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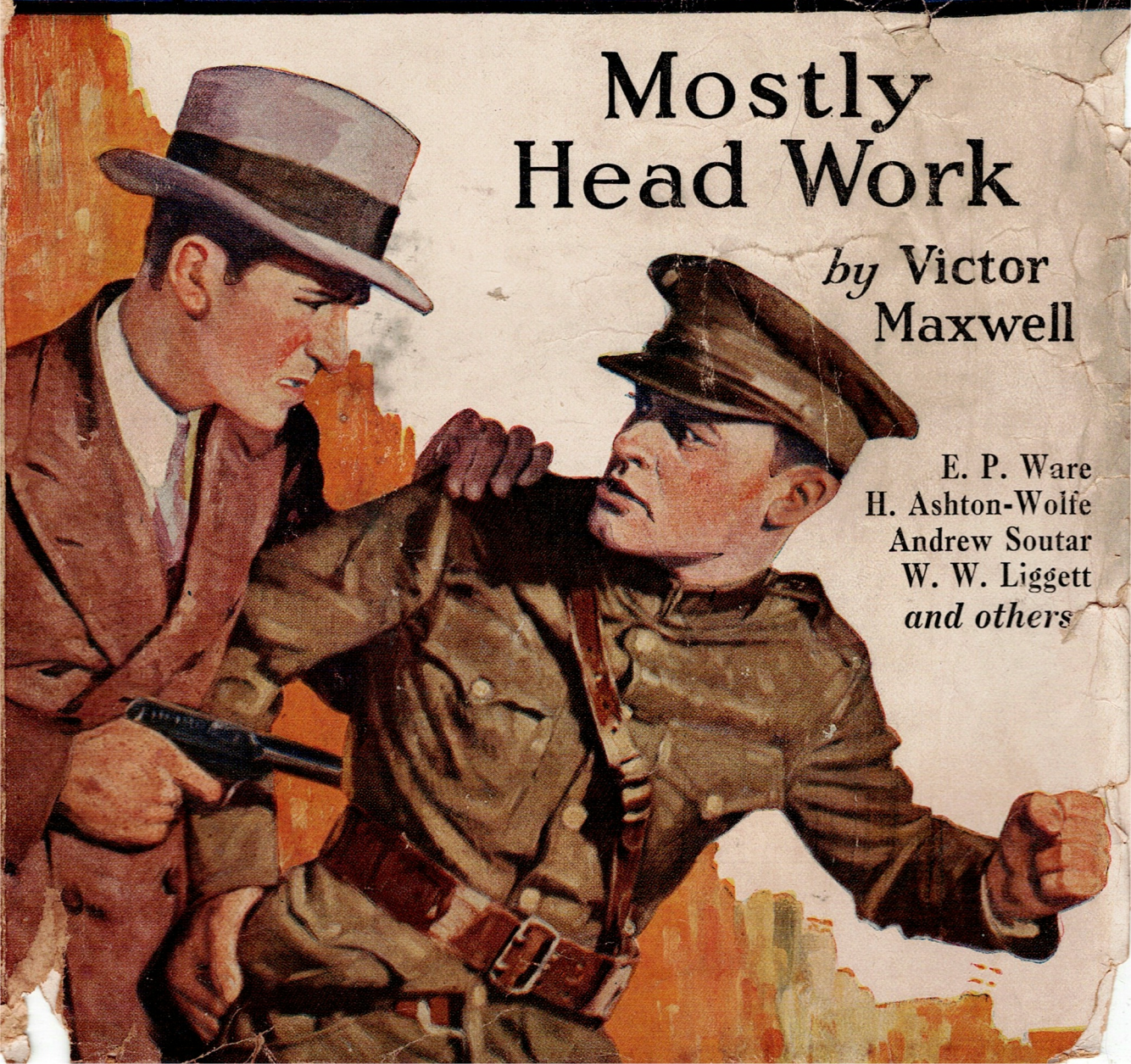

