condemned cell. Here he was constantly visited by the chaplain, a great believer in Spiritualism who was at once attracted by the convict's highly-strung, volatile nature. The young man was fairly well read, had dabbled a little in Spiritualism and was something of a visionary, and when the attempt to secure a reprieve failed the reverend gentleman decided that here was an opportunity for testing in a practical manner the truths of Spiritualism. He therefore asked the condemned man to show himself after death, and when the promise was given the chaplain had no doubt that it would be fulfilled, although

Major Marriott expressed the opinion that a manifestation would be difficult after the shock which must precede the convict's departure into the next world.

According to the chaplain, however, and Major Marriott vouches for his statement, the young man appeared to him three nights in succession and after this introduction made a fuller manifestation which enabled him to converse with his friend of the condemned cell. The murderer informed him that he had gone straight from the scaffold "into the Light" and at once had found himself in the society of men who had committed the crime of murder. Later on he had found the spirit of the girl he had murdered and was helping her, in fact, he was helping everybody he could in that queer community of the spirits of those who had had such troubled existences in this comparatively commonplace world.

Such is the statement of a presumably sane and educated man, and I suppose one must leave it at that. Major Marriott himself declared that during the period he was governor of Exeter Jail spirits visited the cells, amongst them that of the dead father of a prisoner, who came to comfort his son in his tribulation.

It is all very weird and puzzling. Prison governors are not as a rule addicted to hallucinations. Their work tends to harden them and they see so much of the seamy side of life that their faith in human nature is seldom strong. Personally I should classify them as the least credulous of beings, for in the course of their official careers every possible form of fraud and trickery must come under their notice, and consequently their cynicism renders them almost fool proof. That is why I would give more credence to Major Marriott than I would to the astounding claims made by the once famous Susan Fletcher, who was convicted at the Old Bailey of employing Spiritualism fraudulently to obtain from Mrs. Hart Davies money and jewelry, and was sentenced by Mr.

Justice Hawkins to twelve months' imprisonment.

Mrs. Fletcher stated that from the moment she entered her cell she was never alone, that spirits of her dead friends flocked there to keep her company, and actually helped her to write letters to friends in England and America, the practical and accommodating spirits providing paper and pencil.

Furthermore, when the prison food turned sour her friends, the spirits, brought her hot-house grapes, and when she longed for flowers to relieve the dullness of her prison they were provided instantly. She gives a matter of fact and very circumstantial account of the grapes' incident, and it would be interesting to have corroboration of her statement that when the wardress visited her early the next morning she found on the floor of the cell the pits and skins of the grapes. Mrs. Fletcher said that had she so desired it the friendly spirits could have rescued her from jail, indeed, she wrote in her book that they urged her to agree to escape but that she declined because she believed her imprisonment to be the best advertisement Spiritualists could get. She certainly had the satisfaction of knowing that there were scores of men and women of high intellectual attainments who regarded her as a martyr, and if she had her moments of depression she bore her punishment philosophically.

Her own account of two seances in prison is worth reprinting. It may be mentioned that "Ernest" was the name she gave to her spirit-medium and that "Bertie" was her own pet-name.

"When I had finished my devotions, I returned to my cell, and went early to bed," she wrote, "at about ten o'clock my cell seemed suddenly filled with light, and, standing in this light, I saw the spirit called 'Ernest', holding in his hand a little bouquet of violets and heliotrope. Giving them to me, he said:

"I have brought you these flowers

from dear Mrs. Nichols and Mrs. Western (of London) with their love. There was a spray of mignonette which we gave to Marie Therese, and which she has placed upon the altar. You caught its perfume to-day; and to-morrow, if you search, you will find the flower.'

"Next day I searched in the chapel for the spray of mignonette, and found it at the foot of the crucifix. I thought I could safely take this to my warder, and tell her where I had found it. Looking at me earnestly, she said, 'Perhaps your angel brought it.' I thought how much wiser the little woman was than she knew.

"I heard a little later from Mrs. Nichols. She said, 'Mrs. Western and I have prepared a little bouquet of flowers, and 'Ernest' has taken them away, and promised to give them to you if possible. The spray of mignonette and the heliotrope were my contribution; the violets, Mrs. Western's.' What better corroboration could be had than this!

"On the night before Mr. Eglinton departed for India, 'Ernest' came to me and said, 'I want my last work in London before we go, to be for Dr. and Mrs. Nichols; and I wish you to write a note to one of them to-day, and place it beneath the altar in the chapel. Write to the other also, as near noon to-morrow as circumstances will permit and put it in the same place. I will take them when I can.' I did as directed. At night I looked where I had concealed the little notes, and they had vanished, when and how, I had no means of knowing; but Dr. Nichols has since written to me."

"Two little notes in your well-known handwriting were punctually delivered. Sitting in my study, Mr. Eglinton, "under control," took a slate, and held it horizontally above his head near the gaslight. Something fell upon it. On his lowering it, I found your little note addressed to Mr. Nichols. A little after Mr. Eglinton asked me to come with him near my writing-desk. He put his

hand into the obscurity under the desk for a moment; and on taking it out there lay on it a note from "Bertie."

"Letters were taken from me by my spirit-friends to Mr. Eglinton, to Capt. James (a retired army officer living in Gower Street, who has been for many years a most intelligent investigator of the phenomena of mesmerism and Spiritualism), and to Signor Rondi, whom I believe to have been sincerely sorry for what he was induced to do against me in America, overcome, as I believe he was, by Dr. Mack or other machinations. Signor Rondi wrote me a long letter, which was brought to me by 'Ernest.' My reply was taken to him in the same way, and received in the presence of Mr. Eglinton. I am sorry for his fault, and believe that he is sorry also.

"The manner in which Mr. Eglinton received one of my missives was curious. He was going along the Holborn Viaduct in an omnibus, when a spirit-voice directed him to alight, and go to some quiet room. He stopped the omnibus, and went into the great hotel of Spiers and Ponds, and into a vacant room, where, feeling something touch his thigh, he put down his hand, and found a letter which had just been written by me in my cell in prison. This is his account of the matter related to me and to others."

These extracts will excite either derision or wonderment, but whatever may be one's personal opinion the fact remains that several of the wardresses who were brought into contact with Susan Fletcher during her imprisonment became convinced Spiritualists.

But long before Mrs. Fletcher or Major Marriott gave their evidence a cunning convict in Dartmoor with a smattering of education and an original cunning of his own tried to escape with the aid of an imaginary ghost and would have succeeded but for sheer bad luck at the last moment. An ingratiating manner, abject deference to the warders, apparent anxiety to do his best and influence over the other pris-

oners won him certain privileges which amongst other things brought him privileged jobs such as weeding the garden attached to the governor's house. In this way he got to know the governor more intimately than an ordinary prisoner could have hoped, and when he deduced from the occasional remarks addressed to him by that official that his hobby was the compilation of a history of Dartmoor when it had been used as the headquarters of American prisoners during the war of 1812 he pondered long and earnestly as to how he could turn the governor's weakness to his own advantage.

The most fruitful of thinkers might have failed to connect this amiable weakness of the retired army officer with a plan for escaping from Dartmoor, but the convict had an extra share of the cunning of his class, and he certainly did not intend if he could help it to serve the whole of his sentence of fifteen years. Not a day had passed since his arrival at Dartmoor that he had not devoted some portion of to making plans for escape, but beyond communicating with a friend and confederate outside he did nothing. It was easy enough to bribe an underpaid young warder to take a message to a friend who was waiting for the signal to provide those necessities for a successful escape—clothes, food and a vehicle, but it was quite another matter getting to that friend, and it seemed impossible because his cell was situated on the ground floor where there were warders on duty in addition to barred and guarded doors and gates.

If only he could get to a cell on the top tier where he would be within a few feet of a skylight and freedom he was sure the rest would be easy. But the shrewd governor placed the lame, the halt and the blind there, and he would as soon have dreamed of giving a young and virile convict one of those cells as the run of his house.

But shortly after he had discovered the governor's hobby the designing convict rang the emergency bell early

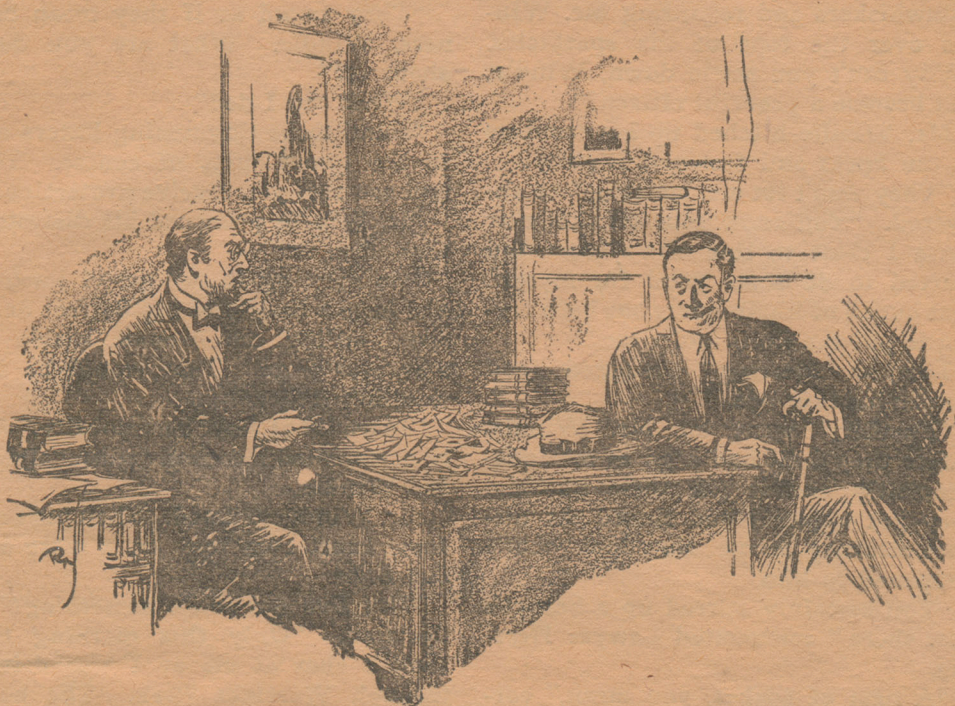
one morning and demanded an interview with the governor. It was a serious offence to ring the bell without a good cause, but he assured the warder that he must see the governor because he had been unable to sleep that night owing to the appearance of a ghost in his cell.

When the governor arrived the convict, cunningly pretending to be unable to identify the age or nationality of the ghost, proceeded to describe the very character he had heard the governor himself refer to as one of the most prominent of the American prisoners who had died at Dartmoor. It was a lifelike description right down to what the narrator termed the "curious accent," and the governor had no difficulty in recognizing the American naval officer to whom he intended to give a whole chapter in his book on Old Dartmoor.

"This is amazing," he said, believing that the convict could not possibly have invented the story, an ignorant and unread man obviously being incapable of knowing anything of the history of the prison. "Remove him to another cell at once. I will remain in the cell to-night in case the spirit of the American officer revisits it."

The convict was at once marched upstairs to the only vacant cell, which happened to be on the top tier, a fact he had known and acted on, and three nights later he was out on the roof and making his way to his confederate and safety when as he was climbing over the outer wall some of the masonry gave way and he fell and broke his leg. When they found him and carried him back to the prison in the early hours of the morning the head warder went to inform the governor of what had happened and failing to find him in his house thought of the vacated cell on the ground floor. A few minutes later there he discovered the governor dozing in an armchair as he vainly waited for the ghost which existed only in the cunning imagination of a desperate convict.

Hamlet was worried about being or not being. So was Mr. Windle. But Mr. Windle was worried about his being and his enemies not being.



MR. WINDLE PINCH HITS FROM HAMLET

By C. M. Rockwell

WHEN a forceful and resourceful ex-confidence man battles his way up from obscurity to the commanding position of millionaire mayor of a thriving new colony of moving picture people and at the same time wins to himself a legion of loyal friends, all in little more than a year's time, it may be accepted as a foregone conclusion that his way up has not been entirely strewn with roses.

Such was the case with Mr. Dalrymple Windle. Many steps in his rapid rise to affluence had been made at the expense of certain unscrupulous captains of industry who had locked horns with Mr. Windle and come off second best. So they had ganged up on him

and gone to the district attorney in a body and demanded that Mr. Windle be chased out of town.

Combining business with pleasure, the district attorney had tried to blackmail Mr. Windle out of one hundred thousand dollars. But Mr. Windle had cleverly trapped the district attorney who was promptly indicated by the grand jury on a charge of attempted extortion.

And that was how matters stood this sunny California morning in November as Mr. Windle placed his smart new tan fall Stetson on the desk of Mr. Augustus Herring in the latter's office and went into conference with the shrewd, red-whiskered little attorney.

"You've got the whole city in an uproar," stated Herring, stroking his red chinwhiskers and regarding Mr. Windle over the tops of his spectacles. "Why can't you settle down, Windle, and become a peaceful citizen?"

Mr. Windle hitched up his trousers at the knees and frowned slightly.

"They won't let me, Herring," he answered. "You know yourself that ever since I came to this man's town and started to do some good for myself, that bunch of highbinders has been trying to put the skids under me."

Lawyer Herring shrugged and pursed his thin lips.

"Further," went on Mr. Windle, "after they'd all had a go at me independently and it got them nothing, they got together and sicked the district attorney on me. Now look what's happened to him."

"You certainly stirred up a hornet's nest there," commented Lawyer Herring.

"A nest of snakes, you mean," corrected Mr. Windle. He took a packet of letters from his inside breast pocket and tossed them upon the little attorney's desk. "Just cast your eyes over that bunch of threatening letters, Herring, and tell me if you think they mean anything. I get 'em by every mail."

Augustus Herring gingerly picked up the letters and scanned the outsides of the envelopes one at a time.

"Anonymous, of course," he suggested.

"Sure. And they threaten me with everything from a dose of carbolic acid to a machine gun, unless I take the next train out of town. Read 'em."

Herring read the top letter.

"I see," he said, looking up. "If you clear out, that would kill the case against the district attorney, because you are the main witness."

"Exactly. Read the rest of 'em."

The little red-whiskered lawyer read through the remaining letters. As he read, his sandy eyebrows went up and down. When he had finished the last one, he looked very hard at Mr. Windle

for a long time without speaking. Finally he said:

"They sound as if they mean business, Windle. What are you doing about it?"

"What can I do?"

"Hand these threatening letters over to the grand jury, of course. They will see that you receive protection."

Mr. Windle grimaced his distaste of that idea.

"Go running to the grand jury, eh, and have a couple of big flatfoot detectives tailing me around beside me wherever I go. That would be fine, wouldn't it?"

"It would at least be a novelty," dryly commented Herring, smiling slyly at Mr. Windle.

Mr. Windle grinned. Then his handsome hazel eyes took on a more serious light.

"But I've got to do *something!*" he declared. "Only this morning they took a shot at me as I was driving through Westlake Park. The bullet snicked a piece out of my hat brim. Look here!" He picked up his new fall Stetson from Herring's desk and pointed to a notch in the brim. "And it's a brand new hat, too. Cost me twenty bucks, Herring."

"Hm-mm!" grunted Herring, eyeing Mr. Windle curiously.

"And yesterday somebody put the brakes of my car on the fritz, while I was up on Mount Lookout with a—a—with a friend of mine. If I hadn't spotted the disconnected brakes, we'd both been killed on the steep grade, coming down."

Mr. Windle's hazel eyes flashed ominously. He resumed:

"It's bad enough to have them after my hide, Herring; but when they start getting my friends into it, too—well, I've got to do something about it!"

"See the grand jury."

"Oh, hell, Herring! Can't you suggest something better than that?"

"Hire private detectives to protect you, then."

Mr. Windle shook his head.

"Not so good, Herring. I don't like dicks of any breed whatever. It's in my blood."

Lawyer Herring's sandy eyebrows went up.

"In a serious case like this," he said, tapping the packet of letters, "it's a case of necessity, Windle. You don't want to be shot or knifed in the back, do you?"

"Do you really think they'd do it?"

"Did they merely try to ruin your new hat this morning?" countered Herring, pointing to the nick in the brim of Mr. Windle's new Stetson. "If they did, I'd say that it was mighty good shooting." He sat back in his chair and stroked his red chinwhiskers. "Just suppose they'd missed and hit your head. That would have been pretty bad luck for you, wouldn't it?"

Mr. Windle ran his fingers through his crisply curling chestnut hair. He heaved a little sigh.

"I thought maybe they were merely trying to bluff me," he said. He eyed the snicked hat brim. "But that was a bit too close for comfort, Herring; and that business of putting my brakes on the bum yesterday might have turned out serious. Oh, I guess I'll have to hit back, all right. And you can't suggest anything, eh?"

"Go into hiding until the trial comes up," suggested Herring.

Mr. Windle's handsome hazel eyes widened at this.

"Huh!" he snorted disgustedly. He grabbed up his hat from Herring's desk and strode out of the little lawyer's office.

Herring sat very still, staring at the door through which Mr. Windle had passed. He blew out his cheeks at last and rubbed his thin nose and then picked up the letters which his indignant client had left upon his desk. He adjusted his spectacles and slowly read through the letters again.

"They mean business!" he grunted as he put down the last letter. "I wonder if Windle would rather be cremated, or just buried as is?"

Mr. Dalrymple Windle pulled his Skookum Straight Eight sport roadster up beside the curb in front of the entrance to the lot of the Superb Pictures Corporation and waited for his friend, Miss Betty Mainwaring, the petite blond darling of the movie fans. As Betty came out through the main gate, she saw Mr. Windle seated in the Skookum. A look of relief passed over her very expressive and exceedingly winsome face.

"So you're still in the land of the living, Dally?" she said, as she snuggled in beside him. "I was so dreadfully worried that I couldn't work properly. We had to shoot a couple of scenes over and over again. And my voice trembled with anxiety for you, Dally dear. Did you see Lawyer Herring?"

"I did, and a fat lot of help *he* was," answered Mr. Windle. He stepped on the starter button. They swept away into the traffic.

"What did he say? Did you show him those letters?"

"I showed him the letters, Betty, and he advised me to run to the grand jury for protection, or hire a bodyguard—or, worse still, to crawl into a hole out of sight until the district attorney comes up for trial."

"And what are you going to do? I mean, *which* are you going to do?" Betty asked.

Mr. Windle looked straight ahead without answering.

"Which are you going to do, Dally?" Betty asked again. Her baby-blue eyes looked up anxiously at Mr. Windle's stern countenance. She spied the notch in his new Stetson hat. "Why, your hat is torn!" she exclaimed, and reached up and removed it from his head. "A piece is cut right out of the brim, Dally! Didn't you know it?"

"Oh, I knew it," answered Mr. Windle, keeping his eyes on the traffic.

"Why did you buy a damaged hat, Dally?"

"It wasn't damaged in the least when I bought it."

"Oh!" Betty gasped. She stared at the notched hat brim. She turned it this way and that in her dainty hands. "Oh! I *knew* something would happen, Dally! I just felt it in my bones! What was it?" She gripped Mr. Windle's right arm so hard that he looked down into her questioning blue eyes in surprise.

"When they damaged your brakes while we were up there at the Mountaintop Inn yesterday, Dally, I knew that they wouldn't wait long before they tried to get you again. What was it?"

"A bullet," briefly answered Mr. Windle. "They had a shot me as I was driving through Westlake Park this morning, Betty."

"Oh, o-oh!" gasped Betty, gazing at the snicked hat brim with horror-struck eyes. "Oh, *Dally!*" She thrust the hat away from her on the seat and gripped his arm even harder than before. "Drive me straight home!" she commanded.

When Mr. Windle pulled up in front of the handsome Spanish type stucco bungalow in Windleton, his new and very popular subdivision where Betty had come to live with her mother and a younger sister, Betty demanded that he come inside.

"We've got to talk this thing over, Dally!" she declared. "You've just got to do something to protect yourself! Come in out of the street. Goodness knows who mightn't be looking for you, even out here!"

Mr. Windle slid his long legs out of the Skookum Straight Eight and followed her into the house.

Betty closed the front door and locked it and slipped the key into her handbag.

"And you don't get out of here again, Dally Windle, until we've worked out some plan to protect you!" she stated very vehemently. "Not if I have to call the neighbors in to help me tie you up in the basement.!" Her blue eyes flashed determinedly. She led Mr. Windle into the big living room and pushed him into a wide armchair and

brought him cigarettes and an ash tray and a bottle and a siphon.

"There!" she exclaimed, sitting on the wide arm of his chair. "What is there to complain about regarding this?"

"Nothing in the wide, wide world," answered Mr. Windle.

"Did you tell Herring about how they tried to wreck us yesterday by tampering with your brakes?" Betty asked, when Mr. Windle had charged his glass, discharged it and put it down.

He nodded. "Told him everything, Betty; and he advised me to get a bodyguard or crawl into a hole, like I told you."

"And why don't you—get a bodyguard, I mean. Oh, Dally! If anything happened to you—"

Mr. Windle slipped an arm around her slim waist.

"Don't worry," he soothed her. "I'll have to do something."

"What?"

"I don't know yet. But I'll find a way out, Betty. I've been mulling it over ever since I left Herring's office."

They heard the telephone ring in the hall. A maid answered it and then appeared in the doorway of the living room.

"For Mr. Windle," she said.

Mr. Windle stared in surprise.

"But how would anybody know you're here, Dally?" Betty wondered.

He shook his head in puzzlement and went out and answered the call.

"That you, Windle?" came a husky, croaking voice over the wire.

"Yes. Who's this?"

"Never mind who's this," came the low-voiced answer. "But if you want to live until daylight to-morrow, Windle, *get out of town!* And stay out! This is absolutely your last warning! If you are not far away from this place by to-morrow morning's sunrise, you'll be stone dead! If you don't believe it, just hang around and see!"

The telephone clicked in Mr. Windle's ear. He batted his eyes and quietly hung up.

"Who was it, Dally?" Betty inquired from the doorway of the living room. "Who knew you were here—so soon?"

Mr. Windle licked his lips and took out his handkerchief and wiped them and stalled for time. Indeed who, he wondered, was keeping such close tabs on his movements?

"Who was it?" insisted Betty. "Tell me!"

"The steward at the Cameleopard Club," hazarded Mr. Windle. "He said he just rang up here on chance, Betty. It's a special poker party I'm wanted for to-night."

"Liar!" challenged Betty. She ran up to him and grasped his sleeves and tried to shake him. "Why tell me such a silly lie, Dally? You know that I know that it wasn't the steward of the Cameleopard Club! Who was it?"

Mr. Windle mopped his forehead.