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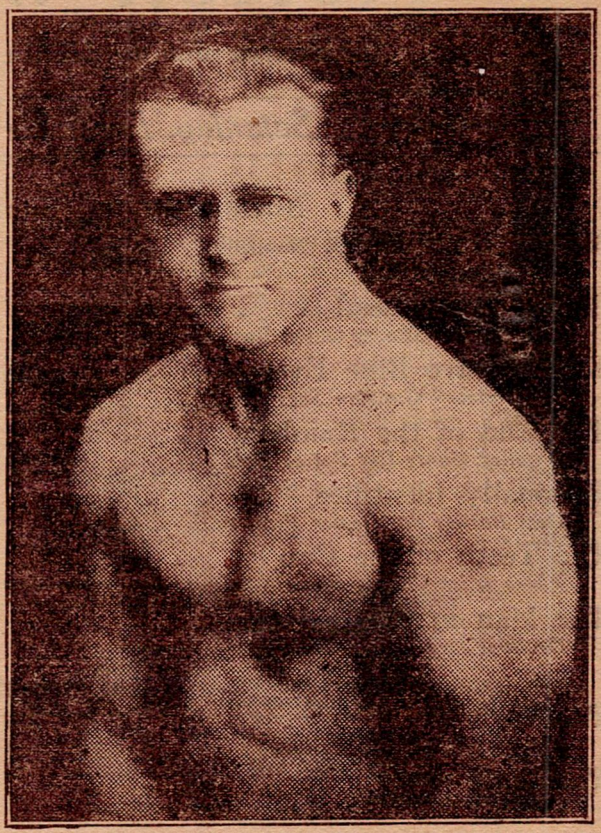

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"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME XXXVII — *Saturday, December 15, 1928* — NUMBER 6

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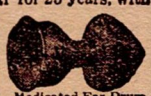

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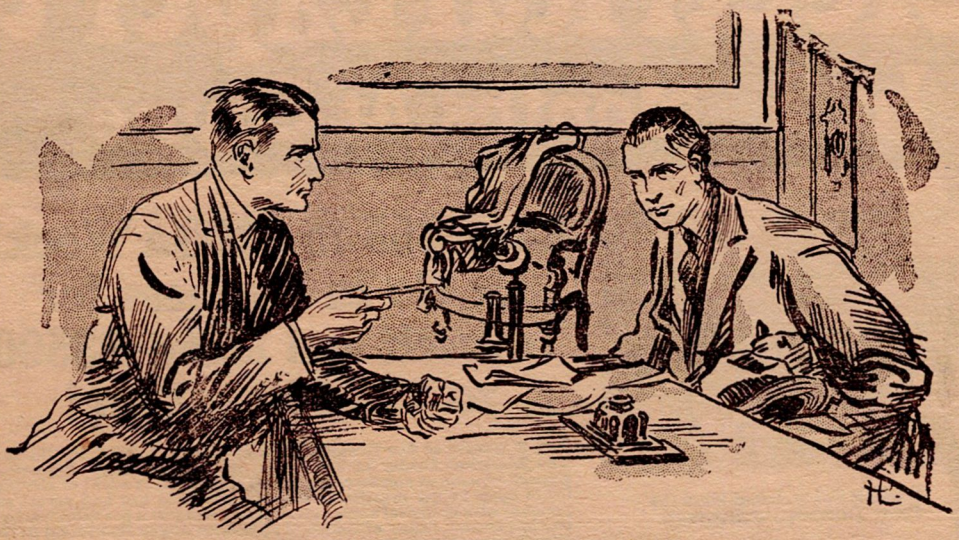
VOLUME XXXVII SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1928 NUMBER 6



"Do you want the guys who got your stuff to go to jail?" Riordan demanded

Mostly Head Work

That Popular Detective Team, Brady and Riordan, Tackle a $60,000 Jewel Theft—and See It Through to an Unhappy Finish

By Victor Maxwell

CHAPTER I

The Missing Case

DETECTIVE SERGEANT RIORDAN had just completed going through the day reports and had outlined his assignments for the men of the first night relief when the doorman entered the inner office and said there was a gentleman outside who wanted to report a robbery.

"What's the matter with the man on the desk?" growled Riordan. "Has he broken the point of his pencil?"

"Please, sir," said the doorman, "this feller, he asked for the officer in charge."

"All right, chase him in," answered Riordan with a sigh.

There entered presently a nattily attired man of middle age, smooth-shaved and somewhat robust, with a

ruddy countenance and pale blue eyes, who advanced to Riordan's desk.

"Glad to find you, sergeant," said the newcomer. "I'm glad to find one of authority in. This is a serious matter I wish to report."

"Sit down and shoot," answered Riordan, not appearing to be much impressed.

His caller pulled up a chair, and, after settling in it, reached into his pocket and pulled forth some letters and cards. Displaying these, he said:

"I'm Peter Gallant, sergeant. Here's some letters and my business card. As you'll see, I'm salesman for the Consolidated Jewelers' Supply Corporation.

"My sample case has just been stolen, and it's a matter of fifty thousand dollars or so. I figured you'd rather hear about it first hand than have me tell somebody outside first."

Riordan shot an eye at the clock over Captain Brady's desk. It was ten minutes after five.

"Where'd all this happen?" he asked.

"At the South Side station, sergeant. I was going out on the four-twenty train for the north, and had checked the sample case. Here's the check. I was walking up and down the platform, waiting for the train to come in, when I saw the sample case rolled out, along with some other baggage.

"Just as I was getting on the train I looked up toward the head end, and a light truck that had been backed up against the outer edge of the platform was driving off, and I thought I recognized my sample case on it.

"I pushed back through the crowd of passengers as quickly as I could and run up to the head end of the train and asked the baggage crew if they'd seen the truckmen take my sample case.

"They gave me the laugh at first, but we looked through the baggage car, and the sample case wasn't there. It wasn't on the depot platform. And it isn't in the baggage room at the depot.

"The baggage master thought it would show up somewhere, and advised me to go down and grab my train, saying he'd report it to the tracing department. When I got back down to the platform the train was pulling out.

"I reported the matter over the telephone to the special agent's office of the terminal company, and then I came up here. I figured the quicker the warning I gave you, the more you might be able to do. Of course I'm covered by insurance—that is, the company is covered—but still, losing a sample case full of stuff like that will put an awful crimp into my trip and plans."

"What kind of a truck did you say it was?" asked Riordan.

"A small light truck, sergeant. No particular color. Flivver engine, probably. It had flivver wheels, anyway. You know, one of these light trucks that the itinerant expressmen use."

"Your sample case marked in any way that would make it look like good bait for a sneak?" questioned the sergeant. "Firm advertised on it, for instance?"

"No, sir, it was just a plain, black sample case, with three locks on it. Had my initials, P. G., painted on it in white. Nothing about it to show what it contained."

"You tell the baggage agent when you checked it what was in it?"

"No, sergeant, I didn't."

"How come you checked it? I thought you salesmen usually sent stuff like that by express?"

Gallant shrugged his shoulders. "Most of the time I check it," he answered. "Especially on short jumps. I was only going up into the Sound country. Besides there was nothing about it to identify it, and it had three locks on it."

"You say there was fifty thousand dollars' worth of stuff in it, and you didn't think it was worth expressing? What did you value it at when you signed the baggage receipt?"

"I wrote down fifty dollars."

Sergeant Riordan reached for his telephone and called the Union Terminal Company.

Getting the special agent's department he asked if they had a report on the robbery, and was told that two men were even then at the South Side station checking on it. He left word for them to call him when they came in, and hung up.

"You notified your firm yet?" he asked Gallant, turning back to his caller.

"No, sergeant, not yet. I thought I'd better come here first. I'll notify them as soon as I get to my hotel."

"Which one's that?"

"I was at the Belmont-Grand. Of course I checked out before train time. I'll go back there, though."

Riordan's eyebrows arched. "If you were staying at the Belmont-Grand," he asked, "what's the idea of checking your sample case out at the South Side station? The Belmont-Grand is only six blocks from the Union Depot."

Gallant laughed. "I know that, sergeant. But I had my stuff on display out at the Merchants & Dealers Warehouse. They've got showrooms out there, you know, and it's a sort of general meeting place for all buyers.

"I always get to a place like that if I can, rather than using hotel sample rooms. In the first place you can make a better display, and in the second place it gives you a certain class. It's only the big firms go to these permanent exhibit and sales buildings."

"Oh, I see," answered Riordan with a nod. "Well, how'd you get the stuff from the warehouse to the South Side station?"

"The warehouse people have a trucking service; they hauled it over for me."

"Give you a check, did they? Claim check, I mean."

"Yes, sergeant, and I exchanged that for this check in the baggage room."