"Pipe down, Betty," he begged. "I can stand the other thing, but when you get on my neck you make me—you make me—"

Betty reached up and clapped a pink palm over his protest.

"Right here is where I come in on this business, Mr. Dally Windle!" she exclaimed. "I saw a car following us out here from the lot, and they're out there waiting for you this minute! I know it! Well, you aren't going out there to be shot at again!" She pulled Mr. Windle back into the big living room and pushed him into the wide armchair and squeezed in beside him. "I've been thinking about this all day long," she said. "And I've got a plan that will fool them. Listen to me, Dally Windle!"

"Shoot," meekly invited Mr. Windle.

Betty entwined her arm with his and buzzed busily into his left ear. Mr. Windle listened patiently at first. Then he began to grin. He nodded from time to time. When Betty had finished, he turned and stared into her baby-blue eyes.

"It's a ring-tailed snorter!" he exclaimed admiringly. "And did you

think up all that by your little self?"

Betty nodded brightly.

"And you'll do it, Dally?" she begged.

"Well, I'd never thunk it of you!" stated Mr. Windle, shaking his head. "Sure I'll do it, Betty. It's a better plan than I could have doped out for myself. Girl, I didn't think you had it in you!"

Betty bounced out of the big armchair.

"Come right along, then!" she cried. "We'll get busy right away. We'll fool 'em, Dally! We'll fool 'em right under their very eyes!"

"Wait," said Mr. Windle. "There's lots of time, Betty. Of course you know exactly who's behind all this dirty work, eh?"

"Why of course," Betty answered. "It's that Hume, the banker, and that proprietor of the *Daily Dawn*, who tried to run you out of town last year, Dally, and also Horwitch, that crooked little real-estate operator. Then there's Sowdy, the jerrybuilder. We got good and even with him, didn't we, Dally? Oh, they are all hand-in-glove with that crooked district attorney, Dally. They are the ones who put him up to trying to blackmail you in the first place. They are all in cahoots together, and if the district attorney is convicted, the others are afraid that they'll be dragged into it, too. That's why they are so anxious to run you out of town before the trial comes off."

"Bright girl!" complimented Mr. Windle. "You've got it all correct to the last decimal place, Betty. Well, roll up the curtain and let the play begin. I'm ready."

That evening a furtive watcher slinking in the shadows on the opposite side of the street saw great activity in and around the new home of Miss Betty Mainwaring, the celebrated movie star. A great crowd of Windleton movie people turned up as by magic and began making whoopee with Mr. Dalrymple Windle, their popular mayor, the center of their attention. The men

toasted Mr. Windle and the women danced with him until the small hours. It was indeed a lively celebration of something.

Another man, summoned secretly by telephone came and kept the hidden watcher company.

"What the devil is it all about?" anxiously inquired the newcomer. "Windle doesn't act as if he's worried about our threats. What's he up to now?"

The first man shook his head.

"Search me," he answered glumly. "I followed them out here from the Superb movie lot, where he picked up the Mainwaring dame. After they'd been inside the house for a time, I rang up and told Windle to get out of town before sunrise. Shortly afterwards *this* broke loose. They're certainly having quite a party."

Along after one o'clock in the morning, when the whoopee-makers had begun to thin out, the patient watchers were at last rewarded. Mr. Dalrymple Windle's Japanese servant, Suuki, drove up to the front of the Mainwaring home in a taxi, with a great load of luggage bearing Mr. Windle's initials.

"A-ah!" breathed the watchers.

And then the party suddenly broke up. Mr. Windle came out and boarded his Skookum Straight Eight sport roadster. Betty Mainwaring got in beside him. They drove away, followed by Suuki and the luggage in the taxi and a whole string of movie people in their own cars.

"Windle is beating it for safety!" exclaimed one of the watchers to the other. "And his friends are seeing him off. I thought we'd put the wind up him. He's scared!" They hurried around to a side street and got into a parked car and followed the party to the railway station. They mingled in the crowd and saw Mr. Windle waving his hand from the rear platform of the *Early Bird* as it pulled out for the East.

The first editions of the morning

papers all carried the news that Mr. Dalrymple Windle, popular mayor of Southern California's newest community of moving picture people, the thriving and picturesque little city of Windleton, had gone East on important business. The date of his return was very uncertain.

Banker J. Fergus Hume read the news over his breakfast coffee and rubbed his ash-white hands with extreme satisfaction. He chuckled deep in his throat, and rang up his cronies as soon as he reached his desk in the Universal Bank.

"Windle's gone!" was the glad tidings he spread to his confederates. "Did you see it in the paper? And it says he may not be back for a long time, or words to that effect. That fixes the case against the district attorney. It will collapse like an empty sack. Without Windle here, the grand jury are all up in the air. It's a wash-out!"

At noon that day, Banker Hume, Horwitch, the real-estate operator, Sowdy, the jerrybuilder, and Howsey, proprietor of the *Daily Dawn*, all lunched together in a quiet corner of the big dining room of the Cameleopard Club. The indicted district attorney, out on heavy bail awaiting his trial, the outcome of which he now felt happily certain, was not with them in person, though he was there in spirit.

"Well, Windle's licked this time!" boasted Horwitch. "We certainly put the wind up him all right, Mr. Hume. I was out there and followed him to the station with his friends. They gave him a big send-off. I nearly cheered for him myself!"

Banker Hume's cold, gray face cracked into a semblance of a grin. He was about to speak when Sowdy, the jerrybuilder, spoke up.

"What's this about a mysterious little black book?" asked Sowdy. "The *Sun-Star's* got a big headline about a little black book that the grand jury is hot after." He pulled a copy of the *Sun-Star's* early afternoon edition from

his coat pocket and unfolded it for the others to see. They all craned their necks to read the flaring headline across the top of the front page.

WHO HAS THE MYSTERIOUS LITTLE BLACK BOOK?

Grand Jury Searching for Little Black Book Said to Contain Important Evidence Against Indicted District Attorney and Accomplices

Howsey, proprietor of the *Daily Dawn*, was first to straighten up from reading. "Bah!" he snorted. "A lot of boloney! Just some hop-head reporter on the *Sun-Star*. There isn't any little black book. If there was, we'd know all about it, wouldn't we?"

Sowdy frowned worriedly.

"Read it all," he said to Howsey, passing over the paper. "It says that the district attorney kept notes and data in a little black book—particulars of all his shady deals and the men who were in with him. *And that he's lost the book!*"

"What's that?" demanded Banker Hume, his gray face suddenly turning even grayer. "Give me that paper, Howsey!" He snatched the *Sun-Star* from Howsey's hand. He read the story to the end. At last he looked up. "My God!" he gasped, his cold, gray face lined with terrible anxiety. "This *can't* be true!"

"Boloney!" snorted Howsey. "Just some scare stuff by the *Sun-Star*. That's them all over! Circulation boost. Not a shred of truth in it!"

Horwitch reached out and took the paper from Hume's shaking fingers. He rapidly scanned through the story.

"Funny business!" he grunted, when he had finished it. "That gonnifer, Windle, was friends with the *Sun-Star*. This is just some kind of a funny business to throw a scare into us."

"You're sure Windle *did* go away on the train, Horwitch?" nervously asked Hume.

"Sure he went away! Didn't I with my own eyes, here, see him go away.

Ain't we got a man following him on the same train, too, Mr. Hume? If he turns back again, won't we know all about it right away? Funny business, Mr. Hume. There ain't no little black book. The district attorney wouldn't be such a fool as that!"

"It's an easy matter to settle," offered Sowdy. "Ring up the D. A. and ask him."

Banker Hume immediately forsook his lunch, to which he had looked forward with such joyous anticipation—a little celebration with his shady partners—and hurried to a telephone. In a little while he came back again and resumed his place at the table without a word. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Well?" asked Sowdy, fidgetting uneasily in his chair. Horwitch and Howsey were waiting, too.

"He says he didn't ever have any little black book," Hume answered. "He says it's all a fake story put out by the *Sun-Star*."

"Didn't I tell you!" exclaimed Howsey triumphantly.

"Funny business!" chimed in Horwitch.

Banker Hume shook his head. Lines of worry still cut deeply into his gray countenance.

"What is it?" asked Sowdy.

"I didn't like the way the district attorney said it," Hume answered. "He—he didn't sound quite convincing."

"Why would he deny it if he *did* have a little black book?" demanded Howsey. "What would be the sense of that, Hume?"

Hume faced Howsey. His cold gray eyes looked like bits of icy glass in his cold gray face. "What if the D. A. is lying about it?" he asked. "Just suppose, Howsey, that there *is* a little black book, and that the D. A. really *did* lose it, as the *Sun-Star* claims. What will the D. A. do next, if that is the case? He will jump his bail of fifty thousand dollars, Howsey, and you and I are the ones who will have to pay. We went bail for him."

"Boloney!" declared Howsey, but his thick fingers drummed nervously on the table.

Sowdy blinked and swallowed. Horwitch repeated his slogan. "Funny business!" But he, too, seemed ill at ease after Hume's words.

What had started as a little feast in celebration of a victory over Mr. Dalrymple Windle, began to take on the aspect of a dreary wake without the corpse.

Hume tried to pick at his food, but his anxiety ruined his appetite.

"I don't like the situation worth a damn!" he exploded at last. "It looked queer to me right from the beginning—Windle running away from trouble like that. It isn't like Windle to do that. There's something behind this that we don't understand!"

The others of the little party seemed to be catching Hume's uneasiness. Their lunch was neglected while they went into a huddle. When the meeting broke up, four very worried men left their lunches uneaten as they filed out of the dining room of the Camcleopard Club.

"I'm going to get hold of the district attorney right away!" declared Banker Hume. "We must get to the bottom of this business without delay. If there really is a little black book with our names in it, and notes about—about—" He paused and winced visibly.

Sowdy clamped on his hat and headed for the door.

"If the grand jury gets their hands on that little black book," he said to Hume, who strode beside him, "my address will be somewhere in South America. Where will you go?"

Hume shuddered. "Let's hope for the best," he answered.

And when Banker Hume reached his palatial private office in the colossal Universal Bank, he found the worst waiting there for him.

"Mr. August Herring, the attorney, called you on the telephone, sir," said Hume's private secretary as Hume was hanging up his hat. The banker's arm

paused suspended in mid-air. His face blanched.

"Herring is Windle's lawyer!" he gasped. Then: "What did he want?" he asked.

"That you come over to his office as soon as you came back from lunch, sir. He said it was most important."

Ordinarily Banker Hume would have snorted at such a message. He would have indignantly demanded that Herring come to *his* office if he wanted to see him. But now he took down his hat and hurried out without a word. When he arrived at Attorney Herring's dingy office he found Sowdy there ahead of him. He was hardly seated, when Horwitch arrived, to be followed almost immediately by Howsey. The four of them sat nervously awaiting the appearance of Herring. Finally the little red-whiskered lawyer came in from an adjoining room and gravely studied his four anxious visitors over the tops of his spectacles while he slowly stroked his beard. He sat down behind his desk.

"What's all this about, Herring?" blusteringly demanded Howsey. "What kind of important business justifies you in demanding me to come here—all of us to come here like this?" He waved a hand at his three associates.

Herring took his watch from his pocket and studied its face.

"My client will be here within two minutes," he replied. "If you will kindly be patient, gentlemen, we won't keep you long."

"Your client?" queried Hume, sitting forward on the edge of his chair.

"Mr. Dalrymple Windle," said Herring. "Ah, there he is!"

Mr. Windle breezed in all smiles. He nodded affably to Hume and Howsey and Horwitch and Sowdy.

"Uh—when did you get back?" demanded Horwitch.

"Get back?" repeated Mr. Windle. "Get back from where, Horwitch?"

"Why, I saw—that is—uh—the papers said you'd gone East," Horwitch stuttered.

"You mustn't believe everything you read in the papers, Horwitch," calmly replied Mr. Windle. He pulled up a chair beside Lawyer Herring's desk. With four pairs of worried, puzzled eyes watching his every movement, he took something from his hip pocket.

"U-uh!" gasped Banker Hume, dragging a large white silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and mopping his sweating forehead. Sowdy started to rise from his chair, his eyes turned toward the door.

"Don't run away and leave us, Sowdy," begged Mr. Windle. "We may need you." Sowdy sighed and sat down again.

"This," said Mr. Windle, holding up a little black book, "was loaned to me by my friend, the editor of the *Sun-Star*. One of their enterprising reporters got ahold of it in some way that we need not go into at this time, gentlemen. But I assure you that it is a very interesting little book."

"Let me see it!" demanded Howsey, reaching out a hand.

"All in good time, friend Howsey," replied Mr. Windle. "Don't be ah-precipitate." He thumbed through the little black book. "And it's all in the handwriting of the district attorney, too," he said. "Yes, gentlemen, a very, very interesting little book, I assure you."

"Oh, my God!" breathed Hume. "What a damned fool to write down things like that!"

"Oh, that part of it was all right," returned Mr. Windle. "The error was in letting it get into—well, shall we say unfriendly hands? Yes, that is the right phrase, gentlemen. Decidedly unfriendly hands."

"Get down to cases!" snapped the harassed Howsey. "If you've got the damned thing, Windle, why pile on the agony? What do you want?"

"That depends, Howsey. First I must tell you that the editor of the *Sun-Star* has all the copy from this very interesting little book set up in type, just waiting until I give him the

word to shoot. Then he'll get out an extra-special edition of his paper that will turn this old town entirely upside down—and, incidentally, put you four gentleman in jail. Then he will turn this little black book over to the grand jury, and about that time you can say good-by to your friend, the district attorney."

"I've said that all along!" cried Hume. "The district attorney will jump his bail and we'll have to pay up, Howsey!"

"You'll be holding the bag—in jail," smilingly stated Mr. Windle. "Won't that be interesting, eh?"

"Funny business!" breathed Horwitch, still staring fascinated at Mr. Windle, whom he had supposed to be well on his way East by this time.

"Very funny indeed," agreed Mr. Windle. "Listen to this, Horwitch, and he read from the little black book:

"*August 11. Horwitch to have charge of re-valuations for Tax Assessor's department, and split fifty-fifty.*"

"It's a damned lie!" spluttered Horwitch. "I only got—" He suddenly stopped and swallowed convulsively.

"Only got what?" prompted Mr. Windle.

Horwitch looked down at his feet and did not answer.

"Now here's a little memo regarding you, Sowdy," said Mr. Windle, smiling pleasantly at the cringing Sowdy. "Let me see—ah, yes—" He found the place.

"Don't!" cried Sowdy. "Don't read it, Windle!"

"No?" queried Mr. Windle. "It's very interesting, Sowdy—very! That little building contract for the city hall annex, you know."

Sowdy raised both hands in protest. "Oh, all right, if you feel that way about it," agreed Mr. Windle. He thumbed through the little black book and at last looked up at Howsey, proprietor of the *Daily Dawn*. "A nice little profit you made on the city's advertising last year, eh, Howsey?" he asked. "Too bad that you had to fork over that cut to the D. A., though.

How much was it? Let me see. . . ."

"Oh, cut it out, Windle!" barked the perspiring Howsey. "What the hell do you want us to do? Spit it out, and we'll do it!"

"Yes, Mr. Windle," put in Banker Hume in a surprisingly timid voice for so large and important a personage. "Name your terms and we'll—well, we'll try and meet them."

"Thanks, Mr. Hume," replied Mr. Windle. "But before we discuss terms, wouldn't you like to have me read a few notes about that last city loan that you floated for us?"

"No, no!" protested Hume. "Don't read any more out of that damned little black book, Mr. Windle!"

"Just as you say, then," said Mr. Windle with seeming reluctance. He snapped the little black book shut and returned it to his pocket.

"What do you want us to do?" irritably demanded the fuming Howsey.

"My attorney will attend to the details," pleasantly replied Mr. Windle, nodding to Lawyer Herring who was sitting behind his desk, silently stroking his red chinwhiskers.

"Yes, yes," said Herring, coming suddenly to life. He picked up a document from his desk and began to read. He read steadily for all of five minutes, in a sing-song, droning voice, with plenty of "whereases" and "party of the first parts" sprinkled throughout. When he had finished, he looked up over the tops of his glasses and waited.

"But that's a full and unreserved confession!" exploded Howsey. "What the—"

"What the hell did you expect it to be?" tersely demanded Mr. Windle. "Did you think I was going to hand you four crooks an illuminated testimonial?"

"But—but—" Banker Hume started to stutter.

"Listen to me!" ordered Mr. Windle in a coldly stern voice. "There aren't any buts in this business, understand! Either you four men sign this confession, which I will put away in a safe

place against future contingencies—is that the right word, Herring?"

"The correct term," answered Lawyer Herring, nodding very gravely.

"In a safe place against possible future contingencies," went on Mr. Windle.

"And then what?" asked Howsey.

"And that damned little black book?" queried Hume.

"And the *Sun-Star* with it all set up in type ready to print!" wailed Sowdy.

"Oy-yoy! Funny business!" wept Horwitch.

"That can all be arranged," said Mr. Windle. "The editor of the *Sun-Star* and I have talked it all over. We are both agreed that this city has had enough scandal to last it for a long time. These scandals of political corruption keep people away from us—keep new capital out, and all that sort of thing; so, when you four hombres have signed that confession, I'll put the little black book away in a safe place where nobody will ever see it again, as long as you continue to behave yourselves. The *Sun-Star* will melt down the type and re-set it into a sermon, maybe—or possibly an article on beauty culture for the ladies."

"What guarantee will we have that —"

Mr. Windle interrupted the questioning Howsey.

"Guarantee?" he asked in surprise. "Guarantee? Say! But you've got a hell of a gall, Howsey, to ask about guarantees! What do you expect me to do, anyhow—take you all out to dinner and a show after you've signed that confession, hey?"

"I'll sign," spoke up Sowdy. "It can't possibly be any worse than it is, anyhow."

"Me too!" said Horwitch, and he got up and reached for a pen on Lawyer Herring's desk.

Banker Hume weakly rose to his feet and stood waiting his turn behind Sowdy and Horwitch.

Howsey cursed bitterly under his breath and stood in line.

When the four of them had signed the confession, Mr. Windle carefully scrutinized their signatures. "And now," he said, folding the document and tucking it into his inside breast pocket alongside the little black book, "and now, gentlemen, you understand that I have made no promises regarding the district attorney. If the law gets him in court, he stands his trial and takes his sentence."

"The law will never get that district attorney!" declared Banker Hume. "He's probably on his way to Patagonia by this time. When he saw that article in the *Sun-Star* about his loss of that damned little black book, I'll bet he didn't even stop to pack!"

A sudden commotion broke out in the next room. The door flew open and the district attorney burst into the office.

"What's going on here!" he demanded, glaring around at the men standing startled by his dramatic appearance. "You four birds trying to frame me, eh?" he shouted at his confederates. "Squealing, eh? Leaving me in the lurch!"

A hubbub of recriminations arose, out of which Howsey's voice came loudest.

"If you hadn't kept those names and notes in that crazy little black book—"

"What black book?" shouted the infuriated district attorney. He faced Banker Hume. "Didn't I tell you over the phone that there never was any little black book? Didn't I tell you with my own lips that the *Sun-Star* is running a bluff? I'm suing them for libel! A hundred thousand dollars, and by God I'll get every damned cent of it, too!"

"The same way you got a hundred thousand from me," mildly put in Mr. Dalrymple Windle.

"You—you—" bellowed the district attorney, shaking his fists and his heavy jowls at Mr. Windle.

"He's got the little black book," said Banker Hume.

"What little black book?" yelled the

district attorney. "Damn it, haven't I told you again and again that there never was any little black book? Are you all going crazy—or am I?"

"Show him," said Hume to Mr. Windle.

Mr. Windle took the little black book from his inside breast pocket and handed it to Banker Hume. "You show him," he replied.

Hume stood dumbfounded for an instant with the little black book actually in his two hands. He gripped it tightly.

"Open it!" cried Howsey. "And then burn the damned thing!"

Banker Hume slowly opened the little black book and leafed its pages. The district attorney and Howsey and Sowdy and Horwitch crowded up around him and all tried to see together over Hume's shoulder.

Hume fumbled the pages and turned them back and forth. At last he looked up with a queer, sickish expression in his fishy gray eyes.

"It's all blank!" he almost whispered, his weak voice petering out in a choking gasp.

Howsey whirled on Mr. Dalrymple Windle. "Give me that paper!" he screamed, and leaped for Mr. Windle's throat, his hands reaching to choke and murder glaring from his eyes.

Mr. Windle deftly side-stepped. A blue-black automatic magically appeared in his right hand.

"Easy!" he warned in a quiet but menacing tone.

Attorney August Herring disappeared beneath his desk. "Don't you people go pulling any rough house in here!" he shrilled, sticking out his red chinwhiskers to reconnoitre.

"There won't be any trouble," stated Mr. Windle. He waved the threatening automatic at the men before him. "Get out!" he barked. "Beat it while the going is good!"

"Tricked!" gnashed Howsey. "There wasn't a damned line written in that book. Not a damned line!"

"Not a damned line, as you so clearly

put it," admitted Mr. Windle. "But let me quote you a line from Hamlet, gentlemen. A little actress friend of mine suggested it and I added a few fixings of my own to make it more interesting. The line is—" And Mr. Windle paused for effect. He grinned happily at the five men who were crowding away from the menacing automatic, edging slowly toward the door behind them.

"The line is," resumed Mr. Windle—"Conscience makes cowards of us all."

Banker Hume was first to reach the door. He snatched it open and shot out without saying good-by. The others

followed him. Horwitch was last out.

"Oy-yoy-yoy!" Horwitch wailed. Tears ran down his greasy little face. "Funny business! I knew it, I—"

"And you'd better tell that private detective of yours to come back home," Mr. Windle called after the departing Horwitch. "He's following an actor friend of mine who's on his way to New York—an actor friend who is doubling for me, Horwitch. We made him up last night. It was a pretty good job, too, wasn't it?"

Horwitch did not pause.

"Funny business!" he wept, and shuffled out of sight down the corridor.

A REAL ESTATE SWINDLE

TO get in on the ground floor is one of the secrets of success in the real estate game, as well as in many others. This was brought home to a Winnipeg real estate firm not long ago when an American turned up in that city and advised them he was anxious to secure a suitable site for the establishment of a business. They told him they were sure they could suit him, and showed him what they had. He selected a lot and deposited a marked check for \$5,000 with them for an option on the piece of land. Then he went off again to complete his business arrangements.

Soon afterwards another visitor turned up who announced that he was the representative of a U. S. firm of chain stores who were desirous of opening in Winnipeg. He too wanted a business site. After looking over their plans, he selected the site on which the first customer had already paid the option. The realtors strove to persuade him to accept another lot, but he was adamant. It must be that particular piece or nothing, and he offered to pay them their own price for it. They promised to see what could be arranged with

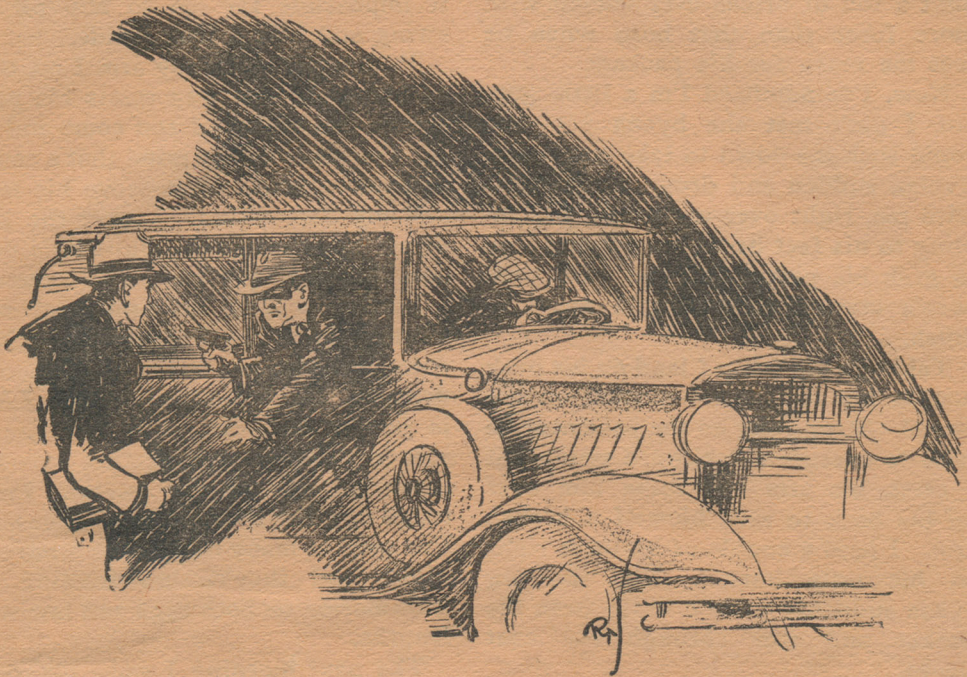
the first purchaser, who was now back in the city again.

Accordingly they got in touch with the original customer and offered to buy his option, but he affirmed that the matter had been submitted to his principals back East, who were well satisfied with his choice. He would not think of selling out, he said, except at a considerable advance on his purchase figure. After some negotiation the realtors got him to agree to take a profit of \$1,000 on the lot and surrender his option, and they returned his \$5,000 check to him with their own check for \$1,000 in addition.

Congratulating themselves that they had done a good stroke of business, the real estate people then sought the newest customer, but he had disappeared and could not be found, and letters sent to the New York address he furnished were returned with the information that he was not known there. Then they tried to get in touch again with customer number one, but by this time he, too, had faded away. The police are still looking for both, and the realtors are \$1,000 out of pocket.



It seemed to Shorty that the whole world was after the mysterious package which accident had given him.



EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF

By Allen S. Jacobs

I'VE just checked in my taxicab, it being two-thirty A. M., and turn to leave the garage when Simpson, the company's checker, calls after me.

"Say, Hardboiled, I'm beginning to look for wings to sprout on you. You ain't been in trouble for quite a month of Sundays. 'Tain't natural."

Taking a hitch in my pants I tell that particular so-and-so what I think of him and all his breed. Even though they do call me Hardboiled Shorty Dawe, ain't my fault trouble seems to pick me out natural as a deep-sea sucker picks a smooth rock.

Afterwards, the big hunk of cheese claimed his words was a prophecy. But I'm telling you that guy's a plain hoodoo.

Outside the garage the air is swell. One of those balmy nights when the

streets is dead still. Feels good to stretch my legs after cramping them in the driver's seat for a full and long shift, there being a chiropodist's convention in town that has kept me hopping every minute. Got a two-room bachelor apartment a couple of blocks from the company's garage and believe me, brother, I don't need any special persuasion to turn in pronto.

I'm striding past the corner when a guy pounds around the apartment building there and smashes into me full force. Though I'm no six-footer, as you may have guessed from the moniker the boys give me, I take the jolt standing. However, the string bean that's struck me folds up on the pavement, a package sliding from his hand. Catching his wind the guy climbs back onto his feet with a growl.

Polite-like I reach for his package to

hand it to him. But man alive, there ain't a ton of bricks ever landed with more force than that bozo when he sees me reach for his package.

Now, I've admitted I'm a little guy, but I ain't met the hyena yet who could sock me down to take the count. I relax sudden and drop. He tumbles with me, right over my head. Scrambling to his feet he makes a flying leap to grab his parcel and run. But this bozo's started something I mean to finish.

Taking a big jump I land on his neck just as his fingers are closing on the parcel. Struggling on the pavement he tries to execute a backward swing but I catch his arm and force him over on his back to save himself a broken arm. I land a couple of beauties right on his ugly button. But the big hyena suddenly pulls a knife from his pocket and rips through my coat sleeve.

With a howl of pain I grab my arm. The bozo heaves, flinging me off right on top his precious parcel. He tears after me with that knife like a mad bull. Swinging it high above me he aims straight down for my heart. Not a bit excited I kick up, catch him a crack in the wrist that sends his pig sticker flying through the air.

Gathering my feet under me I go after him, mad as a hatter now. But the big egg streaks it down the street. Now, I'm as good as any guy in a fight, but I left part of my knee joint in France at Thierry during the Big Fight. The surgeon did a swell job rebuilding it from a piece of my hip bone, but nevertheless my sprinting days are done. So I let the matter go at that and pick up the parcel which seems to be at the bottom of the whole ruckus.

It isn't heavy enough to be a couple of flasks of hooch, and anyway it would have been leaking after the jolts it's received. It's tied with tough brown string in the particular manner you do

up a package for mailing, which makes it impossible for me to slip off the string and take a look inside.

Tucking it under my arm I continue on home. If that guy wants his package he can advertise and come and get it. I've made up my mind that a couple of shiners ought to improve his looks and my disposition. I ain't the kind of person who can call quits on a dirty deal like that guy has handed me.

Letting myself into my apartment with my latch key I throw the package onto a bedroom chair and get undressed. The wound in my arm, I find, is just a flesh cut. I'm that tired I roll in without even getting myself a sandwich out of my cooler. I'm a tough egg, but it's been some time since I've used as many muscles as I have tonight, and they're broadcasting the information on both high and low wave lengths.

The next morning I wake up round eleven as is usual when I'm doing night cruising. Going into the kitchenette I put my coffee to boil and scramble myself a full pan of eggs with sausage. Setting it ready on the kitchen table I pull the paper in from outside my front door.

The headlines aren't interesting, only about some new Chinese crisis which is likely only an old one rehashed sensationally for the public's edification. But there is one piece of interesting news on the front page. It seems that the residence of William Shrader has been raided by gangsters.

Of course everyone knows William Shrader, the Napoleon of the theatrical world. Starting ten or fifteen years ago with a couple of "nickelodeums," as they were called in the old days, he has recently bought out almost every big moving picture and vaudeville house in the United States and half the producing companies. The name of William Shrader is a national prayer in the heart of every movie-struck boy and girl.

To-day's newspaper story says that a gang of thieves has broken into Shrader's home, tied the magnate's secretary in her bed and blown a secret safe in the millionaire's own bedroom. It seems he and his wife were absent at the time, and the servant's quarters are well cut off from the rest of the house.

The gang got part of his wife's jewels, valued at one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Among the missing jewels was a jade necklace into which real pearls had been set, a diamond bracelet of alternating square-cut diamonds and emeralds, and a dinner ring set with rubies. The rest were less valuable pieces and a few small jeweled antiques.

Of course reading about a rich man's loss aint any particular worry for me, but I sure get the jolt of my life a few moments later.

Returning to my bedroom for my coat I catch sight of the package that'd caused me last night's ruccus. Curiosity leads me to take out my pocket knife and cut the strings on it. There's a cardboard box inside. Opening the lid on my bed I see a lot of tissue paper and yank it out.

Man alive, on top my bed spills a mess of jewels among which I see a jade necklace into which real pearls have been set, a diamond bracelet of alternating square-cut diamonds and emeralds and a dinner ring set with rubies.

Recovering from the first shock I notice a packet of letters in the bottom of the box. They are addressed to Jewel Blessing, the world famous movie star, in a big slanting irregular hand. Taking one from its envelope I scan it.

Hot diggety, that letter would put Romeo himself to shame. And it's signed with the well-known signature of William Shrader!

Now, to the world the wedded life of William Shrader is a stirring ex-

ample of faith and fidelity. His wife helped him earn enough to buy his first nickelodeum, sewing and pressing pants behind his little tailor shop twenty years ago. During all these past five years of staggering wealth, his apparent love for his fading wife and his loyalty in the face of all the beauty that flings itself at his feet without so much as the asking, was much discussed in magazine articles and praised in sermons throughout the country. What a newspaper would pay for the letters here in my hand would be equal to any Rockefeller foundation.

Since these letters to the Blessing jane are in a box with the jewels it's reasonable to surmise they must have been in his safe with his wife's jewels. But to keep such dangerous letters as these does not seem the logical act of a man clever enough to rise from a pants presser to a multi-millionaire.

Suddenly it dawns on me that between the jewels and the letters, these innocent-looking notes are by far the greater loss to the magnate. And the big egg who tried to slip me the berries last night—why, he must be one of the gang who raided Shrader's mansion but a few hours before he ran smack into me. No wonder he went for me when I reached to pick up that precious package. He probably thought I was a crook from a rival gang out to hijack his loot.

The way the package was tied gives me a thought. As I noticed from the start, it was done up as if for mailing. I've heard about crooks mailing loot to a fictitious name in care of General Delivery. That way the dicks can search them and their rooms till they're blue in the face without being able to pin anything on them. When the dicks get tired trying to shake 'em down and lay off shadowing them, they walk into General Delivery and call for their package.

Looks to me like this job was planned

that way. And it would have gone through per schedule if that tall hyena hadn't bumped into me last night on his way to a mail box for packages, and made the mistake of staging a rucuss when I tried to be polite.

"Well," I tell myself, "I'll just toddle over and pay Mister William Shrader a visit. This looks like my lucky day as well as Shrader's."

Being an optimistic cuss I figure that a millionaire like Shrader ought to slip a guy like me at least a century note in reward for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, worth of jewels and his priceless love letters.

Stuffing everything back into the box I take it under my arm and leave the apartment. I no sooner reach the corner when a curtained touring car swings into the curb directly in front of me. The guy beside the driver leans out and shoves a gat under my snoot.

"Give me the package or I shoot you down like a dog!" he raps out viciously.

He's masked, and I can't see his face but I recognize the tall string bean nevertheless. The driver's got a cap pulled low over his eyes and he looks no more than a mere boy.

Before I can make a move the masked bandit snatches the package from under my arm and the driver shoots in the gas.

I let out a yell that uproots a flatty walking his beat a block away and starts him coming on the run. The rear license on the vanishing car is smeared with mud, so that's no help.

The cop pounds up to me. "What's the matter here?"

I open my mouth to spill the beans and then shut it again. Likely story I have to tell, isn't it? And if I do tell it, I can see plainly that I ain't gonna have another peaceable day till they find the real crooks who did the Shrader job. They'll be sure to give me the third degree, figuring I might be one of the gang and was simply

double-crossed and coming through with my story to get even. They'll shadow my every move. And though you may think this oughtn't to worry any honest citizen, still I'm white and twenty-one at least, and no guy with his health and a future wants dicks trailing his every movement.

The flatty gets tough. "I said what's going on here? Didn't you yell?"

I grin good-naturedly. "Just exercising my lungs, officer. Saw the doc to-day and he says I oughta exercise them more."

He regards me narrowly. "Say, are you trying to kid me?"

"Not for a world of Sundays," I reply, solemn-like, minding his scowling map. "Don't believe it'd be healthy, and I'm gonna need my health for a while."

He becomes downright suspicious. I notice the fingers of his right hand are hovering above his hip pocket where his gat bulges.

"Raise your hands above your head. I'm going to pat you down. If you got a gat or a bottle I'm going to jug you."

I shrug my shoulders. "Have your fun, but remember I'm ticklish."

Finding nothing for which he can drag me off to the hoosegow, he looks disappointed.

Very polite-like I tip my hat to him. "So long, officer. I'll be toddling on."

He snorts like an angry bull. "See that you exercise your lungs on somebody else's beat hereafter or I'll take you in for disturbing the peace."

If I wasn't so mad about losing the box and a possible reward, I'd have told him to trundle off and pick himself a lemon off the first fruit stand.

Walking along, I turn the situation over in my mind. It's plain that I was followed last night by the guy who was forced to leave without his package. When he picked up and ran, he must have only circled the block and trailed me right to my apartment.

Now, there ain't a guy living what's got away with the kind of rough work

that baboon's pulled on me last night and this morning. If it's the last thing I ever do, I'm going to recover that box from him.

I don't go on night shift till six o'clock, so I got plenty of time to kill. Since I was headed to pay William Shrader a visit, I figure I might just as well do that as anything else.

Shrader's home, I find, is one of them Spanish court affairs with a fountain spouting in the center. The door's way back in the middle.

"What is your business, please?" the butler asks, politely enough; but his eyes show plainly that he's thinking he'll make short work of this bum.

I try to look mysterious and confidential at the same time. "My friend, I am not a reporter, nor a crank, nor a dick. Tell your boss that and give him this note."

Taking out an old card, I scribble on it: "I have some information about your letters." Folding the card in half, I hand it to the butler, knowing full well he'll read it the minute he's out of sight.

"Wait here," he says crisply, and shuts the door in my face.

One of three things can happen. First, Shrader may have me admitted and hand me right into the hands of the police. But I don't think this is likely. With his whole reputation at stake, it's almost certain that he's not hankering to broadcast the existence of those letters. Second, he might refuse to see me and put private dicks on my trail. But I'm gambling he isn't even telling private dicks about those letters until he finds out whether he can buy the letters back peaceably. Unless I'm much mistaken Shrader is going to see me.

The door opens so suddenly I almost jump backwards off the top step.

"Mr. Shrader will see you," the butler announces, as if he himself were doing me the personal favor. "This way, please."

I notice the reception hall is almost as handsomely furnished as the lounge

of Shrader's newest talkie theater in Market Street. And the carpet's just as thick. The butler takes me upstairs to a door in the rear, opens it and signs me to enter. I step in and close it right behind me, much to the butler's irritation, I imagine.

Sitting at a big desk, Shrader's just like his pictures. Medium size, hair thinning fast, waist line getting fat, but keen eyed and quick despite the apparent deliberation of his every movement. The room is his library, judging from the books lining the walls.

He indicates a chair beside his desk. I take it. He regards me inquiringly. I return the look, refusing to be the first one to open my mouth.

"Well?" he says at last, a bit annoyed. "You wished to see me?"

"Yes."

He waits another minute, fingers the card I sent in, finally forcing himself to continue: "About some letters, eh? What letters?"

"Some letters addressed to Jewel Blessing," I reply bluntly.

Though I suppose he's expecting that reply, it gives him a jolt none the less. He sits stock still for a moment, then: "You are prepared to bargain with me for them?"

My eyebrows go up despite me. I give a short laugh. "You've got me all wrong, brother. I'm no blackmailer. Just like I wrote on that card, I got some information about them. I came here to give you that information free of charge—on one condition."

Shrader's eyes narrow shrewdly. He's the most silent guy I've ever run up against. He waits for me to continue.

"On condition that you don't sic the dicks on me and let them make my life miserable. When I say I've given you all I got, you can bank it's all I know. And third degree methods can't manufacture any more."

A sudden light comes into his face. "I begin to understand. You are informing on your pals? In that case, of course, I give my promise. All I want is those letters."

I snort. "Do I really look so much like a crook? You've certainly got me all wrong. But since you give me your promise, I'll give you my story."

Briefly as possible I tell him the whole business. Several times I see his eyes probing me sharply. He's thoughtful when I finish.

My curiosity gets the better of me. "Say, I don't want to butt into your personal affairs, but I'd sure like to know how come a smart man like you kept a bunch of letters like those in his safe?"

Color comes into his cheeks despite his rigid reserve. "I'm really not so big a fool as you might judge from the situation. You see we had a party here the night of the robbery. Jewel Blessing was one of my wife's guests. At my request she brought the letters and received a substantial sum in exchange. But since my wife planned to take all her guests downtown for a special midnight pervue of Blessing's latest talkie, I was forced to lock the letters in my safe till I could find time to destroy them."

He scowled. "Believe me, I've played Don Juan the first and last time in my life. My wife is worth a million Jewel Blessings, whose love is doled out by measure of the gifts and money she receives. Under the circumstances, you will understand how anxious I am to recover those letters."

The situation's a tough one all right. I take a deep breath and come up for air. "What are you going to do now?"

"As I see it, I'll just have to wait till the gang comes to me with their proposition." He sighs. "However, you've been very decent to offer what information you have. Please accept this."

He takes his wallet from his pocket and unrolls a hundred-dollar bill. Now, century notes don't grow on bushes for a guy like me. But after a moment's struggle with myself, I shake my head.

"I can't take that. I haven't been able to help you any. Still, I'd appreciate a favor on your part."

The cold glint of reserve comes back

into his eyes. He looks at me inquiringly.

"When the big baboon that socked me comes to you and makes his deal, let me know. I hanker to go into a little private conference of my own with him after you've completed yours."

"Why?" he asks suspiciously.

"I owe that bird something—and he's going to get it if it's my last act on this planet."

Though I try to pin him down to it, he actually promises nothing. Probably he figures I'm planning to connect with the crook so I can work him for a cut, which might start trouble that'll end in the papers. Like all big men he tends to his own business and lets the other guy tend to his. My grief is no fly in his particular ointment.

On my way out I notice a girl powdering her nose at the hall mirror hanging above one of them narrow marble-top tables that look like the joiner forgot to glue on the other half. Though her back's to me, I can see her reflection, and she's some looker. But as I stare into the mirror, she goes white and wild-eyed. With a quick catch at her breath, she snatches up a pad and pencil from the table and rushes off into the library.

Puzzled, I turn to the butler. "Who is the young lady?"

He pretends not to hear, so I repeat the question.

"The young lady is Mr. Shrader's private secretary," he replies in a tone that hints it really is none of my business.

Walking alone the street, I puzzle over the girl's strange behavior. There was only my reflection and hers in that mirror, the butler being behind me. Now, I'm sure I never saw this jane before or I'd remember her, my one weakness being a pretty skirt. Just the same she must've recognized me, and it certainly startled her for some unknown reason.

However, as I keep turning her face over in my mind, trying to recall where I might have seen her, the jane's fea-

tures grow familiar. Yet, rack my brain as I will, I can't place her. Maybe she used to dress differently, or maybe it's the way she wears her hair.

At this last thought, I let out a yelp. That's it—her hair. I know now where I've seen those features. And, oh, brother, I could do a jig. For those letters are as good as recovered this minute.

Swinging on my heel, I hurry back toward Shrader's mansion. His place being in the center of the block, I plant myself at the corner. There's a big tall bush at the edge of a lawn there with a break in the center that I can see through.

I find it's pretty tough work watching the house all day. I have to change my position all the time to keep from arousing suspicion. Six o'clock I signal one of my company's cabs when it cruises by, and persuade O'Brien, the driver, to report that I won't be able to work to-night.

When darkness comes I have to draw in closer to the house not to miss my quarry. But there's a flatty on the beat that I have to dodge every hour or so.

It's past ten o'clock when the jane finally comes out of the house and makes a beeline for the street car stop at Jackson and Fillmore's streets. There's a number three car coming around the corner and she just makes it. Being a good half block in the rear of her, I'm cussing a blue streak, when I see a number nineteen ambling along behind like an answer to my prayer. I sprint to beat it to the corner and hop it. The "nineteen," I know, will string along behind the three car clear to Sutter Street before it turns off. At Sutter there's one of our company's stands, and unless I'm downright unlucky I can pick up a taxi there.

Planting myself beside the motor-man on the front platform, I keep an eye on all passengers leaving the car ahead. To my surprise she disembarks at Sutter, just as I had planned to do. Hurrying back to the rear platform, I drop off before my car reaches the stop

and watch her from the shadow of a doorway across the street. A few minutes later she boards another street car heading for the beach. Hurrying over to the company's stand I note with relief that the driver waiting there is a new one and doesn't know me.

"Straight out Sutter Street behind that street car up ahead," I tell him, and slam the door.

I tell you it's pretty stiff medicine to sit idly in the tonneau of my company's own blimp. But of course, you'll never appreciate that unless you've driven cabs ten or fifteen years for a living.

Out at Thirteenth Avenue there's a strip of park that runs from Golden Gate Park across the city's streets to the Presidio. She gets off here and streaks it along the drive into the darkness. I slip my driver two bucks and go after her, dodging along behind the bushes far enough back not to lose her.

Half way along she gives a quick look about and plunges into the shrubbery in back of a bench. Stepping lightly, I work my way up to the spot and hear voices.

"I tell you I don't dare go to the post office with this package now." My heart gives a triumphant jump, recognizing the string bean's voice.

"That taxi driver is a wise hombre," he goes on. "Probably realized the package was all tied for mailing and he's likely tipped off the dicks. When you phoned that he was to see your boss, I knew it would be plain insanity for me to try and mail it. They'll be laying for a guy of my description at every post office branch in the city. But they'd never suspect a woman, much less you. You'll have to take it, Myra."

The girl sounds worried. "You promised to tend to everything. All I was to do is let you into the house and leave you tie me up in my bed. Suppose some of these detectives you speak about should recognize me."

"What if they do? They'll never suspect you. They found you tied up in your bed."

Her voice is doubtful. "Just the same I don't think it's a good plan any more to put the stuff through the mails."

"Maybe you can think of a better plan?" he queries sarcastically.

"Certainly. If you've got cold feet, let me take care of it. I'll hide it in my room."

"No, you won't," he comes back suspiciously. "If anyone keeps the loot it's gonna be me. I'm taking no chance of you double-crossing me."

She sounds hurt. "You can't think I'd deal with Shrader and let him know I was in on this!"

"Yeh, exactly. He has millions and could make you a star. You only went into this when you found you couldn't get him and that a prettier face than your own was successful where you'd failed. Then your blew up and sent for me. But I got wise to you when you phoned me the job had to be pulled that very night and then tried to hold out the letters. It wasn't a split on the jewelry you were after. It was a hold on Shrader."