"As a matter of fact, did you see your sample case after it left the warehouse? I mean, did you identify it at the station baggage room, or just give them the check?"

"I saw it, sergeant. I went back with the baggage agent as he changed checks."

"What did you do that for?"

"I wanted to be sure it was locked. I told him so, and he let me step around the counter and go with him. He stood there while I tried the three locks."

"All right. Give me a list of the stuff that was in the sample case, please."

Riordan drew forward a pad and poised a pencil over it. Gallant reached among his papers and drew out a typewritten list.

"Here's the list, sergeant," he said. "I always carry two or three typewritten lists, to check against when I pack and unpack. You can have this one, it will save you from copying it down."

"Thanks. Got another list? I ought to have two of them."

Gallant reached among his papers again, and produced a carbon copy of the list.

"Good," said Riordan. "I'll give this to the terminal company special agents; they'll likely need one."

"You won't have to do that, sergeant," commented Gallant. "I left one for them with the baggage master at the station."

Riordan put the two copies of the list on his desk. "Well," he said, "so much the better. I can use two lists myself, and that will save me having a copy made. By the way, when you saw this truck, did you notice how many men were on it?"

"Two, I should say."

"Can you describe them?"

"No, not very well. One seemed to be thin and stoop-shouldered. He was standing in the back of the truck, leaning over the trunk. He was thin, that I am certain. The way he was

standing may have made him look stoop-shouldered."

"Open truck, was it?"

"Yes, sergeant. There was a canopy over the driver's seat, but the body was open."

"You didn't happen to note the license, did you?"

"I couldn't. It hung too low. There were people on the platform at the time, and they hid the lower part of the truck."

"How did you happen to look up toward the head of the train?"

"Habit, sergeant. I always look up to see if my baggage is being put aboard."

"Did you yell out, shout 'Stop thief,' or anything, when you saw this truck driving off?"

"No. You see, I wasn't sure it was my sample case. But I shoved back through the crowd right away and ran up to look."

"The truck going fast, was it?"

"It was pulling right away from the platform."

"You chase it any?"

"No, sergeant. You see, I couldn't believe they were really stealing my sample case right out bald and bold like that. So I stopped to look at the baggage first, and to ask the men in the car if they had my case aboard. Then it was too late to chase the truck."

"When you ran up the platform, and the truck was pulling away, how close would you say you got to it?"

"Oh, I don't know. Fifty or a hundred feet, maybe. But the truck was moving right along."

"You couldn't see your initials on the sample case in the truck?"

"No; the back was turned toward me."

"Well, when you were within fifty or a hundred feet of the truck, did you notice what color license tag it had, if any?"

"No, I didn't, sergeant. You see, I still thought my sample case must be on the platform or in the baggage car, and I didn't look at the truck as intently as I should have, perhaps. You know I can think of a lot of things now that I might have done that I didn't do at the time."

"Yeah," answered Riordan. "We all do that, when it's too late. Well I tell you what you do, Mr. Gallant. You go to the Belmont-Grand and stick around there, or else leave word where we can get you.

"I will throw some of the boys right out on this, and maybe in an hour or so I can report something to you. I'm glad you came right in with the report, it's given me a chance to ask questions quick. I'll call you up later on tonight, whether we have anything to report or not."

CHAPTER II

A Nervy Bunch

GALLANT thanked him and left the office, and Riordan sat for some time carefully reading over the items on the typewritten list the salesman had given him. Then he got up and opened the door into the outer room and glanced over the men who were waiting assignment.

"You, Willis and Stacy," he said. "Slip out to the South Side station and see what you can pick up there on a trunk robbery. Make it snappy."

As Willis and Stacy rose and started toward the door leading to the hallway, Riordan's eyes traveled over the room beyond the civil clerk's desk.

In a far corner he saw the huge bulk of Inspector Halloran huddled down in a chair, his head sunk upon his chest and his eyes closed. He looked at the doorman, sitting on a chair beside the desk and reading an afternoon paper, and smiled.

"Bill," he said, "go over and see if you can waken that big lummox up. If you can, send him in to me. If you can't, get a club and knock his chair out from under him."

He went back to his desk and re-

garded the list Gallant had left with him once again. He was still studying it when Halloran waddled in and eased himself into a chair.

"Yuh wanted me, Matt?" he asked.

"Big boy, you're not getting enough exercise," said the sergeant, grinning. "You need to get out more and move around. Here's where you get a chance. But look at this list first."

Halloran reached out a huge paw for the paper, and studied it carefully. Then he looked at Riordan with a question in his eyes.

"Well?" asked the sergeant.

"What is it, Matt? Inventory for bankruptcy court?"

"What gave you that idea?"

"The values on this stuff. Look-it —'one dozen seven-jewel, open face, Crescent case watches, ladies' size, two hundred and forty dollars.' What's the idee? I c'n go down to the Bon Marché department store an' buy 'em over the counter for ten bucks per each. An' the rest of it is all of a piece with that. Look-it here—"

"Never mind, I see you're not as sleepy as you look," cut in Riordan. "All I wanted you to get was an idea of the quantity, never mind the value.

"Now you chase yourself up to the Beehive Garage, which rents anything from a bus to a concrete mixer, and see if you can get a description of two men who rented a flivver truck.

"Maybe they got it to-day, maybe they got it yesterday or the day before. Maybe they brought it back a short time ago, or maybe they didn't bring it back at all. Truck with an open box body and a top over the seat.

"If they didn't bring it back, get the license number, and the minute you get it telephone the Traffic Bureau to go look for it. If they brought it back, get a description of the men that had it, and then go down to the depot and watch the trains south and east for them.

"If they got this stuff, they'll likely have it with them. Tell 'em you're a prohibition agent an' you think they got booze an' you want to see what's in their grips."

"But, Matt, I ain't got no license to do that."

"I'm telling you what to do. If they show up and haven't got anything, you can lie out of it the best you can. If they refuse to show up, bring 'em in."

Halloran shook his head dolefully, hoisted his huge form from the chair, and moved slowly from the room. Riordan picked up the list the big sleuth had tossed back on his desk, and studied it some more. He was still going over and over it when the doorman ushered in two neatly dressed men, and he rose to greet them.

"Hello, Reynolds!" he said to the first of the two. "Got my message, did you? Much obliged for coming up."

"Sure glad to come up, sergeant. Shake hands with Mr. Taylor. He's another of the special agents; just come here recently from Los Angeles. Taylor, this is Detective Sergeant Riordan."

Greetings exchanged, Riordan motioned to chairs, and then picked up the list of the contents of the sample case and held it forward.

"You boys seen this?"

Taylor nodded his head. "We got a copy," he said. "This guy left one with the baggage agent. Looks like it was quite a haul, don't it?"

"Yeah. That is, if the values aren't padded much more than fifty per cent. What you boys make of it?"

It was Reynolds who answered. "I been stationed here for six years," he said, "and it's the beatenest thing I ever heard of. For pure, unadulterated gall, I'll say it's good."

"Gimme what you got on it?" asked Riordan.

"Well, sergeant, it was like this. This here trunk, or sample case, is checked to go north on the Number Seven. The baggage room puts it on

a truck and runs it out on the platform about three minutes before she's due.

"The two boys that dragged the truck out left it on the platform and went back to the baggage room for another truck. They say they seen a small truck standin' beside the platform, up at the head end, but they didn't think nothing about it; there's often express wagons and transfer trucks down there.

"When they come out with the second truck the Number Seven was just pulling in, and they run the second truck up alongside o' the baggage car and started heavin' their load off. Then the boys in the car dropped out what stuff they had onto the truck, and the two guys from the baggage room dragged it back and pushed the first truck up to the car.

"They were unloadin' that when this here Gallant party rushed up and begun to belch. And that was when they first noticed this here trunk was missin'. The Gallant party, he insisted on lookin' inside the baggage car for his goods, an' they all piled in and hauled the stuff over. But the sample case wasn't there.

"When they got out of the car, the boys say, Gallant begun to holler about the truck. They looked for that then, but it wasn't there. Nobody round the station, as far as we can find, seen the truck pull out, nor seen anybody get this sample case. But it's a cinch they got it and threw it on the truck and drove off with it. Gall, I calls it."

"You checked back on this sample case?" asked Riordan.

"Taylor, here, he done that," answered Reynolds.

Riordan turned to the second special agent, to hear his report.