She laughs shrilly. "You give me a pain in the neck."

He sniffs. "I'd hate to tell you the kind of pain you give me. Once I was strong for you, but you were a nice girl then—kind of sweet and—well, you know. But you're a pretty tough little egg now."

"Say," she bursts out in a fury, "are you trying to criticize me? You jail-bird!"

"Who'd I do that stretch for? You —" he breaks into a string of curses.

She cries out in terror. I crash through the bushes and grab for him. He's choking the breath out of her. He hears me coming, drops her, draws his gat. He fires, but I fall on my face. Coming at me, he aims again. I twist sideways, and, gathering my feet under me, land a good clout on his jaw. He staggers. I shoot my fist at his wrist, knocking the gat from his fingers.

With an oath he leaps for me and

we go down together, rolling over and over, each trying to stay on top. Every time I'm on top, I shove one to his ugly button. Every time he's on top he hammers my snoot. I'm beginning to read my horoscope in the stars shooting about me. Desperate, I change my punch and drive down at his chest, knocking the wind out of him and giving him a chance to listen to the heavenly choir.

Patting down his limp body, I find a small package in each of his side-pockets, from which I gather he had decided to mail the jewels and the letters separately. Probably if I could read the writing on them I'd find they are addressed to different names, but it's too dark.

Giving the string bean another clout for luck, I climb off of him. The girl is standing there with both hands wrapped tight about her throat, her breath coming fast. With a frightened sob, she makes a break into the bushes.

"No, you don't," a man's voice says savagely. There's a brief struggle. And then my eyes fairly start from my head.

William Shrader himself crashes through the bushes, dragging his secretary back into the little clearing where I'm still standing above the unconscious string bean. In the millionaire's hand gleams the barrel of a revolver. Flinging the girl away from him none too gently, he covers the whole party.

"I'll trouble you for my property," he remarks casually, but his voice is hard as a steel-edge knife.

I pass the two packages over without any comment.

"Had a hunch I'd recover my stuff if I followed you," he tells me dryly.

Now, wouldn't that give you a jolt? I recover the letters he's been moaning about and a cool hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of jewels, and he hands me rap like that.

"When you left I slipped out a side door and followed you," he goes on to explain without my asking.

What a boob I've been. I was so certain he couldn't afford to take any agency into his confidence and that, anyway, he hadn't a detective hanging around to put on my trail so suddenly. But in the excitement of my discovery regarding Shrader's secretary, I never thought the millionaire himself would take on the job.

It certainly looks like I've got myself into a heap of trouble out of sheer bonheadedness. Under the present circumstances Shrader can pocket the letters and turn all three of us over to the police with the other package containing the jewels. How am I going to prove I had nothing to do with the job if the other two decide to take their revenge by implicating me? I figure I'd better speak fast and to the point:

"Say, Mr. Shrader, you're wound up the wrong way. The story I gave you was straight."

He's downright skeptical. "Then how did you know my secretary was implicated in this?"

Taking a deep breath, I plunge, telling him how I saw his secretary in the hall and how startled she was at my reflection. I tell him, too, how I puzzled over where I'd seen her before.

"Well, where did you see her before?" he demands.

"The string bean over there wore a mask when he grabbed the loot from me on my way to you. But the driver, who looked like a young kid, did not. Pondering where I'd seen your secretary before, the answer came to me in a flash. Your secretary was the driver of the automobile. Being a girl, I suppose she figured the boy's clothes sufficient disguise to safeguard her from identification. Her hair give her away."

"My hair?" she gasps, puzzled.

"Yeh. The more I thought about you the surer I was I'd seen you before. I thought to myself maybe it might have been when you were wearing different clothes and had your hair dressed differently. To-day you were wearing your hair all fluffed around your face, so I naturally pictured what

your features would look like with your hair off your face. That minute I recognized that your features and the kid driver's was the same."

The string bean moans and tries to sit up with a hand clutching his aching head. The girl bursts into tears and points to him. "He got me into this. He threatened me and I was afraid to tell on him."

"She's a little liar," I tell Shrader.

"I know," Shrader replies. "I, too, heard almost their whole conversation. I was a few yards away from you."

Anxious to have it over, I demand, "Well, do you believe me or are you throwing me in with the black sheep?"

After a moment he says, "To avoid any scandal I'm going to let all of you go. Better get out of here quick before I change my mind."

The string bean, looking like the loser at the end of a twenty-round champion fight, scrambles to his feet and plunges into the bushes. The girl rushes off too. The millionaire regards me across his gun.

"Well, aren't you going to beat it with the rest?"

"I'm in no hurry," I reply.

With a slight smile he digs into his pocket and pulls out a couple of bills. "Here's two tens for you. After all, I'd never have got my property back if I hadn't followed you."

Now a guy can stand just so much. Regardless of his gat, I walk straight up to him, plant a perfect beauty flat on his famous button while I twist the revolver from his fingers.

With a polite "oof!" he takes a violent seat on the ground. Throwing his gun into the bushes, I dust off my hands and saunter off into the night.

Next morning when I enter the garage, Simpson, the company checker, takes a look at my black eyes and cut chin and lets out a whoop:

"Knew it was too good to last. Hard-boiled, I take back what I said. Ain't no danger of wings ever sprouting on you. Anything sprouting on you is more likely to be a red tail in Hades."

Detective Durham followed a dangerous trail when he went after his partner, who had suddenly disappeared.



THE MISSING SLEUTH

By Tom Curry

DETEKTIVE TIM DURHAM, the youthful partner of Larry Sullivan, veteran of the New York Police Department, awakened with a start from a sound sleep. The phone bell at his side was ringing in a peremptory manner, and Durham snatched it up with a yawn and a curse.

"Hello," he growled.

"Durham? Come over and report at once. This is Inspector Simmons."

"Yes, sir."

Durham hung up the receiver, looked at the clock which claimed it was two A. M., and began to throw on his clothes, yawning mightily as he did so. He lived some distance from the center of the city, and it would take him an hour to get to H. Q. at that time of night.

He made it as quickly as he could,

and strode into the inspector's office, ready for duty as the clock struck three.

"Hello, Tim," said Simmons. "Word came in from Philadelphia that the Morgan gang—or rather, what's left of them—is over there. They were spotted on the street, and the police sent for us at once. Go over and report to the City Hall there right away."

"Yes, sir. Where's Sullivan?"

"Sullivan went on ahead. He was here a few minutes after the report came in, and we sent him on to get possession of all the facts so that when you arrive there will be no delay. Here's a note he left for you."

Detectives always work in pairs, and two sleuths who have gone through fire and water together are usually closer than brothers. They have shared danger and work and sport, and they

grow to depend upon one another. In the case of young Durham and the veteran Sullivan, it was even more so than usual, for Durham had been taught his work by the older man.

Durham read the note his pal had left for him. "Tim: Sorry I have to hurry on. We'll stay at the Swan as usual. Connect with you at City Hall or if we miss there, at the hotel. So long."

It was not the first time the two sleuths had been to the Quaker City together, and they had often stopped at the Swan Hotel, but a few blocks from City Hall, where P. H. Q. was located.

Durham caught the first train he could get for Philadelphia, and rode on, napping from time to time, and turning over the Morgan case in his mind.

It had been a big thing that Sullivan and Durham had broken together. Mart Morgan himself, leader of the big mob of jewel thieves and stick-up men, was lying wounded in Bellevue at that moment, shot down when he resisted arrest by the two sleuths. By bad luck, the detectives had lost most of the mob, for Morgan had caught them on his trail, and tried to shoot it out with them. Sullivan's bullets had got the leader, but the alarm reached his lieutenant, Johnny the Sack Lewis, and the other gangsters in time for them to make a getaway. Alarms had been sent out for them, but they had not been heard of until word had come from the Philadelphia police.

Morgan was known to have accumulated large amounts of loot. Sullivan and Durham had been trying to discover the hiding place of this; so far, they had had no luck. They had searched through all of Morgan's known hangouts in New York, questioned the wounded gang chief, to no avail.

They hoped to get a squeal on the hidden treasure from one of the lesser gang members, and Durham looked forward to this eagerly, as the train

sped on at sixty miles an hour toward Philadelphia and his partner, Sullivan.

Morgan was badly wounded; there was a detective seated at his bedside at all times, in case he should take a turn for the worse and decide to atone in part for his ill deeds at the last moment.

All the mob would be up on murder charges, once they were within the confines of the Tombs. If Morgan recovered from his wounds, he would probably go to the chair.

As for Durham, he had kept more or less in the background, and was not known to the mob as was Larry Sullivan, who had been bothering the crooks for some time. Also, Sullivan was getting famous, and his picture had been printed in the papers, so that wise crooks carried his photograph in their pockets and did a record half-mile when they saw him coming. This was one of the drawbacks of fame for a sleuth.

Finally, the train pulled into Broad Street Station, and Durham walked across the street to the City Hall, over which Bill Penn himself stood in the form of an immense statue, spreading out the hand of peace over the city he had founded.

The Morgan mob had originally come from the City of Brotherly Love, Sullivan had told Durham that. It was not unlikely that the mobsters should take refuge there, somewhere in the great, rambling city.

Durham walked through the tunnel and turned into a doorway which led him up some steps to the Chief's office. Police Headquarters was in the great square building.

Durham, young, dark of hair, with strong shoulders and a slim waist, nodded to the lieutenant on duty.

"Detective Sullivan here?" he asked.

The lieutenant raised his brows. "Detective Sullivan," he repeated. "What's his first name?"

"Why, Larry Sullivan, of New York. I'm Detective Durham, his partner."

"How d' you do. No, I haven't seen

your friend. Have you come over after somebody?"

"Yes, surely. After the Morgan bunch."

But the name meant nothing to the lieutenant. Durham finally explained at length, and the lieutenant went in and consulted his superior, who came out and spoke with Durham.

"Sullivan has not reported yet," said the captain. "As for the Morgan gang that you speak of, no word was sent out from here about them. If a squeal came in, I haven't heard about it. I'll look it up further, if you'll come back in an hour."

Durham began to grow a trifle uneasy, but the chances were that the two officers had missed a report, for they had come on duty at midnight. The young sleuth went to the Swan Hotel, and registered there, after asking for Larry Sullivan and being informed that his partner had not been at the hotel that night. He left his bags in the room assigned him, and then, after a wash-up, returned to the City Hall.

Sullivan had not yet been heard of. That was definite. And no official word had been sent from the Philadelphia headquarters concerning the Morgan gang.

Now Durham began to grow really worried. His partner should have reported at once to P. H. Q. in the Quaker City, and would have been told that there was nothing doing, that the supposed squeal was a false one. Perhaps, thought Durham, Sullivan had found the word had been a bum steer, and taken the next train back to New York.

But when he had called the New York office several times, and been told Sullivan had not reported, he knew that his hunch was wrong.

The morning found Durham weary, worn and foot-sore. He had trudged between the City Hall and the Swan Hotel all the intervening hours, and no word had come from his partner.

Had Sullivan ever boarded the train to take him to the Quaker City? He

might have been run over, and taken unconscious to a New York Hospital. Durham went to the station and found the name and address of the conductor of the train on which Sullivan should have come to the Quaker City. The conductor recognized Sullivan's description at once; yes, he had taken up the ticket of such a man, he was sure, had punched it three times on the way over. He could not swear, however, that Sullivan had gone all the way into Broad Street Station. He might have got off at West Philadelphia or North Philadelphia.

Durham had already asked for help from the Philadelphia police, and word had gone out to look for Sullivan.

Durham, very much distressed and worried, finally had something to eat, and went to his room to snatch a few hours sleep. He kept hoping against hope that word would come in from Sullivan.

He could not sleep much, but spent some time in going over the circulars which had been printed and broadcast describing the members of the Morgan mob.

There was Johnny the Sack Lewis, the lieutenant; an Italian called Martino, and an American known as the Wart, Willie the Wart Gonan. There were pictures, side face and front, and written portraits, with fingerprints of each man.

As far as Durham could make out, Sullivan had boarded the Philadelphia express, and ridden to Broad Street, where he had simply been swallowed up in the crowds, not more than a hundred yards from City Hall. Of course, there was the chance that Larry might have got off at one of the stops on the outskirts of the city, but if he had, why?

The longer Larry remained out of sight, the less chance was that the veteran sleuth would be found alive. Sullivan was very resourceful, and should find a way out, if he was not murdered by some enemy, some crook whose career he had brought to a stop

by sending him to prison. Such a person might have lured him to the Quaker City, in order to kill him. But if so, why was not Sullivan's body found? It might be that he was dead, thrown into the Delaware, or his corpse hidden in some cellar.

To keep himself busy, and try to subdue to some extent the terrible worry, Durham worked all afternoon and evening. He visited the North Philadelphia and West Philadelphia stations, to find out if by any chance Sullivan had been seen at either stop. But both stations were open platforms, with many exits; it had been night, and it would be a quite simple matter for a man to walk off from the train without being seen.

Had the message been a lure? If it had been, how had the sender of it coaxed Sullivan off the train? If it had been desired to murder the veteran sleuth, why had it not been done in New York?

But Durham could answer none of the questions he put to himself time after time, and his brain buzzed with worry and uncertainty over Sullivan's fate.

The Philadelphia police were working hard, combing the city for Sullivan.

Every hour or two, Durham would return to the Swan Hotel, and wait in the lobby, hoping against hope that Larry would appear. He constantly called the City Hall to ask for news.

Durham ate his supper at the Swan, and then took a chair in the shadows of the lobby, behind a large palm. Often he had sat there with his partner when the two had been after a man, and having performed their labors, were taking a well-earned rest. The young sleuth lit a cigar, and puffed away at it. But nothing seemed to be worthwhile any longer; his pal was gone.

He was at a loss what to do. He had exhausted all his resources.

The lobby was indirectly lighted, and a good many people came in and out. Durham, out of habit, looked at

these people, but the eternal hope which sprang in his breast that one of them might be Larry Sullivan was not vindicated.

Among others who sat in the lobby of the Swan, Durham saw a slim, quiet-looking fellow, with dark hair. This man was clad in a blue suit and held a gray hat in his lap.

He, too, sat back as did Durham, and after a time, Durham really looked at him. There was something oddly familiar about him.

Evidently the slim man was watching for someone, as was Durham. The young sleuth sighed, thinking that probably the stranger's friend would be along soon, while as for his own pal, it was extremely doubtful if Durham ever saw him again. It was sad.

The detective's eyes kept returning to the face of the slim man, who had his eye on the door and was eagerly scanning each newcomer to the lobby.

Durham was just about to get up and make a visit to the City Hall, to ask again about news, when something clicked in his brain.

"By golly," he murmured.

Instantly—or finally, for worry about Sullivan had made him dull—the muscles in the sleuth's face tightened and a flash of excitement passed through him. For he realized that he did know the slim man.

Unless Durham was very much mistaken, the man who sat in the lobby of the Swan was a wanted criminal, one of the Mart Morgan gang, Johnny the Sack Lewis himself!

The young sleuth's lips set in a straight line. He grew wary, but there was no need to worry about Johnny the Sack spotting him. In the first place, Durham was not well known to the crooks, as was Sullivan. In the second place, Johnny the Sack was too busy watching the door and new arrivals to notice Durham. The detective sat between the dining room and Johnny, and he rose finally and took a chair behind a pillar, where he could just see Johnny the Sack but was well

in the shadows himself. There he excitedly extracted his circulars from his pocket, and at once confirmed the identification of the slim man. Without doubt, Johnny the Sack Lewis, lieutenant of the Morgan mob, sat in the lobby with him.

Momentarily, Durham expected to see The Sack get up and leave, or meet whomever he was awaiting. But the minutes passed, and though Lewis was growing fidgety, he still sat there in the big leather armchair, watching the new arrivals.

Eight o'clock came, then nine. Durham, his heart burning within him with suppressed excitement, wished for action.

But it was not until ten o'clock struck in the tall clock nearby that Johnny the Sack Lewis, with a curse, rose and left the hotel with swift steps.

Durham was right after him. Luckily for the young sleuth, Johnny the Sack was not suspicious of his back. However, Durham was extremely careful how he followed the mobster. He took all the precautions he knew to forestall any possible recognition.

The Sack took the subway which became an elevated and rode to West Philadelphia, where he got out and waited for a street car. Durham managed to get on the car, which was fairly crowded, and kept on the rear platform, while The Sack rode up front.

After a mile or so on the street car, Johnny the Sack Lewis left the trolley, and Durham got off at the next block and hurried back in time to take up the trail. Lewis walked for two blocks, and finally turned into a double house which stood some fifty yards from its nearest neighbor.

There were lights showing behind black curtains in the right-hand house, but the left half of the building appeared to be vacant. Johnny the Sack Lewis opened the door of the lighted section with a pass-key, and stepped inside, slamming the portal after him.

They were somewhere near North Philadelphia, of that Durham was cer-

tain. However, in the night he could not tell exactly where he was in the strange city.

He carefully reconnoitered, making a large circle about the building. He could see nothing, nor could he catch any sounds from inside.

But the presence of Johnny the Sack Lewis in a house was enough to warrant a raid. Durham walked down the block as quickly as he could, after his look around, and within a short time caught sight of a patrolman coming toward him.

"Officer," said Durham, "I need help."

The cop stopped, looked at him curiously, and then Durham identified himself and told the patrolman to fetch aid.

"I'll be down the road, across the street from that house that stands by itself there," said Durham. "Make it snappy."

He returned to guard the place, while the cop went for assistance. After twenty minutes, which seemed hours to Durham, help arrived in the form of four detectives and two uniformed men, in a patrol wagon.

The sleuths saluted Durham, and the building was surrounded.

The nearest street light threw a vague yellow illumination over the scene, as Durham, with drawn gun, tiptoed to the porch of the house, the chief of detectives at his side.

"Shall we knock, or try the door?" whispered the latter. "Are they desperate men?"

"They'll shoot it out, if they get a chance," replied Durham.

The sleuths tried to peek in at the side of the shades, but could see nothing to guide them. Finally Mulcahy, the leader of the detectives, softly turned the knob of the door. It was locked, as they had thought.

It was a ticklish situation. To attempt to burst in the door would give the crooks an opportunity to snatch up their guns, and there would probably be bloodshed.

Mulcahy and Durham drew off. "We'd better wait until one of them comes out. We can get more men and grab them as they start for the bushes."

"They may not stir till morning, and I'm in a hurry," said Durham. "I'm hoping that one of these babies can tell me where my partner, Larry Sullivan, is. Well, we'll have to get them to open the door. If we knock without reason, they'll arm themselves before they open up. Wait, I'll guarantee to get the door open. Get your men to close in."

Durham hurried down the street, and to the surprise of all the raiding sleuths, came from the avenue, crying out in loud, stentorian tones, "Extra, Extra! Read about the big robbery—"

But in a few moments, the other sleuths saw the trick. As Durham approached the ambushed house, he cried louder and louder.

"Ex-tra! Git your ex-tra!"

To make sure the inhabitants of the house heard him, Durham stopped for a moment and shouted his false call. Then he signalled Mulcahy to stand ready, and went up on the porch with heavy steps.

"Ex-tra!" he called.

Someone growled at him through the portal, which he knocked at. "Who's there?"

"Extra, mister," said Durham. "Big extra. Sell you a paper."

"Get the hell out of here," said a man's voice from inside.

"What, mister?" said Durham, pretending to misunderstand.

Evidently the man inside decided that the best plan would be to open the door and send the paper boy away happy, without arousing any suspicion. A bolt clicked, a chain was undone, and a moment later Mulcahy, Durham and two cops burst through the portal and grabbed the man who had opened the door.

The prisoner was an Italian; it was Martino, one of the bunch. He fought furiously, and the cop had to take away a long knife which the wop managed to half-draw.

Durham and Mulcahy pushed forward, with drawn guns; a woman screamed nearby, and the noise of chairs being shoved back from a table sounded from the living room.

A shot crashed into the wall beside Durham, and the sleuth fired through the half open door. Further screams in the tremolo of hysterical women rang through the halls. Mulcahy and Durham jumped through the door.

The bunch had been playing cards. There were two women and a man cowering in fear in one corner of the room. Johnny the Sack Lewis, a gun in his hand, leaped through the door into the kitchen, as the two sleuths entered the living room.

A small fellow was right behind him. This was Willie the Wart Gonan, another member of the Morgan gang. The Wart was unarmed.

"Throw up your hands and stand still, Gonan," shouted Durham.

The Wart, between Lewis and the dicks, cursed and surrendered. But Johnny the Sack kept going and the sleuths heard him open the back door and run out into the night.

However, they knew their outside men would grab him. Shots confirmed the fact that Lewis had been spotted.

Mulcahy and Durham set about the task of marshaling the two women and three men captured in the first rush.

The man who stood with the women was unknown to the sleuths, as were the girls.

They placed the prisoners in one corner of the room, and brought in Martino, the Italian, who had been subdued by the harness bull. The latter was set to guard the five.

A plainclothes man came in and reported to Mulcahy. "We had to wing that one that came out. We'll need an ambulance."

"O. K.," said Mulcahy.

Durham at once began a search of the house. He looked everywhere, in all closets, in the cellar, and under beds.

But he could find no trace of his partner, Larry Sullivan.

The young sleuth was sadly disappointed. He had hoped that Sullivan would be in the hangout, a prisoner of the mob. The other sleuths were searching the place, too. A few trinkets and small sums of money were found about the house, but no real loot was uncovered.

Durham heard the ambulance bell, and went out to speak with Johnny the Sack Lewis. The lieutenant of Mart Morgan was conscious, with a painful wound in the left leg.

"Where's Detective Sullivan?" asked Durham.

"Huh?" growled Lewis. "Sullivan? Who's that?"

"You know who he is," replied Durham. "Larry Sullivan. And you're going to tell me where he is."

But The Sack denied all knowledge of the missing sleuth. The other prisoners did likewise, the women too hysterical to talk coherently. They were the molls of Gonan and Lewis. Martino maintained a stubborn silence, and the other man, a large, light-haired fellow with watery blue eyes, who was the brother of Lewis's girl, though frightened, took his cue from Lewis.

A harness bull was left in charge of the house, and the prisoners were all taken to the City Hall for questioning.

Durham, after a last futile search of the raided house, accompanied them. Lewis was taken off to a hospital.

The captain spoke to Durham, when the latter arrived at City Hall.