"As soon as I heard about the truck," said Taylor, "I went out in the yard, leaving Reynolds, here, to gather up what there might be about the depot. I asked the yardman had he seen such a truck, and he says come to think about it, he did see a flivver truck beatin' it out pretty fast.

"He remembers it because this truck just beat an interurban car over the crossin' right above the yard entrance. He didn't notice what was on the truck, all he knows is he thinks it was a black truck; which isn't much for identification.

"I asked him if he noticed the truck when it came in, and he doesn't remember; there's all kinds of wagons pulling in and out all the time.

"Well, I called up the warehouse—Merchants & Dealers—where this fellow had his stuff shipped in from, and asked them what kind of a truck did they use, and they said one of their regular yellow vans.

"The checker over there recalls the Gallant sample-case, all right, and give me the name of the driver on the truck that hauled it over. Joe Edge, it was. I haven't been able to get him yet, but I will.

"I went back to the baggage room and looked over the shipment records, and it looks like this sample-case was received all right off the warehouse truck, along with some other pieces, and was checked out all right.

"It looks like it was stolen off the terminal company property, all right, so I suppose we're liable. But since this cheap guy only valued it at fifty bucks, that's all he can recover, as far as we're concerned."

"What do you think about a salesman checking stuff like that?" asked Riordan.

"Huh," answered Reynolds, "they do it all the time. Save insurance money, they do. Of course, they bill their firms for excess charges, and put it in their pockets. The railroad is pretty safe these days, and on anything outside of jewels these boys'll take a chance.

"Why, if this guy had declared even a quarter of that value the excess charges would have been somethin' scandalous. In fact, we wouldn't have

handled it except as special parcel goods.

"But these travelin' men, they check valuable stuff all the time just like common baggage, and nine times out of ten nothin' happens. This must have been a tip-off job. Not from any of the boys at the South Side, either; they couldn't have known what was in it.

"Some wise guy on the outside framed this job, you take it from me. Probably a mob's been followin' this fellow Gallant, waitin' for a chance like this. All it took was nerve."

"Your yardman, will he let any kind of a truck drive in?"

"Sure, if it looks all right. There's all kinds of wagons come to the station, with stuff or to get it. Besides that, half the trucks for the freight sheds come in through the yards, it's shorter and saves 'em pulling round and over the tracks. You got anything on this, sergeant?"

"Not any more than you have. I got two or three boys out smelling round, but it's hard to get something to start on. That was why I wanted you to come up, I thought maybe you might have found something."

"We ain't got a thing more than we told you," said Reynolds. "And we don't aim to bust ourselves on it, either. This feller didn't declare that sample case to be worth more than fifty dollars, so he can go fish. Let him and the claim department fight it out.

"Of course, we want to get hold of any mob that figures they can come in and lift baggage like that; but we ain't goin' to chase this parcel none. I've sent out a wire along the line to look out for a piece of baggage of that description, but it ain't likely they'll ship it.

"I reckon they dragged it to some hide-out here in town and opened it up. Looks to me like you might find the stuff first showing up in some of the hock-shops."

"We'll look them over, all right," said Riordan. "Well, I'm much obliged to you for coming in. You notified the insurance people?"

Reynolds shook his head. "No, why should I? They'd just report it to Partridge, and then we'd have a lot of his nuisances runnin' round. We got trouble enough without that. Let this Gallant party to the notifying."

Riordan nodded his head and laughed. There was more talk, and the special agents took their departure.

Riordan reached for his phone and asked to be connected with Mr. Gallant at the Belmont-Grand. After some moments he got him.

CHAPTER III

"Scared Tight"

"THIS is Detective Sergeant Riordan speaking, Mr. Gallant," he said. "You reported this job to your insurance people yet?"

"No, sergeant," came the voice over the wire. "I was hoping that perhaps you'd turn up something."

"Wired your firm yet?"

"Not yet, sergeant. I thought maybe you might have some word. I'll night-letter the house before the evening is over, but I want to wait as long as there's a chance of hearing something. Anything developed yet?"

"Not very much, Mr. Gallant. I've had a talk with the special agents of the terminal company, and I've got some men out nosing round. Suppose you drop down here about ten, or half past, if it's convenient. I might have some news for you then. If I haven't, you can wire your firm."

"All right, sergeant, I'll do that. Expect me about half past ten."