"Been trying to get you all evening," he said. "A couple of your friends came over from New York on the eight o'clock express. Mart Morgan revealed the hiding place of the loot everybody's been after. He was in delirium, but he mentioned an address in Philadelphia here, and mumbled something about the dicks never getting his plunder. Detectives O'Hara and Keith came over, got some of our men, and they went right out to the address Morgan had given away. It was a small house in the suburbs, and was deserted. It was a hangout and hideaway of Morgan's,

and he rented it on lease by the year. They dug up plenty of jewels and cash in the cellar. I guess the other members of the mob weren't wise to that hiding place, or they'd have been there before this and got the stuff themselves."

"Any word of Sullivan?" asked Durham wanly.

The captain shook his grizzled head sadly.

Durham, however, could not rest for long. The prisoners were silent, coached by The Wart, and would not talk of Sullivan or anything else. But Durham took a cab, and returned to the house in North Philadelphia, where he found the harness bull sitting on the front steps, looking over his shoulder fearfully.

"What's the matter?" asked Durham. "You look unhappy. I just came out to see if I could find any traces of my friend, Detective Sullivan."

"I'm glad you did," said the cop, a large Irishman. "By golly, I think there's ghosts in this house."

"How's that?" asked Durham, amused for a moment.

"Why, when the others left, I'm sittin' here alone, when I hear a 'thump, thump,' like it was downstairs. I went the rounds, but divil a sign of anybody could I find. So I came out here where I could run quick in case I needed to."

"Show me where you heard it," ordered Durham.

His heart had leaped, when he had thought over the officer's word for a moment. The dull thumping might very well come from a man who was tied and unable to do anything but raise his heels and hit the floor. Perhaps he, Durham, had missed some hiding place in the house.

They listened for several minutes, but nothing came to them. Durham was disappointed. "Are you sure you heard something?" he asked.

"Sure. As plain as your nose."

Durham cupped his hands, and shouted. "Anybody here?" he yelled.

As the echoes did away, and Dur-

ham strained his ears, he heard a dull, "thump!"

It came from underneath him, but seemed far away. The sleuth went to the cellar, and shouted again. This time the noise could be placed. It came from the wall of the adjoining house.

There was no connection between the twin houses, save that of the thick wall. But Durham, very much excited now, went out and found that a cellar window of the place next door had been forced and was open to the touch. He pushed it back, and let himself down into the cellar.

The lights were off in the vacant structure, but Durham had a powerful torch, and he threw this to right and left as he advanced into the place.

A bundle of rags in a corner of an empty coal bin caught Durham's eye, and he hurried to it. Pushing back the coverings, the trussed body of a man showed in the light of Durham's torch.

With a cry of delight, Durham bent over his partner, Larry Sullivan.

A leather gag was tightly jammed in the unhappy sleuth's mouth, and though his blue eyes shone with thankfulness at sight of Durham, they were wan and full of pain. His hands were tied behind him, and his ankles were bound firmly together with knots that would never come loose.

Durham snatched off the gag, and set about cutting the ropes which held Sullivan, a large, light-haired man.

"It's—it's about time," whispered the big sleuth. He grinned feebly up at Durham, but made no attempt to rise.

His muscles were asleep, his tongue was swollen and black from the gag. He was unable to move by himself. Durham set about massaging the stiff limbs. Sullivan's eyes had heavy black circles under them, and he lay in a heap on the dirt floor. The thumps he had managed to make by striking his heels against the side of the coal bin, and the noises had been communicated to the next house through the intervening wall.

Durham called the harness bull, who

was relieved to see a real man in place of a ghost. They took Sullivan from the cellar, and placed him on a couch in the house they had raided. Water and massaging of his limbs gradually brought Larry Sullivan to the point where he could rest comfortably. The circulation was coming back into his limbs.

There were other marks on the big, fair-haired sleuth, besides those of the cords. He was black and blue all over.

"They beat the life out of me," whispered Sullivan, grinning up at his young partner. "Boy, I thought you'd never come!"

"Thank heaven I found you," said Durham. "When you get well enough to talk, I want to know what the hell happened to you."

"I can talk now," said Sullivan huskily. "I'll tell you shortly. I came over on the train, and at North Philadelphia a tall, light-haired guy with watery blue eyes came down the aisle and put his hand on my shoulder. 'The chief sent me to take you to the place where Johnny the Sack Lewis and his men are hiding out,' says he. 'I'm Detective Williams. Glad to know you, Detective Sullivan.'"

"That must have been one of the birds we took to-night, with the women and the three members of the mob," said Durham.

"Yeh. He fooled me, all right. I'd never seen him before, and I fell for the spiel, and got off with him. It was easy for him, then. He led me to a car, and we were driven off. They brought me to this place, and when they had me on the porch, the driver pulled up his cap and jerked out his rod, and turned out to be Johnny the Sack himself. I had been busy talking to this bird who had got me off the train, and, anyway, the Sack had kept his face away from me."

"But what the hell did they want?" asked Durham. "Why didn't they let you have it?"

"They wanted to find out what I knew about the hiding place of Mart

Morgan's loot," said Sullivan. "They took me into the cellar of the next house, tied me up, and started to massage me. They beat me up, and worked on me for several hours. They thought I was lying when I said I didn't know anything that would help them. You see, they figured that Morgan had let slide a few clues that would help them, who knew so much more than I did, to find the booty.

"I knew they'd kill me sooner or later. If the loot was found and the fact came out in the papers, I would be done for. Or they might get tired of waiting for me to tell them what they thought I knew, and murder me in a fit of temper.

"I figured and figured, even as they took turns working on me, how to get word to you.

"Finally, I had an idea. It was a good one, too. It not only gave me a chance, but it stopped them beating me up. I told them that Morgan *had* let something loose, while he was in delirium in the hospital. Johnny the Sack Lewis looked like the best bet to me. When he was kicking me and asking me what I knew about the treasure that the mob was sure Mort had hidden, from them as well as from everybody else, I pretended to give in.

"'You've got me,' says I. 'I'll tell you all I know. It hasn't done us any good; but maybe it will you.'

"'What is it?' asked Lewis, eagerly.

"'D' you know Dave the Hunchback?' I asked.

"'Naw,' says Lewis.

"'You can't miss him,' says I. 'He's very small, with a large lump on his

back, and with a white streak over his left temple. He— Aw, I won't be a quitter!'

"Lewis thought I was getting cold feet on my squeal, so he socked me a couple of times, and I went on to describe Dave the Hunchback. The Sack got more and more eager. He made me squeal—or so he thought.

"'You'll probably find this Dave the Hunchback at the Swan Hotel,' says I. 'He's a fence and he meets his customers there from seven P. M. to ten P. M. If you find him, he can tell you where Mart Morgan's secret hideout is. We just got the word from Morgan an hour or two before your false squeal came in from Philadelphia, and were going to hunt him up when we'd collared you fellows.'"

"Boy," said Durham, "that was a swell idea!"

"Sure it was," admitted Sullivan. "And it worked, too. Johnny the Sack jazzed out that night, right over to the Swan Hotel, to look for Dave the Hunchback, and find out where Mart Morgan's secret joint was. They knew it must be somewhere over here—or thought so, anyway, for Morgan made frequent trips here before we got him. Lewis intended kidnaping Dave the Hunchback and forcing him into a squeal. Of course there was no such person as Dave the Hunchback, but Lewis went to the Swan Hotel and sat around the lobby waiting for him. But you were there, as I hoped you would be, and you wouldn't be my partner and as smart a dick as you are, if you hadn't spotted Johnny the Sack Lewis and been led back to this joint."





THE SOCIETY OF DEATH

A FOUR-PART SERIAL

By T. T. Flynn

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XXII

In A Closet

WHEN Ben stood in the middle of the room talking to McReynolds and noticed the movement of the door in the left wall, he had no idea who was behind it.

And when he stepped over to that door and opened it, he was more surprised than the man who was listening on the other side.

Daniels, the missing chauffeur, had heard McReynolds' protest, and so was prepared for the sight of Ben. His hand jerked from his coat pocket, clutching a large claspknife. A finger pressed a catch in the handle. A long shiny blade flashed.

Daniels sprang forward. Obviously he intended to stab.

Ben recoiled, gasping: "For God's sake—don't do that!"

It was an instinctive exclamation. Ben was unarmed. The glitter in Daniels' eyes showed the man to be in deadly earnest.

McReynolds called in startled tones: "Don't do that in here!"

Ben's exclamation, McReynolds' plea, had no effect on Daniels. He would have cut Ben down right there if possible. Ben lunged backward, grabbed a chair, thrust it between himself and the leaping chauffeur.

Daniels stumbled over the chair, and swore heartily as the sweep of his knife ripped the cloth of Ben's coat sleeve instead of slashing through the flesh.

Daniels was as tall and heavy as Ben. In repose there must have been a disarming openness about his face.

Now, under the lash of emotion, it was distorted into a mask of passion, not pleasant to look at. He swept the chair aside with a crash and lunged after Ben.

Searching wildly for a weapon, Ben stumbled back against the hard edge of a small library table standing in the middle of the floor. He got the table between himself and Daniels just in time.

McReynolds stood in his tracks, wringing his hands and pleading: "Not in here! Not in here!"

"Shut up!" Daniels snarled out of the side of his mouth. He tried to get around the table at Ben.

Ben had never been in such a dangerous corner before. Not even those moments in the old deserted house on the Indiana shore. Cold murder was etched on Daniels' face. The gleaming sheen of the naked knife blade carried its own message of murder.

Ben could have cried aloud for help, but knew it would do no good. Any outside help would arrive too late. He would only be wasting his breath. Life and death were in the scales, and it was only a matter of split seconds before one would triumph. He could not get away. Before he could reach the door, wrench it open, and get through, Daniels would be on him.

Daniels tried to get around the small library table at him. Ben darted McReynolds around in front of him. McReynolds cried out with terror, struggled to get free. Ben hurled him at Daniels' legs.

Daniels had to leap back to keep from tripping over the flying body.

In that moment Ben saw a large vase standing on a bookcase. He leaped for it, seized the neck with both hands, and hurled it at Daniels.

The chauffeur saw it coming and tried to dodge. He was too late. The vase struck a forearm heavily, and dropped to the floor, shattering there with a loud crash. It must have hurt, from the bitter oath Daniels spat out.

The fracas was one swift whirl of

action and movement. Ben saw the flying vase had failed to stop Daniels. He saw a large framed oil painting hanging on the wall at the right of the bookcase.

A hard yank brought the painting from its supports. Ben whirled, holding the heavy frame in front of him like a crude medieval shield.

Daniels slashed at him. By a dexterous movement Ben moved the picture. The knife blade slithered harmlessly across the glass.

He and Daniels glared at each other, their eyes not two feet apart.

"You fool! You'll hang if you kill me!" Ben panted.

"I'll cut your throat!" Daniels grated.

Ben had been acting purely from self-preservation. Hot anger swept over him now. He kicked out under the edge of the picture. His shoe sole struck Daniels' kneecap.

The pain must have been terrific. Daniels recoiled, mouthing obscenity. "I'll kill you!" he choked. "Damn you—I'll kill you!"

"Come on!" Ben invited through his teeth. "Kill me, you yellow-livered psalm-singer! If you can!"

He hurled the heavy picture at the other. The very bulk and weight sent it crashing through Daniels' guarding arms. It threw the fellow back. As the frame dropped heavily down on the other's feet, Ben struck savagely with a clenched fist.

He missed the jaw; but his knuckles knocked Daniels' nose out of shape. Blood began to flow.

"Laugh that off!" Ben grated and struck again. He missed, and spun half around with the force of the blow.

A sweep of the knife slashed the flesh of his left shoulder. Ben leaped back before a second try could be made. Red anger was spreading a haze before his eyes. Only a violent effort of will restrained him from leaping barehanded against that naked steel blade.

Daniels swiped at his injured nose with a hand, spreading a red smear

across its back; and when he shook his head just after, red drops patted down on the carpet.

McReynolds had scrambled to his feet. His face was grey with fright. Some remaining glimmer of sense, or the cunning of the cornered rat, sent him to the table. He jerked open a drawer, snatched out a shiny-barreled revolver.

"Stop!" he screamed. "Both of you! I'll shoot! I'll shoot!"

The words cut through Daniels' reckless anger. He saw the revolver, swerved to grasp it. "Give it to me!" he panted.

McReynolds dodged, covered him with the weapon.

"I'll shoot you too, damn you!" he sobbed, and in the mad fury of the scene there was nothing unreal about such words coming from the lips of a staid, respectable, baby-faced student of Egyptology.

Something told Ben that McReynolds *would* shoot too. The knowledge seemed to percolate through Daniels' anger at the same time. He stopped in his tracks and stood sullenly.

"Put that rod up!" he ordered.

McReynolds moved it with unsteady jerks between Daniels and Ben, covering them both.

"I will not put it up!" he refused. "Do you want everyone in the apartment down around our ears?"

"No!" Daniels panted. "But I want to stop his mouth. You fool! Do you know where we are now? If he gets away with his story, we'll both be arrested. Every cop and dick in Chicago will be after us. And if we get out of the city they'll have the whole country on our heels. They've got our names and our descriptions! We won't have a chance."

"He won't get away," McReynolds gulped. "But be quiet! Do you hear? Be *quiet!*"

"All right; but do something!"

"I am doing something," McReynolds insisted. He was between them and the door. He backed to the door, and

reached in his pocket and took out a key and locked the door with a fumbling movement. "There," he gulped. "He can't get out now. Put that knife away!"

A measure of sanity had returned to Daniels. He relaxed. The hand holding the knife dropped to his side. Slowly he snubbed the blade in and pocketed the weapon. And then drew out a handkerchief and wiped at the blood that was streaming from his nose.

Ben had been standing warily in his tracks. He recognized in McReynolds' manner the unreliable edge of hysteria. The man was apt to shoot at the slightest movement. It would be foolish to make that movement. Better to stand and argue, and see what the future would bring, than risk quick death by a rash act. So he stood silently, warily, watching McReynolds and Daniels.

McReynolds waved the gun at him. "Put up your hands!" he ordered hoarsely.

Slowly Ben elevated his hands. He made the mental reservation that if Daniels went for his knife again, he'd fight to the last moment. Hatred for the chauffeur still filled him with dizzying force. McReynolds was a natural phenomenon, swayed by the emotions of the moment; but Daniels had acted in a cold-blooded manner. Ben was certain the man would be capable of killing ruthlessly for the mere pleasure of it.

"What are you going to do about him?" Daniels asked McReynolds, as he dabbed at his nose with the white handkerchief.

"Tie him up! Put a gag in his mouth!"

"Suppose he gets away?"

"He won't."

Ben spoke to them as coolly as possible. "You fools! You don't think I came in here like this without telling someone where I was going, do you?"

"Did you?" Daniels glared.

"Keep me here and find out!" Ben invited. "And don't forget that a live body will be worth more to you than

a dead one when you're arrested."

Daniels greeted that statement with an oath. McReynolds nodded, however. "He is right," he commented nervously. "We—we must not do anything to him—until we see whether he is telling the truth or not."

"I think he's lying!" Daniels grunted angrily.

"I hope he is," McReynolds said fervently. Confidence was coming back to the little man now. He stepped away from the door, keeping the gun trained steadily on Ben, and ordered threateningly: "Go in the other room. Right through the door that you opened just now."

Ben obeyed. There was nothing else to do.

The room was a bedroom. He stopped at the foot of a polished four-poster bed and lowered his hands. Then raised them again as McReynolds followed him and ordered harshly: "Put your hands up again and keep them there!"

Daniels came in also, still mopping at his broken nose. McReynolds kept Ben covered with the revolver while Daniels ripped two sheets in strips. With the strips Daniels bound Ben's wrists behind him. Tied his elbows too, jerking the thongs so tightly that the strained muscles hurt. Daniels then tied his ankles together, and his knees; and finally pushed him roughly back on the bed.

The two men stood by the side of the bed and hurled a succession of questions at him.

To all the questions Ben remained silent. Every incriminating answer they dragged from him would only inflame them that much more.

Failing to get any satisfaction they gagged him thoroughly. Daniels picked him up, carried him to a clothes closet, and thrust him inside with as little concern as he would have shown a bag of meal. The door closed with a slam. Ben heard the grate of a key in the lock, and then steps departing from the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Janitor's Wife

PITCH blackness, heavy stillness surrounded him. He was half lying, half sitting in a decidedly uncomfortable position. No matter how he moved he was cramped. The space was not large enough. The strained muscles of his arms were already aching. When he tried to find a comfortable position and failed, he added that score to the heavy debt already standing against Daniels' name.

Ben refused to allow his mind to dissolve into a welter of chaotic thoughts. He resigned himself to the discomfort and even pain, and began to consider this new development. The last man in the world he had expected to find in McReynolds' apartment was Daniels. The discovery was the missing link that definitely tied the plump little dilettante of Egyptology into the amazing web of crime. Of course, McReynolds had been under suspicion, but now he was definitely implicated. And that raised still more questions.

How was McReynolds implicated? And to what extent? What lay behind the personality of this man whose whole life had been blameless, as far as the police could ascertain. What had tempted him to deviate from the straight and narrow?

Could McReynolds, Ben wondered, be so obsessed with matters pertaining to ancient Egypt, to which he had apparently devoted his mature years, that he was willing to become a criminal to obtain possession of the authentic mummy of Nefertis, the long-dead princess of old Egypt?

It seemed logical, but only for a moment. McReynolds was not a rich man, although he apparently had money enough to satisfy the everyday necessities of life. He simply did not have the money or the personality to weld together an organization such as had evidently been committed to the mummy and the murders. By no stretch of the imagination could McReynolds'

passion for Egyptology be widened to include Daniels, or Eddie Collins, the released jewel crook. Men like that only committed crimes for a monetary gain.

The actions of McReynolds and Daniels showed that they had a great guilt on their minds. The trail ran red hot to their door, and from there wandered off into a confused maze of distorted and unrelated facts. As Sam Adams had said the evening before, the more details he brought to mind the more bewildered he became. What part had Eddie Collins played in the matter?

And what part had McReynolds played?

He had been present at Professor Craigwright's house, but only as a respected guest. Every moment the man had been in sight of the other guests. He had made no effort to leave them. How could he have had anything to do with the murders? And if McReynolds was now definitely linked up with the matter, how many of the other guests were also connected with it? Every one of them had seemed ultra-respectable. But then, so had McReynolds.

And there was still the unexplained death of McAlister in Cairo. Had it been an accident, or was it related in some way to this strange chain of happenings that had taken place in Chicago?

The ache in Ben's arms and legs grew to sharp pain. No amount of shifting could find a comfortable position to ease the strain. After a time numbness set in.

Long hours passed. Ben was wearing a luminous wrist watch, but it was behind him and he could not mark the passage of time. After the numbness stole through his arm muscles lethargy of a sort enveloped his whole body.

Frantic efforts at first had convinced him it was utterly impossible to free himself from his bonds. He was a prisoner there to wait the will of McReynolds and Daniels; and from words they had uttered as they bound him,

it was easy enough to guess what the end would be when they returned. McReynolds' subduing of Daniels with the revolver had not been from any motive of kindness. The man had merely been afraid that murder on the spot was certain to be found out. So they were holding him until a more propitious time. The end would be murder, of that Ben was certain.

Long hours. How long they were only Ben would never know. He dozed for awhile, or perhaps it was merely the numbness weakening his brain.

He came to with a start. A door had closed in the apartment. He heard steps; then voices. A little later the steps came to the door of the closet; a key grated in the lock and the door opened. Daniels looked in at him, and scowled unpleasantly.

"Rest easy," Daniels advised sourly. "I'll attend to you later on."

Ben was not able to answer because of the gag in his mouth. By now he felt like an inert lump of flesh, and did not care greatly what happened. He knew in a vague way that if he was not killed there was danger of death from the terrible numbness that enveloped his body. He closed his eyes that he might not see Daniels' face.

A moment later a door slammed again and the key turned in the lock. Shortly after that the apartment fell silent. It was hard to tell whether anyone was in it or not. That didn't greatly matter either.

Ben wondered dully whether his absence would be noticed; and whether Sam Adams would institute a search for him. Probably not.

Long hours dragged past again. Suddenly, through the blackness and the stillness enveloping him, Ben fancied that he heard a noise in the bedroom beyond the closet door.

A moment later he heard the muffled ringing of a telephone bell. It was not answered. Again and again the bell rang. By the fact that it was not answered Ben knew that the apartment was empty.

Presently the telephone quieted. Deep silence fell again, only to be broken by that curious noise he had heard on the other side of the door.

Suddenly he came alert. A key was being inserted in the door lock. Cautiously it turned. The door opened. A flood of electric light burst in.

His dazzled eyes made out vaguely the form of a woman. She uttered a stifled scream of terror at sight of him and then retreated into the room. Ben made choked noises down in his throat behind the gag, and prayed to Heaven that she would not flee and leave him alone.

She had left the door open. His eyes were getting accustomed to the light. He made out her figure in the middle of the room, staring at him with wide, terror-stricken eyes. She was large, fat, blowsy, with blond bobbed hair and heavily rouged lips. Either terror rendered her incapable of movement, or the noises he was making in his throat caught her attention and reassured her. She stood there, staring.

Convinced that he was not a corpse, she came uncertainly back.

"Who—who are you?" she stammered. "Whatcha doing in there?"

Ben could not answer of course, but he made more noises behind the gag, and twisted his head and tried to speak through his eyes.

"You're all tied up!" she babbled.

Ben nodded. He wanted to beg her to untie him. It was agony to think that she might go away and leave him.

Indecision struggled across her blowsy face. Then she observed doubtfully: "I don't know what it's all about, but I don't guess no one belongs in a place like that. Here, I'll let you loose."

She got heavily down on her knees in the doorway, and with blunt fingers untied the knots at his legs and knees. As she loosened them his legs were free; but still he was helpless, incapable of motion because of that terrible numbness which had swept over him.

She took the gag out of his mouth next. "What's it all about?" she asked.

Ben's jaw was so stiff he could hardly articulate words. His throat was dry and inflamed also, but he managed to wrench out hoarsely with an effort: "Pull me out on the floor and untie my arms! I can't move!"

She was a large woman and not lacking in strength. Getting heavily to her feet, she caught his shoulders and dragged him out into the room. And there he lay flat on the floor, face down, while she unfastened the bonds around his elbows and wrists. The arms, when they were released, flopped helplessly to the floor like bits of wood. He had no control over them, there was no feeling.

"They're numb!" he gasped. "I can't use them!"

"Let me put you on the bed, mister." With some degree of effort she got him off the floor and laid him on the bed.

"Who are you?" Ben queried.

She hesitated. Her face flushed slightly. She looked guilty.

"I'm the janitor's wife," she told him.

In her blowsy face Ben read a likely explanation for her presence. McReynolds and Daniels were gone. She had thought the apartment empty, and probably with a skeleton key had slipped in to look around, perhaps to pilfer something. That was the one weak link McReynolds had overlooked—the chance that his apartment might be entered while he was away.

"Who are you?" she asked in turn.

"It doesn't matter. Go to the 'phone, call detective headquarters, give them this address and the number of this apartment. Tell them to send men here at once."

Her appearance of guilt deepened.

"There ain't any need to do that, is there, mister?" she faltered. "I—I was passing in the hall and heard a noise in here and just stepped in to see if everything was all right."

"I'm not thinking about you. It's myself."

The telephone rang suddenly. She started nervously.

"Answer it," Ben ordered.

"I'd rather not, mister. You see, stric'ly speaking, I ain't supposed to be in here. If I answer the 'phone, Mr. McReynolds is liable to find it out an' complain to the management; an' then maybe me an' my husban' will get fired. Jobs ain't so plentiful now either."

"You won't lose your job," Ben assured her.

"I don't know about that, mister. Maybe I'll lose my job over this."

"Of course you won't. Do you know where McReynolds is?"

She shook her head. "No. I saw him an' another gentleman go out this afternoon but they didn't say anything to me."

The first tingling of returning blood was beginning to make itself felt. As the seconds passed the feeling grew worse. Finally it mounted almost to agony. At his direction the woman rubbed his arms with her strong hands.

"What time is it?" he asked presently.

"It's after seven, mister."

Presently Ben was able to move his arms slightly, and then to sit up in bed. Finally stood up, and began to swing them, feeling better as life flowed back.

The telephone rang again. This time Ben went into the next room and answered it himself.

A voice that he did not recognize asked: "Is that you, McReynolds?"

Ben answered that it was, trying to disguise his voice as much as possible.

The stranger informed him plaintively: "I've been trying to get you for two hours. Where've you been?"

"Out," Ben told him.

"This is Morton. Meet me at the Garden Court Club at nine o'clock, will you? I got something to talk over."

"Sure," Ben agreed quickly. "Where will you be?"

"I'll have a table back in a corner somewhere. Ask for Jenks. That's the name I'll give. Jenks. Got it? J-e-n-k-s. Jenks."

"I got it," Ben assented.

"All right. And say, any word from the Big Squeeze?"

"No," said Ben gruffly. He hung up, wondering greatly and feeling not a little elated. The Garden Court Club he knew well. It was a night club of rather unsavory repute, frequented by the various types that linger on the borderland of respectability.

There still remained the matter of calling Sam Adams. Ben hardly hoped to find him in his office, and he did not. Sam Adams had gone home. Ben 'phoned the house, and got him.

He told Sam what had happened.

"I was wondering all day what had happened to you," Sam said at the end. "I called your office and they said you were out; didn't know where you were. I wasn't sure but what they hadn't got you. I guess you don't know they got Miss Craigwright, do you?"

"What's that?" Ben almost shouted.

"They got Miss Craigwright."

"You mean—you mean they—shot her?"

"No," Sam said. "Or if they did, they did it mighty quiet. But she went out and disappeared. Her father hasn't any idea where she could have gone, and from what I know of the young lady, something must have happened to her. She was to call me this afternoon and didn't."

Ben almost groaned aloud. Nevis! Why did it have to happen to her?

Ben had not told Sam of the telephone call he had answered. He spoke of it now, and of the engagement he had made to meet the unknown Mr. Jenks at nine o'clock. "If we can get him," he told Sam earnestly, "we'll probably have one of them. He may know where Miss Craigwright is."

"I'll send McKenna and King around to you," Sam declared instantly. "The three of you can bring the fellow in. And say, on second thought I'll send two more men along. They can stay there in the apartment and nab McReynolds and Daniels if they show up."

"Fine!" said Ben heartily.

The janitor's wife was waiting in the living room when Ben arrived with McKenna and King and the two other detectives. The two detectives stationed themselves in the bedroom and Ben went away with McKenna and King. As they rode toward the Loop he told them what had happened.

"So McReynolds is a crook, eh?" McKenna grumbled. "I didn't like that fellow the other night at Craigwright's house. I remember how loud he was talkin', like he owned the place." McKenna hesitated and then added: "You didn't see any ghosts, did you?"

"Not to-day," Ben grinned. "There was nothing ghostlike about McReynolds and the chauffeur. Let's find a restaurant before we do anything else. I'm starving."

CHAPTER XXIV

Garden Court Club

THERE was nothing about the entrance to the Garden Court Club to indicate what manner of business lay beyond. One saw a single light over a double doorway that was flanked with potted evergreens, and beyond the door a long hall whose walls were plastered in heavy Moorish style.

Ben and McKenna and King had stopped at a small restaurant to allow Ben to eat something. They reached the Garden Court Club at a few minutes past nine and parked the police car several doors down the street.

Ben went in first, alone. McKenna and King were to follow. It was better that way, they decided, for there was no telling who might be present to recognize McKenna and King as detectives. Such a happening might well endanger any chance of deriving benefit from the meeting with the unknown Jenks.

Not one of the three had any idea who Jenks might be. It was Ben's plan to go in on the spur of the moment and find out what he could. So he walked under the entrance light, down the long hall, and came to an in-

ner pair of doors, before which stood a tall, broad-shouldered individual whose left ear was crumbled and distorted from ring battles. Ben had been here once before. This man had been pointed out to him. It was Eddy, the bouncer.

Eddy surveyed him sharply. Ben nodded coolly and walked on in.

Although it was yet early in the evening only a third of the tables were filled. A jazz orchestra was playing raucous music to which seven or eight couples were dancing. The head waiter came forward to meet him.

Ben said casually: "I have an appointment with a friend here at nine o'clock. A Mr. Jenks. Is he here?"

The head waiter shook his head without interest. "Jenks?" he said indifferently. "Sure you got the name right?"

"Sure," said Ben. "He told me he'd have a table over in a corner where we could talk quietly." He winked slightly.

The wink or his manner did the trick. The head waiter said doubtfully: "You don't look like the man he told me he was expecting. But I guess it's all right. This way, please."

They threaded a way across the large room, skirted the edge of the dance floor and went to a far corner. There, partially screened by a potted plant and a pillar, was a table at which one man was seated, toying with a sandwich and sipping from a glass in which ice tinkled.

The head waiter indicated this table and left. Ben stepped forward alone.

He knew, at first sight that he had never seen this man before. He was a short dark-featured person with a wide face and mouth, and well-barbered, blue-black jowls. Ben smiled and spoke easily. "Are you Mr. Jenks?"

The other scowled at him. "Who are you?" he asked bluntly.

Ben lowered his voice. "I'm from McReynolds. He couldn't come. He asked me to keep his appointment."

The other's face remained blank. "Who's McReynolds? And who are you?" he asked truculently. "I never saw you before."

Ben did some swift thinking in the moment that followed the stranger's words. He was groping blindly in the darkness of ignorance, and might easily make a false move. If this was Jenks, the man would naturally be on his guard if there was anything crooked about him. Ben made a blind stab at an answer and hoped it would be right, as he did so.

"Don't suppose you ever did see me before," he told the other smilingly. "I never saw you either. But we both know McReynolds. Isn't that enough? You called McReynolds up a little after seven and told him to be here about nine. I was in his apartment at the time. Something else came up a little later and he had to leave in a hurry, so he asked me to come here in his place. He said I would probably do."

"You were in his apartment, eh? Who else was there?"

"Daniels," Ben said promptly. "At least—that's what he's calling himself now." He smiled knowingly.

The scowl left the other's face but he still looked slightly suspicious. "Got anything to show me?" he grunted.

Ben hadn't the slightest idea what reply to make to that. Anything to show the fellow? What could he have to show him? What was McReynolds supposed to have?

He didn't know, so he did the next best thing, tried to bluff it through. "I left it at McReynolds'," he said. "What have you got to show me?"

For a moment it looked as though he had said the wrong thing. The scowl came back to the dark features. Then the man grunted: "Sit down. I guess you're all right."

"Sure, I'm all right," Ben said, slipping into a chair. "What would I be doing here if I wasn't, Morton?" He added the last casually, as though the

man's real name was very familiar to him.

The man called himself Jenks, and whose real name was Morton, shot him a quick look and then nodded. "Yeah," he said again, "I guess you're all right. But I wish McReynolds had come. There's a fellow due here this evening I want him to talk to."

Ben raised his eyebrows. "Why didn't you bring your man to the apartment?"

"Say, I'm not that big a fool," Morton said harshly. "Bring him to the apartment—and then get hell from McReynolds and the Big Squeeze too? Not me!"

Ben's pulse ticked a little faster. The Big Squeeze? That was news! So there was someone behind McReynolds? Someone over him? The Big Squeeze! It sounded like the head of a gang. But what gang?

He was so busy speculating on this new thought that he did not notice when Morton asked: "Going to have something to drink?"

When Ben did not answer Morton repeated the question. "Sure," said Ben hastily. "Order me what you've got there. It looks good."

"It is good," Morton agreed. He snapped his fingers and summoned the waiter, and gave him a curt order. And when the waiter had gone Morton dropped a hand into his pocket and brought it out again. Between his fingers was a small green scarab, shining dully in the reflected light.

A green scarab! Another one! Exactly like the one that had been found at the foot of Daniels' bed, and the one that had been in the possession of Ahmed, the Egyptian, and the one that had been taken from Eddie Collins, the jewel thief. All exactly alike. All appearing at some moment or place that was highly suspicious. What was the meaning of the scarabs? What were they for?

Morton laid his on the table and toyed with it. His eyes rested steadily on Ben. "Funny you forgot yours!"

Ben realized that he was supposed to be carrying one also. That was news. A sudden light began to break on the matter. He was supposed to carry one, and McReynolds and Daniels had evidently each had one. Like a further clear light the meaning broke over him. It was a mark of identification! Men who did not know each other carried them as lodge members wear badges.

It opened up new vistas. A group of men, an organization so large that all its members did not know each other, was a formidable thing indeed. If such was a fact it explained in a measure how such a thing as the disappearance of the mummy and the murders could have been planned and executed.

But the Big Squeeze! Who was he? Not McReynolds. Not Daniels. Certainly neither of the two men who had attacked him out in the sand dunes.

Ben's back was to the main body of the large room. He shifted his chair slightly so he could view the room, and was just in time to note the entrance of McKenna and King, walking stolidly behind the head waiter. They were seated some few tables away, at the edge of the dance floor. McKenna's back was toward Ben. King sat on the other side of the table, where his eyes could rest on Ben and Morton. As King sat down his eyes met Ben's for a fleeting moment, but no expression came over his face.

Ben looked back at Morton. With a nod at the scarab he said indifferently: "Those things are hard to keep. I've lost two already."

Morton nodded. "They are," he admitted. "I've dropped this once or twice but I've always found it. Not that it matters. No one would know what it was if they found it."

"No," said Ben, "they wouldn't."

Ben was tense, on edge. He hoped it didn't show on his face. He felt he was on the verge of great discoveries, and wasn't exactly certain what to do next. This man knew something of the disappearance of the mummy and

the murders, he felt certain, but how was he to get the information? Morton had done nothing to warrant arrest. If arrested, he would probably relapse into silence and admit nothing.

Morton drew out a watch and glanced at it. "About time that fellow showed up," he commented. "I told him nine o'clock."

"Who is he?"

"Maybe you know him. His name is Barr. He's been in St. Louis doing some work."

Ben's drink came. He took a few sips and liked it. Over the rim of his glass he sent a quick glance at the table where McKenna and King were sitting. King was not looking at him at the moment. McKenna's broad back seemed indifferent. Ben hoped that if he needed them they would be ready. And this Barr. Who was he? What was going to happen when he showed up?

Ben had not long to wait for the answer to that last. Some three minutes later steps sounded behind him. Morton got to his feet. "Hello," he remarked to someone behind Ben. "You're late."

Ben turned his head, saw a tall, lean, cadaverous individual standing behind him, staring down at him intently.

"Say," said Morton to Ben, "I didn't get your name."

"Kelly," Ben told him, taking the first name that popped to mind.

Morton nodded. "Kelly, this is Barr," he said with a wave of his hand.

And as Ben stood up and shook with the cadaverous individual, Morton explained: "McReynolds couldn't get here, Barr. He didn't know what was up, so he sent Kelly to see."

"Where is McReynolds?" Barr asked colorlessly, pulling the third chair out and sitting down.

Ben sat down also. "Something came up," he explained. "I don't know what it was. McReynolds had to hurry away. I don't think he knew what this appointment was about. He asked me to keep it for him, and see."

"That's interesting," said Barr. His voice was low, even, and his face absolutely without expression. His eyebrows were bushy, and his nose was long and hooked; there was a searching stare about his eyes that was a trifle disconcerting.

"What," Barr asked after a moment, his eyes resting on Ben, "is the business that called McReynolds away?"

Ben shrugged. "Search me."

Barr fumbled in a coat pocket. "Most interesting," he remarked colorlessly. "You may be interested to know that just before I left my hotel I received a 'phone message. It said that there was to be a meeting to-night. Something important. I replied that I was to meet McReynolds at nine o'clock. And I was told that that was impossible. McReynolds had been with the man calling me since five o'clock, and was going to be with him the rest of the evening. I was asked to come here and get you, Morton, and the two of us were to go on to the meeting. McReynolds didn't know you were to meet him here to-night."

Morton's face reddened. "Sure about that?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"I called McReynolds at his apartment a little after seven, and talked with him," Morton insisted.

"You couldn't have," said Barr in a flat voice. "McReynolds hasn't been at his apartment all evening."

With startling suddenness, a tension fell over the table. The eyes of the two men riveted on Ben.

Ben realized that his little game was up. Flaming suspicions covered the faces of the two men who were staring at him.

Morton leaned forward. "You told me McReynolds was in his apartment when I called!" he said roughly.

"That's what I said," Ben nodded. "Don't you believe me?"

Morton hesitated. His eyes sought Barr's. "Sure you couldn't be wrong?"

"Of course not. I know the man I was talking to. I've spoken to him

enough over the telephone. If he said McReynolds was with him—the man was."

"Then you lied to me!" Morton accused Ben thickly.

Ben shrugged. "That's a pretty hard thing to say."

"The hell it is! You had me fooled for a minute. I see through you now. You weren't carrying a scarab with you, and you handed me a pretty line." The dark face was scowling in growing anger; Morton's voice was rising.

Barr cut in. "What have you told him?"

"Nothing," said Morton sullenly.

"Gentlemer." Ben insisted, "there's a mistake somewhere. If you'll listen to me I think I can convince you everything's all right."

Barr's hand came out of his coat pocket. For a brief instant the ugly shape of a small automatic was visible, nestling in one large palm. It dropped below the level of the table until only the muzzle was resting on the edge, where his other hand covered it.

"Now," he said warningly, "just sit there quiet and easy. Don't make a move or this thing's liable to go off."

The plant and the pillar that concealed them from the rest of the room now hid Barr's movements. Ben sat very still.

CHAPTER XXV

Four Guns

FOR a moment all three men sat motionless. Ben's mind worked furiously. Once again the fact was hammered home that he was dealing with desperate men; that gun muzzle in Barr's hand was not reassuring. It was not pleasant to think that if he moved for assistance it was apt to go off.

He wanted to turn his head, get into communication with McKenna and King. But Barr's eyes were boring into him steadily. Morton's hand had dropped to a pocket; it was easy to imagine that he was grasping a gun

also, ready to use it if the need arose.

So Ben sat there and eyed them, and waited for the next move.

"What's your real name?" asked Barr thickly.

Ben smiled at him. "Write your own ticket on that."

"All right," said Barr, "I will." There was that in his manner that was not reassuring.

"You both are acting like damn fools," Ben told them casually. "What do you think you're going to do?"

"My car's outside," Morton said in a low voice to Barr.

Barr nodded silently.

Ben turned his head then looked casually toward the other table. McKenna's back was still toward him, and King was looking at the dance floor. Morton spoke. Ben had to look back at him.

Morton said evenly: "We're going to walk out the front door. All three of us. Barr will go first, and then you, and I'll come behind you. I've got a rod in my pocket. One funny move out of you—and curtain. Get me?" The blue-black jowls of the man were clenched until ridges of muscle stood out in his cheeks. The pupils of his eyes were mere pinpoints.

Barr pushed back his chair and stood up, sliding his automatic into a coat pocket and keeping his hand on it. Morton stood up also, and tossed a ten-dollar bill on the table.

"Come on," he ordered abruptly.

Ben wondered what the chances were for making a break or crying out. Then he dismissed the thought. Better go with them and trust to the breaks, and to McKenna and King.

King saw them going. Ben's eyes met his briefly. Ben lowered an eyelid, jerked his head slightly. With an imperceptible nod King signaled that he had caught it.

But had he? Ben wondered rather desperately as he walked out to the entrance hallway. McKenna and King could hardly know that he was leaving under compulsion. They might follow,

but would they be in time? He wanted greatly to look around and see what the detectives were doing, and then decided against it.

They passed through the front door to the sidewalk.

"This way," Barr grunted. He turned to the left. They walked half a block and stopped beside a green sedan at a muttered word from Norton.

"Get in," the man ordered Ben gruffly.

"Where?" Ben asked, sparring for time. "Front or back?"

"Front."

"Now listen," Ben urged in a conciliatory tone, "Be reasonable about this. Would I have showed up if I wasn't all right? Why, say, how did I know. . . ."

Here in the open where no one could observe him, Morton's ugly temper broke out in an oath. "I don't give a damn how you knew anything!" he grated. "I'm going to find out about you damn' quick! If you're all right, okay! If you're not. . . ."

"What?"

"Never mind!" The tone it was spoken in was not reassuring.

Ben turned his head slightly, made out two figures following along the sidewalk. McKenna and King. The street along here was not very well lighted, but he was certain it was they. He decided to stay on the sidewalk by hook or crook until the detectives reached the spot.

"I don't want to go with you two," Ben objected. "Looks to me like you're figuring on taking me for a ride."

"Get in!" Morton ordered angrily.

McKenna and King were nearer now. If he could only shout at them, tell them to hurry up. He'd probably be shot and left there on the sidewalk. *If they'd only hurry.*

Barr saw the two men coming. "Easy," he warned under his breath.

"Knock this bird on the head!" Morton grated.

"Wait till these fellows get past."

"All right. But one smack out of you as they go by," Morton snarled at Ben, "and I'll let you have it in the guts, so help me! Understand?"

"Yes," Ben retorted. He was taut with tension. What was going to happen?

Plenty happened, and quickly once it started. They were standing there, three men apparently engaged in friendly conversation, when McKenna and King reached them. Ben saw that each detective had his right hand in his coat pocket. He suspected that they, too, were holding guns. The possibilities were staggering. Four armed men. What would happen?

Instead of passing, as Morton and Barr were expecting, the two detectives stopped. "Got a match?" King asked casually.

"No," said Morton gruffly.

Barr did not answer.

Ben spoke, and he wondered if his voice sounded as dry and strained as it felt. "No," he said, "I can't give you a match. I'm being taken for a ride."

"Yeah?" grunted McKenna. "Well, *hands up, all three of you!*"

McKenna's hand came out of his pocket clutching a service revolver. Barr shot through his coat pocket. King staggered; his revolver roared, once, twice.

A gurgling sound bubbled from Barr's throat. His knees buckled. He dropped suddenly.

And at the same time the revolver tumbled from King's fingers and he, too, collapsed.

Ben hooked a blow at Morton's jaw. The fellow staggered, shooting through his coat at McKenna.

McKenna's gun answered. The bullet ripped through the side of Morton's coat and crashed into the body of the sedan. McKenna himself grunted, and turned slightly under the impact of the bullet. Morton fired again while he was yet unbalanced. Missed. And then ran, doubling around the front of the sedan, dashing across the street.

McKenna rocked unevenly on his

feet, fired once, twice, three times after the fleeing figure. Morton dodged as he ran. None of the bullets found its mark.

"Where did he get you?" Ben demanded.

"Upper arm! What did he do to King?"

Ben stooped over King. Blood was gushing from a spot over the heart. "Dead!" Ben rapped out. He snatched King's revolver up from the sidewalk.

A window opened overhead. A man peered out. McKenna looked up, shouted: "Call the police! Watch these men!"

Morton was running along the opposite sidewalk. Ben started after him. To his surprise McKenna followed. As they dashed across the street Ben asked jerkily: "Can you make it?"

"Losing blood. Arm feels numb—can make it!" McKenna replied.

Morton reached the next corner well ahead. A taxi bowled into view. He hailed it, leaped in, and the taxi took him away. The police car was across the street some fifty yards back. McKenna veered back toward it. As they reached it he said hoarsely: "Here's the key!"

Ben jammed the key in the ignition lock, turned it, and started the motor. McKenna flung beside him as the car rocked away from the curb in low gear.

They reeled into the side street. No automobile was in sight. McKenna uttered an oath. "Go up to the next corner! Maybe it went down that street!"

Ben didn't slow up when they got to the next street. A block to the right they made out a taxi turning under the corner light toward the Lake.

Ben yanked on the steering wheel. The police car almost turned over as it careened around the turn. It was a long block. Ben swung the next corner and they saw some distance ahead of them the red tail light.

Intersection after intersection flashed past. They gained gradually. The tail light of the taxi was less than half a block ahead, as they shot into

the northwest entrance of Lincoln Park at Diversey Parkway and Sheridan Road. Through the winding park drive they flashed at dangerous speed.

The taxi slowed suddenly, whirled to the left into another bit of driveway. It disappeared behind banks of shrubbery for brief seconds. Ben made the turn on two wheels, tires shrieking as they scraped the asphalt. The red tail light of the taxi was just ahead now, running slower. They flashed up alongside. McKenna covered the driver with his revolver, and shouted: "Stop!"

The taxi driver stopped immediately. McKenna leaped out, and peered into the back of the taxi.

And then exclaimed: "*Nobody in there!*"

CHAPTER XXVI

On The Lake

"THE fellow made me slow up just as I passed the turn," the taxi driver explained quickly. "He jumped out an' didn't pay me. He was packin' a gun."

McKenna jerked open the rear door of the taxi, reached in, lifted the driver's identification card from its case and jammed it in his coat pocket.

"You were hauling a crook!" he snapped. "Get out! Help us round him up!"

They plunged off the asphalt and pounded across the smooth grass. Shrubbery grew thickly all about. They ran back and forth investigating clumps of shrubbery, dark patches of shadow, working farther and farther away from the point where they had left the taxi. It became apparent that they had lost their man. It was a bitter dose to swallow when they met on the shore of the yacht lagoon.

The lagoon was about a mile long and a measurable distance wide. They were at the north end, near the boathouse of the Lincoln Park Boat Club. Out in the water were anchored launches of all sizes and types.