Riordan hung up and turned to his routine work. Nothing further developed on the brazen theft of the sample-case until about nine, when Inspector Halloran returned and entered the inner office.

"Yuh heard anything from Traffic yet, Matt?" he asked.

"About what?"

"About what yuh sent me out on, o' course. I went to the Beehive Garage, like you said. They rented a flivver truck this afternoon about three to two guys, an' it ain't back yet. So like you said I notified Traffic. The license number was J-89089."

"You get a description of who rented it?"

"Sure, there was two fellers. One was a young buck, red-faced and husky, about six feet tall, smooth-shaved, light hair, blue eyes, would weigh about a hundred and eighty or ninety.

"He was the guy that did the drivin'. Give the name of Jim Knowls, which don't mean nothin'. The other guy he said was his father, and looked like a lunger. Man about fifty, stoop-shouldered, gray whiskers—"

"Well, what'd you come in here for?" demanded Riordan. "I told you to watch the trains south and east, didn't I?"

"Sure yuh did, Matt. That's what I come in for. I can watch the Union Depot, all right, but I can't be at the South Side, too. I come in to see if yuh could lemme have Enright to go out there?"

"Sure you can have Enright. All you got to do is have the civil clerk call him. What stall did these guys put up at the Beehive?"

"The young buck said they was goin' to move, for his father's health. He wanted the truck to move their stuff; said they didn't have much. He put up a deposit of sixty dollars on the wagon, mostly in small bills.

"Feller at the Beehive says they looked all right to him. They give him an address down in Old Town, and said they was movin' out to Wamsley Gardens. He didn't expect the truck would be back much before midnight."

"Well, go get Enright and watch the trains. And don't be afraid to run a whizzer. If these guys try to get out of town to-night, I want 'em."

"I'll look for 'em, Matt."

"Yeah, you will. And look out for the old guy. If he had whiskers when he was hirin' the truck, he'll be shaved and spruced up when he tries to beat it. Look for a bird that looks like a Kentucky colonel, with a young football star with him. Now mind, old horse, don't you let 'em get by you. Brace 'em, no matter how respectable they look."

Halloran nodded his head and left to start the quest for Enright. Sergeant Riordan turned back to his routine duties for a time, and then, as was his custom, went out to get something to eat about half past nine.

When he got back he found Inspectors Willis and Stacy waiting for him, and the civil clerk told him Traffic had been trying several times to get him.

Going to his desk he picked up the telephone and was almost immediately connected with the motorcycle squad sergeant, who told him a flivver truck, bearing the license number Halloran had reported, had been found, apparently abandoned, on South Hamilton Avenue, not far from the swamps bordering the river.

"What did you find in it?" snapped Riordan.

"That's a good one," came the laughing voice over the line. "What made you think we found anything in it? I'll be down and talk to you."

There was a click on the line, and Riordan hung up. A moment later the door was dashed open and Sergeant MacCallum, in charge of Traffic during the first night relief, bustled in.

"Matt, you're good," he said, nodding to Enright and Stacy. "Here I was figuring on surprisin' you by showin' you somethin', an' you call my hand by askin' me what we found in your old truck. There's what we found in it."

He opened his hand and displayed a small watch and a tie-pin set with what appeared to be an amethyst.

"Mac, you got an honest crew," said

Riordan. "The fact that they brought that in proves it. Where's the truck?"

"Right where the boys found it, with Kilrane sittin' in the shadows near-by, watching it. Thought you might want to go take a look at it."

"Paved street?"

"They call it paved. It was once. The concrete is pretty well broken up."

"No use looking at the truck then," said Riordan. "If it was macadam or dirt the tracks might tell us something. Better have somebody go out and relieve Kilrane and send the truck to the Beehive Garage, it's theirs, anyway. Now, you got any men you can spare, Mac—sidecar men?"

"It's a quiet night, Matt, and unless a fire or something breaks I got plenty of boys just riding round prospecting. Want me to call 'em in?"

Riordan shook his head. "No," he answered. "But I would like for you to have two or three pairs go down along the river near where they found that truck, say four or five blocks each way, and snoop around.

"I'm looking for a sample-case with white initials on it, and three locks, which, of course, will be busted. I don't know what the initials may be. They may be 'P. G.' and they may not. But I'd like to have somebody look, and your men can get there the quickest."