As they stood there on the bank,

panting, trying to decide what to do, the motor of one of the launches suddenly droned into life.

"People don't usually go cruising this late at night," Ben observed. A thought occurred to him. "Wonder if it could have anything to do with the man we're after?"

"He told me to come in the northwest driveway, an' turn over toward here," the taxi driver volunteered quickly.

The waters of the lagoon were dimly lighted by lights around the banks. They could see one of the launches beginning to move. It shot ahead with rapidly increasing speed.

"There's a channel to the Lake down there," Ben exclaimed. "Say, I'm going to the Boat Club and see if they know anything."

A small group was loitering on the landing when Ben came hurriedly up to them and demanded: "Did any of you see who got in that launch?"

One of the men answered: "Some man came running up, got in a rowboat and rowed out to the launch in a devil of a hurry. He left the rowboat floating out there. We were just talking about it. He acted mighty funny."

As McKenna and the driver came up Ben asked: "Is there another launch around here we can use?"

"I've got a sea sled out there," said the man to whom he was talking.

Ben fired the facts at McKenna. "That's Morton in the launch all right," he finished. "This man says he's got a boat we can use."

McKenna said: "Let's go!" Then turned and ordered the taxi driver to keep an eye on their car, and followed Ben and the strange young man to a rowboat. The latter was an expert with the oars. They were quickly alongside a medium sized sea sled. A few moments later they also were skimming south over the surface of the lagoon, the powerful motor of their craft purring smoothly.

A large searchlight was mounted on the bow. The owner of the boat

switched it on, the white beam flung ahead. They reached the entrance of the channel leading to the Lake, and shot through it.

Their odd looking craft was speedy. It traveled on the surface of the water, rocking, slapping over the Lake rollers.

The owner shut the motor off suddenly. Over the swift *slap-slap* of the water as they coasted, they caught the steady drone of a motor somewhere ahead.

The motor cut in again. They surged forward with a rush. The powerful searchlight presently picked up the hull of the craft they were following. It was a long, low, speedy launch, traveling fast also, as the sheering wave at its sharp bow showed.

They came up to it steadily. Within ten minutes they were miles out from shore and close to the other craft. Their searchlight outlined it clearly. Closer they came. Closer.

A red flash winked from its stern. The vicious whine of a bullet wailed close by. Another followed right after. A crashing noise sounded at the bow. The searchlight went out abruptly.

"Hell!" McKenna exclaimed with disgust.

The boat's owner exclaimed: "*This is dangerous!*"

"Not afraid, are you?"

"No," the other said defiantly. "I'll keep after him if you want me to."

"Keep on."

The gods of luck seemed to have turned against them. The motor sputtered and died a few minutes later.

"What's the matter?" McKenna demanded in exasperation.

"I don't know," the owner answered. "I'll see."

But it was easier to say than do. Fifteen long minutes passed before the engine started again. In that time the fleeing launch drew away and the sound of its exhaust disappeared completely. They rocked silently on the Lake surface, surrounded by a great silence that was broken only by the *slap-slap* of the waves against the hull.

Miles to the west the skyline of Chicago gleamed and glittered like a jewel-hung fairyland. To the south, east, and north the Lake stretched dark, unfathomable. Away off on the northern skyline the faint lights of a ship twinkled, seemingly stationary on the vast expanse of waters. McKenna impatiently swore under his breath time and again.

Ben felt like doing the same. But they could do nothing but wait for the owner to get the motor started.

"We'll never catch him," McKenna grumbled.

"Looks like it," Ben agreed. "Take off your coat. Let me see your shoulder."

By the light of a flash produced by the owner, Ben examined the wound in McKenna's right shoulder. It was a nasty one all right. Still bleeding, caking the shirt and the arm with dark blood. But McKenna was husky. He had stood it all right so far. Ben took his and McKenna's handkerchiefs and one from the boatman and made a rude tourniquet and bandage from them.

Finally the motor started again, but by now there was no chance of following Morton. He had disappeared completely, and might have turned in any direction after he was out of hearing. It was a hopeless matter.

"I guess we might as well go back," McKenna decided reluctantly.

There was nothing to do but agree. But as the boat turned around and headed back toward the light-spangled shore Ben suddenly exclaimed: "I've got an idea!"

"What is it?" McKenna asked sourly.

"Just this. Morton was bearing off to the south. I've got a hunch he was headed toward the south end of the Lake. To the Indiana shore."

"What of it? Fat chance we've got of finding him along that shore. He can land anywhere and get away."

"I know," agreed Ben. "But listen, how about that house back in the sand dunes? Daniels is a member of some gang. This Morton is evidently a

member of the same gang. Daniels went to that house. Isn't it possible that this fellow was making for there also? It must be used as a hideout when things get hot. Chicago isn't very safe for Morton now. Isn't it logical that he'll want to lay low?"

"Might be at that," McKenna conceded reluctantly.

"Certainly," said Ben, warming to the idea. "I think there's more than a chance. At least it's worth following out. If he's gone back to the city we haven't a chance of picking up his trail right away. We might go on and have a look at the house. The way this boat travels it won't take long to cut across the corner of the Lake and get there."

McKenna turned to the owner of the craft. "How much gas have you got?" he demanded.

"Plenty," the other answered.

"Enough to take us to the south end of the Lake and back?"

"Two or three times."

"Any objections to going there?"

"None at all."

"All right," said McKenna. "Let's start."

So they turned once more and headed south.

The boat skipped and bounded over the surface of the water like a flying fish. The steady fan of the cool night breeze swept over them soothingly. The moon was pushing over the horizon, painting a silvery path across the wide sweep of water.

The owner of the sea sled claimed to know the south shore of the Lake well. They described as definitely as possible where they wanted to go. He said he could take them there.

And he did.

They made the last miles with the engine muffled to a purr, and after some search along the shore, touched the beach just west of the small beach cottage Ben and Nevis had noted when they left their car. Ben and McKenna left the owner with his craft, and departed with his flashlight.

Side by side they walked along the

beach, their feet crunching softly in the sand. They elected to go along the beach until they were opposite the site of the old house, and then to cut back toward it.

The beach curved at that point. As they rounded the curve, Ben suddenly laid a hand on McKenna's arm. Both stopped. A small boat pier extended out into the water just ahead. The flooding moonlight disclosed several launches tied alongside it.

A small surge of elation ran through Ben. The fleeing launch must have been making for this spot. There were no lights around the boats or pier.

A sand dune came right down to the beach edge. The rising moon was hidden over the crest of the sand dune, and along its base was a strip of dark shadow.

They walked in that shadow until opposite the pier. Here the dune broke off abruptly, leaving a cleft between it and the next dune, and out of that cleft came a small, narrow, indistinct path. It was not hard for Ben to place it as the path which had led from the house of mystery toward the Lake.

They stopped, looked at the pier, now about twenty yards away. So far there had been no lights or signs of life about it.

"Might as well have a look at it," Ben husked.

"Yeah," McKenna grunted.

They went toward it, and had almost reached it when there was a movement in the launch nearest them. The dark figure of a man stepped out of the cabin into view.

CHAPTER XXVII

The House of Mystery

CHALLENGINGLY the man's voice came towards them. "Who's that?"

"Don't talk so loud," Ben retorted. His sole thought now was to get closer before the other recognized they were strangers.

The other peered hard at them, and

suddenly uttered an oath. "Who the hell are you?" he demanded.

"Bad luck for you!" Ben retorted, and flashed his revolver. McKenna did the same, snarling: "Put 'em up!"

For one brief instant it looked as though the other might show fight. Then his hands went slowly over his head.

"Now," said Ben, "who are you? What are these boats doing here?"

The other made no answer. "Speak up!" McKenna warned. "We won't fool with you!"

"I don't know nothing."

"The hell you don't! Who owns these boats?"

"I ain't answering any questions," the other insisted.

"Hands behind you," McKenna ordered gruffly. He took out a pair of handcuffs and cuffed the fellow, and they pushed the man ahead to the first launch. Ben flashed his flashlight in the windows. It was empty. The other two were also. The last one Ben recognized as the launch they had followed. He climbed down in the cabin. On a leather-covered seat lay a 30-30 rifle, beside it a box of shells. The weapon undoubtedly that had put out their searchlight.

Ben made sure the rifle was loaded, dropped the shells in his pocket, and climbed back on the pier with it.

The other launches yielded stout line and some rags. They took their prisoner ashore. Some yards off in the scrubby growth at the side of the path, they left him securely bound and gagged. McKenna carried his handcuffs away.

And then they went cautiously along the path. It wound among the sand dunes for a quarter of a mile or so, and rounded a shoulder of one, and entered the dune-circled hollow that contained the old house.

It loomed there against the base of a big sand dune, dark, deserted. An eerie, ghoulish quality hung about it. The moonlight struck against the gaping upstairs windows, and they winked

and glittered in a ghostlike manner. The path led straight to the front porch.

As they stood there looking a match flared in the front doorway of the house, and a moment later arced out into the darkness and vanished.

"Someone is there," Ben husked.

They conferred in whispers, and then separated. Ben went to the left, along the base of the sand dune against which the house nestled. It brought him up to the back end of the house.

He listened intently. Heard nothing. If he had not seen the light with his own eyes, he would have sworn that there was not a living soul beside himself and McKenna about the place. He crept forward to the front porch. McKenna was coming through the moonlight.

What they had counted on happened. The man who had been in the doorway stepped out in front of the porch and peered at McKenna. His hand went to his belt and came away. Ben saw the glint of a revolver barrel in the moonlight.

McKenna came on, walking into danger bare-handed.

"That you, Wilson?" the watching figure demanded.

McKenna made an affirmative sound in answer.

Ben left the side of the porch and stepped out over the sand toward the figure whose attention was concentrated on McKenna.

The other suddenly realized that McKenna was not the man he was expecting. His revolver leveled up, covered McKenna. "Here—stop!" he warned.

Ben had less than twenty feet to go. He lunged forward. The other caught the sound of his running steps and wheeled, and fired in startled surprise.

The hurried shot missed. Then Ben was on him, swinging the rifle.

One sickening crunch sounded as the stock struck home. The man reeled back, his gun exploding harmlessly into space.

Ben struck again. The figure

dropped heavily, lay there on the sand.

McKenna joined Ben. "Quick! Let's see what's in the house!"

They ran lightly to the porch, stepped warily inside. Ben had his flashlight in one hand, rifle in the other. The bright beam swept about the desolate front room. There were no changes, even the ruined chair was lying as it had before. A heavy, lifeless silence held everything.

They went into the back of the house. No one was there either.

"No one here," McKenna muttered.

"Doesn't look like it," Ben agreed.

"But where are the men who came in those boats? They went somewhere. This is the only place around here that I know of."

From beneath the kitchen floor on which they were standing a voice called: "You up there, Porter?"

Neither of them answered. The voice spoke no more. They waited one, two, three minutes. It seemed ages. But there was no further sign of the man who had spoken in the cellar.

"I'm going down and get him," Ben whispered.

"I'll go," McKenna insisted.

"Nothing doing. You stay up here."

Ben went to the trap door, lifted it, and went down the steep steps, making no attempt to be quiet. His only chance was to impersonate the man lying unconscious out in front of the house.

The cellar was black, silent. No one had accosted him. He stood a minute at the foot of the steps. Then clutching his revolver tightly, he snapped the flashlight on.

The cellar was absolutely empty.

Astounded, Ben gazed around. There was no mistake. The four stone walls faced him, bare and open.

Bewildered, Ben stood there a few moments longer, looking about and listening; and then he went back up to the kitchen again. McKenna was standing tensely at the top of the steps. Ben husked: "There's no one down there!"

"What?"

"No one down there!"

"We heard him speak!"

"I don't care. Take a look if you want to."

"*Holy Cats!* What do you suppose it was?"

"I don't know . . . mighty queer."

As they stood there, a sudden sensation of the uncanny, of the supernatural enveloped them.

Ben closed the trap door slowly. "It's funny," he muttered uneasily.

"We'll wait," McKenna whispered. "See if we hear it again."

Wait they did. Long minutes dragged past as they stood there in the darkness. McKenna's hand suddenly clamped down on Ben's arm. In the same moment Ben heard. Steps were coming up the cellar stairs. One—two—three—four . . . each plain and distinct. The trap door creaked as something pushed it up.

McKenna's fingers dug hard into Ben's muscles. Ben himself didn't feel any too easy. What was coming out of that cellar?

The trap door swung clear up, bumped back against the side of the kitchen wall. And the steps came on up.

Ben could stand it no longer. He pressed the button of the flashlight. The beam illuminated a man just stepping out on the kitchen floor. Ben recognized him. One of the two men who had struck him down, tied him, and left him and Nevis in the cellar.

The other blinked his eyes, looked away. "Hey," he protested. "Put that out!"

McKenna's left arm shot out into the light. The butt of his revolver collided with the man's head. It settled the matter. They laid him on the floor. Without speaking, Ben went down the cellar again.

It was bare of life and the four walls surrounded him solidly. Where had the fellow been hiding? Where had he come from?

As Ben stood there looking around, trying to solve the problem, he heard

a slight noise behind him. He turned, and the light of his torch showed a section of the wall swinging slowly out. In a flash Ben comprehended.

He switched the flash off, sprang lightly to the side of the door. A moment later he was conscious that another man had stepped out beside him.

A flash of light to see his target. A smashing blow with the pistol and that was settled easily too.

Ben left the stranger lying on the floor and directed the torch beam through the opening. It was the mouth of a low, narrow tunnel, that made a turn a few feet further on, cutting off the view of what lay beyond.

Summoning McKenna in a guarded whisper, Ben led the way back through the tunnel. Beyond the turn was a stout, heavy oaken door, standing ajar.

Ben pushed the door farther open and they went through. More tunnel. Twenty feet farther on it made another turn. Just before they got there a man stepped out and faced toward them. And stopped abruptly at sight of them.

It was McReynolds.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Fate of The Ghost

THE plump little man's eyes widened at sight of them. With a strangled exclamation he darted back out of sight. Ben leaped after him. There was a door beyond the turn, and McReynolds was crying out on the other side of it in warning.

Ben shoved hard on the door. It gave, although McReynolds was evidently trying to hold it. Ben caught a sight of the large cavellike room that lay on the other side.

The walls and ceilings were of wooden timbers, with pillars scattered about to hold the weight of the roof. The floor was of clean, dry dune sand. There were chairs in there, and tables, and some bunks along the walls. A gasoline lantern on one of the tables lighted the place. Men were in there, three or four, in startled attitudes.

Someone knocked the lantern over. The room went dark.

A red stab of flame; the roar of a shot reverberated loudly. Ben heard the smack of the bullet in the heavy door frame at his shoulder. He ducked.

He felt McKenna's left arm reach past him. McKenna shot.

A cry of pain followed. "Thought I'd get him!" McKenna grunted. "Get down!"

Both of them dropped flat on the sand. It was well they did so. A storm of lead pounded into the door timbers and whined down the tunnel. All of it was high, however, well over their heads. The acrid smell of burnt powder bit at their nostrils.

A voice called an order. The firing stopped. Ben and McKenna lay there wondering what the next move would be.

Suddenly McKenna gasped: "Good God—look at that!"

Ben felt a cold chill creep down his spine as, for the second time, he saw a ghostlike manifestation creeping toward him through the air. Just as it had in the Craigwright's garage.

Reaching from floor to ceiling in an undulating, florescent mass of ghoulish substance, it moved steadily forward.

McKenna's shoulder was pressed against Ben's. Ben remembered that the big fellow was convinced that a ghost had killed the butler and Lockhart. Now fright had McKenna, no mistake about it.

It was a heart-chilling sight to watch the specter advancing deliberately toward them. Two men had died horribly already from its attack. Were they going to be the next ones?

McKenna's gun spat at the thing. It swirled, hesitated, and then came on once more.

"I shot right through it!" McKenna gasped. "Didn't even faze it!"

The shot that marked their position did not draw fire from other parts of the room. The men were evidently waiting for the apparition to finish

them off. Ben wished for the rifle he had left up in the kitchen. That at least would be something to fight with. And then he remembered the small punctures in the bodies of the dead men, and the chair he had thrown through the thing, and shuddered. One couldn't very well fight it.

"I'm going!" McKenna gulped. "No ghosts for me!"

As the big fellow started to get up and flee, Ben thought of the flashlight he had been gripping tightly and not using. He pressed the switch. The white beam leaped at the thing.

The next instant Ben fired—once, twice, three times. And a horrible shriek of agony came from a point off to the side of the ghost. The spot that Ben had fired at instead of the luminous presence of the "thing." And immediately after the cry, the "thing" collapsed abruptly and lay in a small shimmering heap on the floor.

In that brief moment of light McKenna had seen also. And he uttered an oath in a sheepish whisper. "Pickett—with a chiffon ghost hanging from the end of a fish pole. I'll be damned! *Some ghost!*"

Pickett it had been, outlined clearly for one moment in the betraying beam of light. Pickett, the spiritualist, his tall, thin, cadaverous form crouched, his lean mask of a face twisted and tense. One hand holding out a tiny bamboo rod from the end of which dangled the man-made "ghost." And in the other hand—a hypodermic. And that one glance explained the deaths. While the victim's attention had been on the ghost, Pickett had crept in from a different angle and had sent them to their deaths with a jab of the hollow steel needle. Horrible. Fiendish.

And yet the dead were now avenged. Pickett had followed them.

Ben crawled forward into the room silently, away from the line of the door.

McKenna's voice cracked loudly. "The place is surrounded! Surrender—or get shot up!"

A moment later there was a shot. But no bullet reached them. A body fell heavily to the sand floor somewhere in the black room.

Then a voice. "We surrender!" It was Morton.

"Throw your guns down! No foolishness!" McKenna warned.

Two thuds on the sand marked compliance with his request.

"That all?" McKenna demanded.

The answer was a flash of fire and the roar of another shot. McKenna's revolver answered instantly.

Ben stood up and ran to one side. Once again bullets were flying and the air was filled with the deafening clamor of gunfire. Two men against McKenna. Ben took aim, waited for one flash, and pressed the trigger.

Thereafter there was one man against McKenna. And when he spoke there was no doubt of his fright. "I give up! Light a light! You'll see I'm the only one left!"

Ben took a chance, used the flash. The other spoke the truth. One man on his feet, and he put his hands up as the light reached him, and turned a white, drawn face to it. A stranger. Ben had never seen him before. A small individual, now shrinking and without fight. On the floor were—bodies.

—And so they came to the end. The gasoline lantern was lighted. McKenna joined Ben. On the floor lay Pickett, dead. And McReynolds—a suicide. And Daniels, wounded badly. And Morton, dead also.

McReynolds had a bullet in his upper leg, received in the last fusillade.

Tossed over in a corner of the room was the missing mummy.

On the table was a small black bag. Ben opened it. Inside were tissue wrapped parcels. The first one he opened was filled with sparkling gleaming diamonds. The others too. A fortune. Millions of dollars worth. Other stones too. Emeralds, pearls, sapphires. . . .

McKenna saw them, looked at the

mummy, and then hobbled to their one live prisoner, caught him by the throat, and grated: "Now you—*talk!*"

The man did finally, babbling incoherently, declaring that he had nothing to do with it.

Pickett was the leader of a smuggling, thieving, blackmailing ring that worked in part under the guise of a respectable spiritualistic society. Such wealthy people as came their way, or even servants, were grist for their mill.

The ring had worked hand in hand with another in Europe. Among other activities they bought jewels from fences, thieves, and legitimate dealers in Europe, and smuggled them into the States, in different ways.

The police in Europe had become suspicious. In Chicago McReynolds had learned that Professor Craigwright was going to bring over a mummy in a few weeks. Plans were made to use that mummy as a smuggling vehicle. The jewels were taken to Cairo. McAlister was murdered. The jewels were hidden inside the dried body, where no inspector would think to look.

Preparations had been made to intercept the mummy in Chicago. It was to come to Professor Craigwright's house. The chauffeur who had been there was put out of the way. Daniels was planted in the house. Pickett made the acquaintance of the cook so as to have an excuse to be around the house sometimes. McReynolds cultivated the professor assiduously on their common interest in things Egyptian.

McReynolds suggested that a select group be invited to see the mummy unpacked. That gave the crooks a chance to get at the mummy between the time that it arrived at the house and the time it was unpacked.

There were almost three million dollars' worth of jewels inside the mummy. The chauffeur, Pickett, and two other men were to get it. They drove up after dark in the alley back of the garage. Pickett tried to lure the cook away for the evening. She

wouldn't go. They had to have her out of the way to work from the back of the house. They took her to the garage, and then went downstairs through the kitchen, and took the mummy.

The butler heard something, came down and caught them. In the darkness Pickett killed him with the poison filled hypodermic.

After they got back with the mummy Pickett discovered that he had lost the green scarab that was carried by all the members for identification. He put the lights out in the house by shorting them, and slipped down in the basement with his ghost outfit to see if the scarab was there. Lockhart was down there by then. When he shot at the ghost, Pickett killed him also. A swift look about failed to find the scarab.

The cook screamed in the garage. Daniels killed her there with a knife. She was wrapped in a blanket and taken out in the car with the mummy, and eventually put in the Lake.

Pickett went back into the garage thinking it was empty and found Ben there. That was when he almost frightened Ben to death with the ghost. After that he gave up trying to find the scarab. They left.

The mummy was taken to the old house which was the real headquarters of the gang. Two men lived in it all the time, professing to be firemen who took fishing parties out in the Lake. The real headquarters was this underground room in the sand dune back of the house. The jewels were to be sold through a downtown jewelry store in which McReynolds was a silent partner. The man knew very little about Eddie Collins. He had some connection with the gang, probably in disposing of the jewels.

McReynolds and Pickett had come under the notice of the detectives and could not leave town until the matter blew over. Pickett did not know that the cook had talked to her sister about him; that was one flaw in the matter, one thing he had overlooked. Ben had

worried Pickett by getting too close to the truth.

When the sordid tale unfolded to the end, Ben asked the man fiercely: "Where is Nevis Craigwright?"

The other hesitated, and then said: "Pickett thought he could frighten you off by getting her."

"Where is she?"

"Over there, through that door."

The man's nod indicated a door on the other side of the room. Ben ran to it, slid the bolt that held it fast, jerked it open. A narrow tunnel led back for a couple of yards, and widened into a small room. Nevis was sitting on the edge of a cot, white-faced, frightened by the uproar and the shots she had heard.

"Nevis!" Ben said huskily.

For a moment she could not realize

that it was he. Then she came to her feet, swayed toward him. "Ben!" she cried. "You!"

His arms answered her. Tears came. "Someone called me up and said you were in trouble, and wanted to see me!" she sobbed.

McKenna herded his prisoner to the door of the passage and looked in and saw them. "Say!" he called gruffly. "Save that till later. We got a lot of work to do here."

"Go 'way," Ben retorted over his shoulder. "I have work to do in here for a few minutes. It's more important."

McKenna frowned and started to make a sarcastic reply. Another look at them checked it. He retreated.

"Maybe it is at that," he agreed under his breath.

IN THE FIRST JANUARY ISSUE

The Candy Kid

A Complete Novelette

By CHARLES FRANCIS COE

The Mystery in the Mire

A Craig Kennedy Story

By ARTHUR B. REEVE

The Damning Message

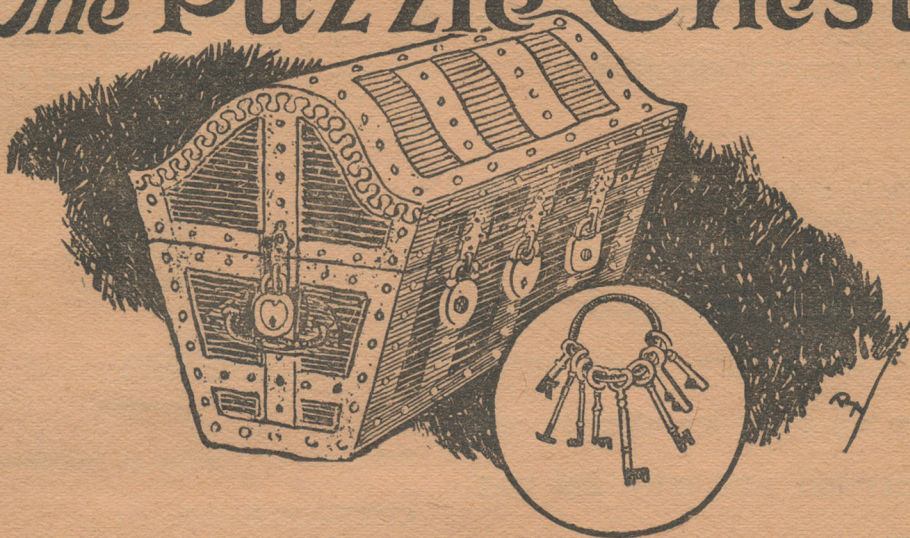
A Detective Tale

By THOMAS MACK

And Many Other Features

The next issue will be on sale December 13th

The Puzzle Chest



Conducted by Helen Asbury

IT'S about time for you to sit up and take notice as to whether you're really becoming proficient at this game or not. Very shortly—perhaps starting with the next issue of CLUES—we're going to have a cryptogram contest, with prizes and everything. You might practice making a few, too, as that will probably have something to do with winning the contest. Facts and details about the method of procedure will be published when the contest starts, so be on the lookout.

We'll start to-day with the light touch. The first two are from *Cryptogrampa*, who has been improving the shining hours spent at the zoo.

TO OCLPSEASSOCIATION
 BWW KTWAM IAAWKQIBQWV
 WITH LOVE BIRDS INVARI
 EQBP TWDM JQZLA QVDIZQI
 RLY CAUSES THE LAUGHING
 JTG KICAMA BPM TICOPQVO
 WENATD BECOME MYSTER
 PGMVI BW JMKWUM PGABMZ
 LAL
 QTIT.

(Evidently, by the way, he was intrigued by the aviary).

WOODPECKERS LIVING IN
 BTTIUJHPJWX QNANSL NS
 THE Petrified FORESTS OF
 YMJ UJYWNKNJI KTWJXYX TK
 ARIZONA WOULD BE SUBJECT
 FWNETSF BTZQI GJ XZGOJHY
 TO SEVERE HEADACHES
 YT XJAJWJ MJFIFHMJX.

There are probably some of you who will feel that the first sentence in this next one should be sung. You will find Gilbert and Sullivan frequently cropping up in these cryptograms. Or rather, Gilbert, anyway.

YOU CAN BE VUEDBRUEDYS
 RAAG? DIUE SBVD DA SYCV AK
 ANO FAAG HYEGUOBEF RBEV-
 DOUS.

His fine Italian hand may be discerned in this one, also:

ALLOWING TO PRESENT THE
 OFFER IT ME SHATALM MUA
 MAN WHOSE ANCESTRY MAY
 ZOL RUETA OLDATMHB ZOB
 BE TRACED BACK TO ONE
 JA MHODAK JODX ME ELA

PROTOPLASMIC PRIMORDIAL ATOMIC GLOBULE
 SHEMESFOTZWD SHWZEHK-
 WOF OMEZWD NFEJIFA.

—————
 This is a trick one. However, its very trickiness will probably be the cause of its speedy undoing.

NEXT CY ZEAC SYV NAICEQTD
 UECT CY ELECT, SENT RENT
 PECT AD PAST CY CUT BVTEC
 ICECTINED, LFC IFRU ZEI UAI
 SECT.

—————
 Now a couple of anagrams. The first one I consider my masterpiece so far. It is a proverb, with the letters scrambled up and rearranged to read:

WE WEEP, BARMAN CONSOLES.

A couple of earlier attempts with the same proverb netted BO, WE RAN SOME NEW PLACES! which isn't so bad, and PLEASE WEAR NO NEW COMBS, which isn't so good; but the final result, as given above, is a darb—isn't it?

I tried another proverb, mixed it up, and came out with: FOR IT MIGHT REVIVE ONE DINOSAUR. See if you can find the original proverbs in these anagrams; the answers will be published in the next issue with the cryptogram answers. And the solu-

tion of this multiplication problem, which is a word of just ten letters, with the key letters arranged in the form 1234567890, when you've found which letters represent which digits.

CLIPS
 DATE
 ITSAAB
 IDCULS
 LIDADS
 CLIPS
 DDILLLDAS

Solutions of puzzles in last issue;

CRYPTOGRAMS:

Committees will meet in Tennessee to discuss problems of importing coffee and woolen goods.

Machiavellian conspirators would attempt unsuccessfully to overthrow the then reigning prince.

This remarkable department deals in hardware, electrical supplies and kindred household articles.

About a donkey's taste why need we fret us? To lips like his a thistle is a lettuce. (Free translation of ancient Latin wisecrack).

Telegram arrives; whole family aflutter. Cipher message announces future marriage bells for distant relative.

Occasional humor has proved decided asset in such otherwise serious occupation as enigma solving.

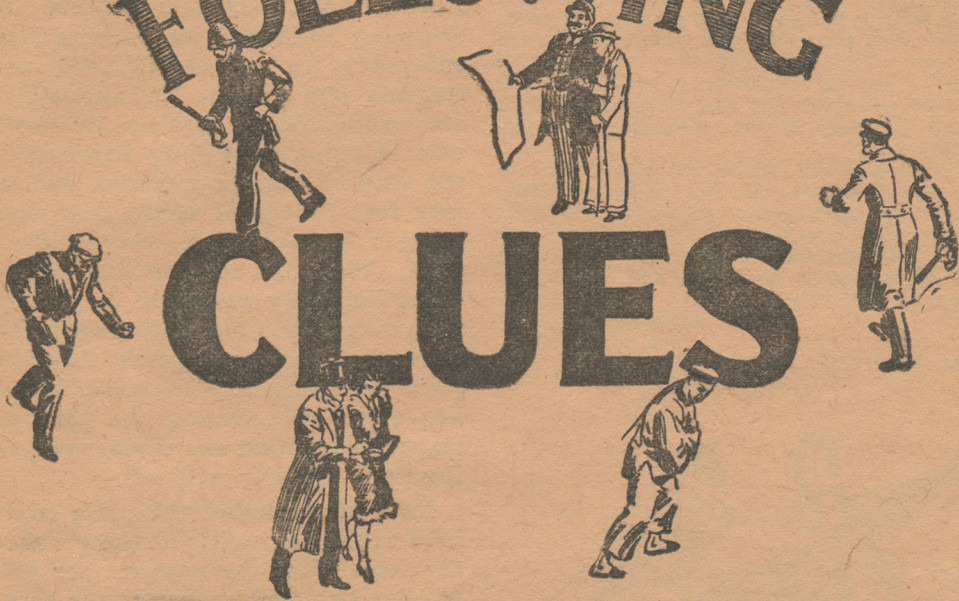
Although pollywogs are tiny creatures when hatched they sometimes grow four feet in a few weeks.

ANAGRAM:

Well begun is half done.



FOLLOWING



The Law of the Letter

Dear Editor:

I am sure all the CLUES fans are more than pleased that CLUES has sixteen more pages of reading matter.

The short stories in the last number were all fine. "Crimson Hands," by Johnston McCulley, was excellent. All of his stories always are. I like the Baffles. They are very interesting to read.

I will be eagerly awaiting the next number with my Parson Payne story in it.

Sincerely,

MRS. GEO. G. FAIRCHILD.

319 North 7th Avenue, Maywood, Ill.

Miss Louise Rice,
c/o CLUES,

Dear Miss Rice:

Have been reading your stories in CLUES, and enjoy them very much. The first story of yours that I have read was about you in character of "Loony Lou," but then your name hadn't been published and I didn't know until I saw an announcement that "Chinatown Nights" was written by you.

I do wish we could have more of your Chinese stories. Could you tell us more of their beliefs? Are their women allowed any freedom; I mean such as we American people enjoy?

There are so many things written about Chinese and one doesn't know what to believe. Of course with your stories I know they are true and it's nice to know that we are reading adventures of a real person.

Sincerely,

MRS. PAULINE NELSON.

912 Iowa St., Sioux City, Ia.

CLUES 2

Dear Editor:

I'm just a lonely engineer out on a construction job, but I want to say that CLUES is one fine magazine. I'm pretty critical when it comes to reading and when I say fine, I mean it. There's nothing like a good magazine and pipe waiting in the shack for a fellow after a hard day's work. Play with a transit and a dumb peon holding the rod for ten hours a day and you'll see what I mean. I don't like the liquor in this part of the country, and the women we're lucky enough to see don't look like the gals we used to drag to the hops at dear old Tech.

So I'm asking you as man to man to help keep me amused for a few months with as good issues of your magazine as the two I've just got my hands on. Give me more stories by Lemuel De Bra and Oscar Schisgall and I'll buy you a drink at Tony's when I get up to New York if ever.

And if I ever catch you printing a story with a civil engineer as a hero, detective or what have you, I'll put a cactus in your editorial chair and make you sit on it.

Yours for more De Bra,

PETE HANLON.

All over the state of New Mexico.

Dear Editor:

Having seen a copy of your magazine at the downstairs stand in the Times Building, I decided to buy one. It featured a story by Arthur B. Reeve on the cover, and being an admirer of this author in former days, I thought I would see what Craig Kennedy was doing these many years after. I must confess that I was a bit prejudiced, for I was

expecting one of Reeve's ultra-scientific stories, which seem to be the kind he has been writing lately. I was pleased, however, to discover that this one wasn't filled with the sort of scientific stuff that is now out of date. I may be an old-timer, but I believe in keeping pace with the age. On the whole, I found the story in your magazine an entertaining one.

I hope you will not let Mr. Reeve get into any sort of pseudo-scientific rut, but will keep him on the open road of rationality and modernism. We pre-Rooseveltites, if I may use the expression, like to have our gods, even our author gods, as bright and shining as when we first beheld them.

Most sincerely,
A READER.

New York City.



The Crystal Globe

IN the next issue there will appear a complete novelette by Charles Francis Coe entitled "The Candy Kid." Here is a powerful, dramatic story of the underworld, written by a man who knows the people and scenes of which he writes, knows how to focus the drama of their lives in a most entertaining way. This he does in "The Candy Kid" with telling effect. A great many of you, according to letters, enjoyed "Boss of the Waterfront," the serial by Mr. Coe which ended not many issues back. We believe you will like this complete story even better.

The array of "shorts" in the next number will include such tales as "The

Mystery in the Mire," by Arthur B. Reeve, "Loot," by Eric Taylor, "The Damning Message," by Thomas Mack, and others by both old CLUES favorites and new authors. It is always our aim to include the work of any writer who is doing something important in the way of detective stories, and you may feel certain of seeing new names on our contents page from time to time. We want to give you the best detective story magazine in America with every issue, and will spare neither time, trouble nor expense to accomplish our purpose. Constantly increasing circulation during the past year makes us feel that our efforts are pleasing you. Quality will tell.

Do you remember the prize contest held at the beginning of the year? In the issue after the next we are going to have *two* such contests. Be sure to watch for these; they are going to test your ingenuity—as well as give you fun. During the coming year we will have a number of such contests. Helen Asbury, the editor of *The Puzzle Chest*, is preparing some especially interesting ones in connection with cryptograms and puzzles.

In the issue after the next we are also going to have an extremely thrilling detective novelette by Frank Parker Stockbridge, called "The Murder in the House on the Roof." This is the best and most exciting one the author has done for us yet. Remember Max Michaelis, the criminal lawyer who appeared in "Missing Evidence?" Max is in this story too—and what a problem his clever brain is presented with to solve! If you want to be thrilled by a fascinating crime story of New York's show world, don't fail to read this tale in the Second January number.





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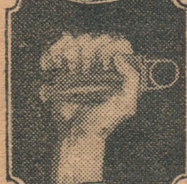
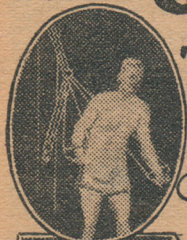
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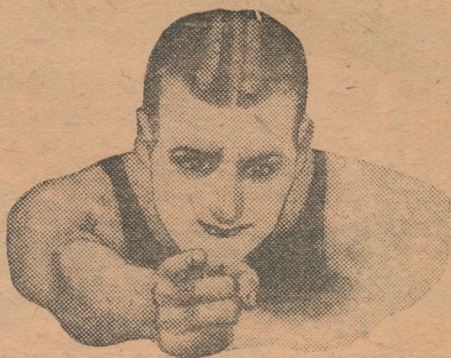
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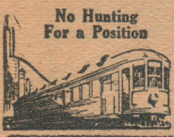
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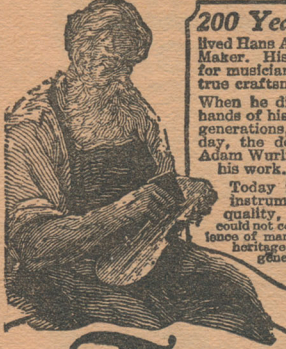
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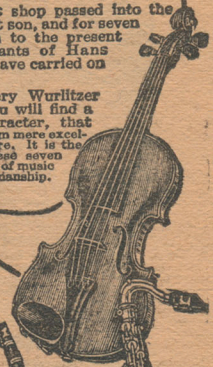
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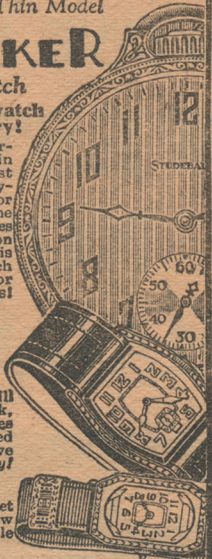
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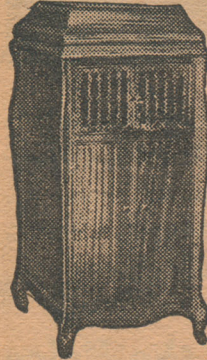
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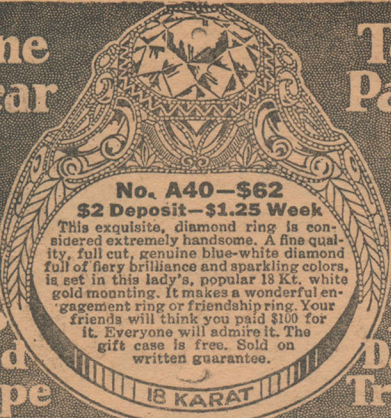
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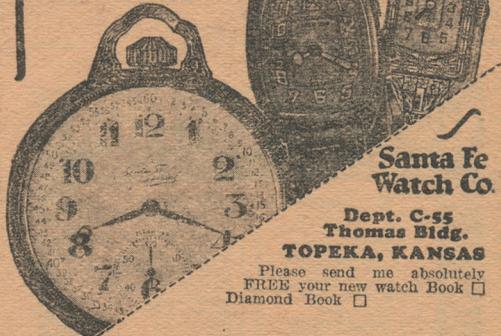
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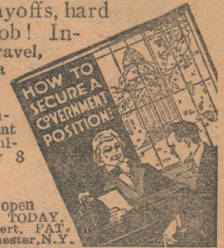
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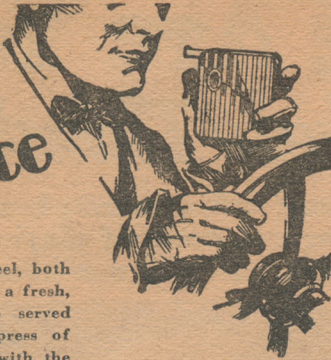


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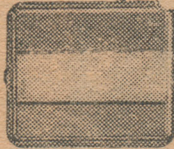
Ejector is the modern, smart way to carry and serve cigarettes.

Write enclosing price if your dealer cannot supply you.

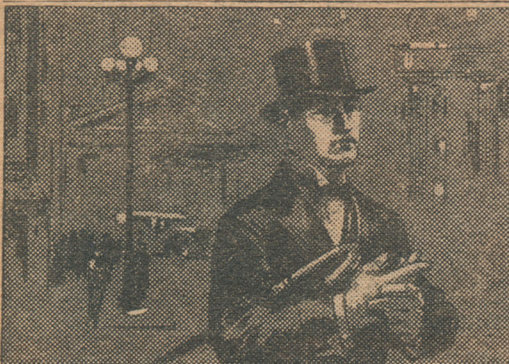
THE LYONS MFG. COMPANY
Dept. D-2, Mt. Carmel, Conn.

EJECTOR
The Perfect One Hand
CIGARETTE CASE

**A Real
Xmas Gift**



Colorful Enamel and fine engine turned designs at your dealer's—up to \$6.00. Model C, \$1.50, Model C50, \$3.00.



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Secret Service Operator No. 38 is on the Job!

FOLLOW him through all the excitement of his chase of the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Tell-tale finger prints on the lamp stand in the murdered girl's room! The detective's cigarette case is handled by the unsuspecting gangster, and a great mystery is solved. Better than fiction. It's true, every word of it. No obligation.

FREE The Confidential Reports
No. 38 Made to His Chief

And the best part of it all is this. It may open your eyes to the great future for YOU as a highly paid Finger Print Expert. More men are needed right now. This school has taken men just like you and trained them for high official positions. This is the kind of work you would like. Days full of excitement. Big salaries. Rewards.

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to
Digestion**

WHEN your digestion is a bit off, chew Beeman's Pepsin Gum after meals.

When your digestion is perfect, chew Beeman's and keep it that way. When your mouth just yearns for a smooth-and-soothing chewing gum, try Beeman's.

For 30 years it has been the favorite of millions of people who chew it for flavor—and chew it to avoid indigestion.

Try a package today.



**BEEMAN'S
PEPSIN
GUM**
aids digestion

How Strong Are You?

Can You Do These Things?

Lift 200 lbs. or more overhead with one arm; bend and break a horseshoe; tear two decks of playing cards; bend spikes; chin yourself with one hand.

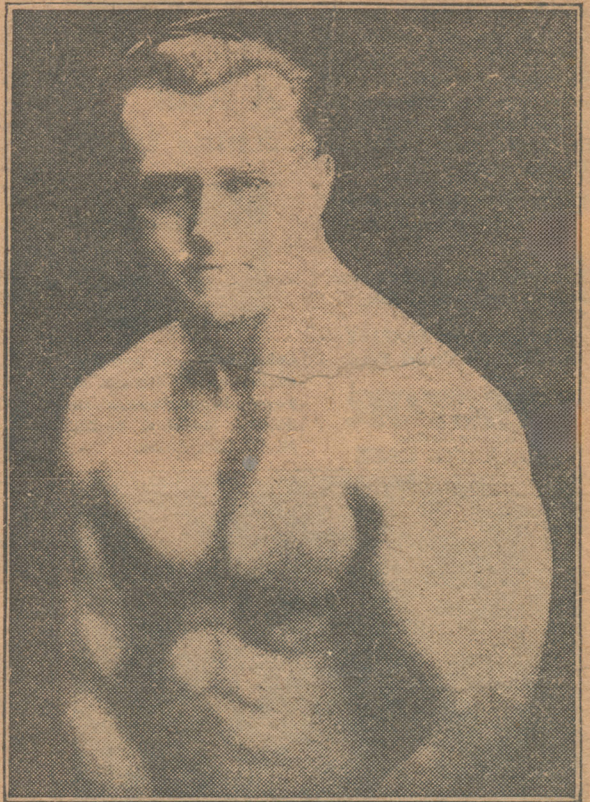
CAN you do any of them? I can and many of my pupils can. It is remarkable the things a man really can do if he will make up his mind to be strong. It is natural for the human body to be strong. It is unnatural to be weak. I have taken men who were ridiculed because of their frail make-up and developed them into the strongest men of their locality.

I WANT YOU FOR 90 DAYS

These are the days that call for speed. It once took four weeks to cross the ocean—now it takes less than one. In olden days it took years to develop a strong, healthy body. I can completely transform you in 90 days. You make a complete change in your entire physical make-up. In 30 days I guarantee to increase your biceps one full inch. I also guarantee to increase your chest two inches. But I don't quit there. I don't stop till you're a finished athlete—a real strong man. I will broaden your shoulders, deepen your chest, strengthen your neck. I will give you the arms and legs of a Hercules. I will put an armor plate of muscle over your entire body. But with it come the strong, powerful lungs which enrich the blood, putting new life into your entire being. You will be bubbling over with strength, pep and vitality.

A Doctor Who Takes His Own Medicine.

Many say that any form of exercise is good, but this is not true. I have seen men working in the factories and mills who literally killed themselves with exercise. They ruined their hearts or other vital organs, ruptured themselves, or killed off what little vitality they possessed. I was a frail weakling myself in search of health and strength. I spent years in study and research, analyzing my own defects to find what I needed. After many tests and experiments, I discovered a secret of progressive exercising. I increased my own arms over six and a half inches, my neck three inches and other parts of my body in proportion. I decided to become a public benefactor and impart this knowledge to others. Physicians and the highest authorities on physical culture have tested my system and pronounced it to be the surest means of acquiring perfect manhood. Do you crave a strong, well-proportioned body and the abundance of health that goes with it? Are you true to yourself? If so, spend a pleasant half-hour in learning how to attain it. The knowledge is yours for the asking.



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CIGARETTES

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