MacCallum nodded. "What's in the sample-case, Matt? The dismembered body of a beautiful girl, or something like that? You got my curiosity all roused up."

"No, no murder. If you ask me, I think the sample case is empty. In fact, I'm not sure you'll find it—tonight or ever. But if you do find it, I bet you you'll find some more jewelry; like that stuff you brought me here."

"I'll send right out, Matt, and round up a coupla pairs of lads. What's the idea? Somebody plantin' jewelry around like they do eggs at an Easter festival?"

"Something like that, Mac. Much obliged for the action. No, don't leave that stuff here; your men found it, let them turn it in to the property room with a report."

MacCallum, slightly puzzled, left the office, and Riordan turned to his two young aids.

"What'd you boys find?" he asked.

Willis, who looked like a college sophomore more than he did like a member of a city police force, grinned.

"What was the idea, sarge?" he asked.

"What you mean?"

"Sending us to the South Side station. Whatever there might have been there was cold when we got to it. You said there was a robbery, didn't you?"

"What'd you find?" repeated Riordan.

"Found that a coupla railroad dicks had been there an' told everybody to shut up and not talk," spoke up Stacy. "Aside from that we dug up that somebody lost a trunk, and that all the station crew could alibi that they hadn't let it slip; that it was checked regular, that it was put on the truck regular and rolled out to the train, and that beyond that they don't know nothin'.

"Believe me, sarge, them railroad dicks sure have got that gang scared tight."

"Nobody asked you anything about it? No butt-in-boys?" demanded Riordan. "No intelligent citizen hanging round wanting to know what it was all about?"

"You mean was there anybody there to pipe us off?" asked Willis.

"Yuh got the idea exactly, boy," answered Riordan. "I sent you up there to fuss around, so if anybody was watching they'd try and buzz you. Didn't anybody seem to take an interest in yuh?"

"Not a soul," said Willis. "Not even the station hands we talked to."

"All right, you found out a lot. Go outside and rest yourselves. You done

fine, as I knew you would. Sit around and play a game of pitch or something; I'm liable to need you before long."

CHAPTER IV

For Two Hundred Dollars

THEY had not been out of the room many minutes before the doorman thrust in his head and announced Mr. Gallant. Riordan signaled for his caller to be admitted. The salesman entered eagerly, and held out a cigar for the detective sergeant.

"Have you heard anything at all?" he asked.

Riordan took the cigar, slowly reached into his pocket for his knife and as slowly opened it, to cut the end from the brown roll.

"Sit down," he said. "I got somethin' to say to yuh."

Gallant dropped into a chair and nervously watched Riordan as he clipped the end from the cigar, closed his knife and returned it to his pocket, and then deliberately struck a match, which he held some six or eight inches away from the cigar, and let it slowly burn itself out.

Then he thrust the cigar in his mouth, and striking another match, held that in his hand idly, while he regarded Gallant with an estimating stare. The second match burned out, and Riordan, striking a third, finally lighted the Havana.

"You a practical man," he asked, "or have you got ideas about good government an' all that sort of rot?"

"I—I don't quite know what you mean," answered Gallant.

Riordan regarded his caller fixedly.

"What I mean is this," he said. "Which would you rather do: get that stuff of yours back, or see the guys that got it go to jail? I mean are you a practical man, who wants his stuff, or are you one of these here—these here highfalutin' guys that thinks every thief ought to go to the pen for life?"

Gallant shifted uneasily in his chair.

"You'll have to make yourself plainer still, sergeant," he said.

Riordan glanced about the room as if he wanted to be sure they were alone. He looked at the door, apparently to see if it was tightly closed. Then he leaned slightly forward.

"Supposin' now," he said, "I could assure you that this here sample-case of yours would be returned to you to-morrow, what would you be willin' to pay?"

Gallant laughed suddenly. "Stuff and nonsense," he exclaimed.

Riodan nodded his head sagely. "Stuff and nonsense nothin', Mr. Gallant. Suppose I was to tell you that at nine o'clock to-morrow mornin' this sample-case of yours would be delivered at the basement of the Belmont-Grand; would you be willin', after you'd opened the sample-case and seen the stuff was all there, to give a certain party say—two hundred dollars?"

Mr. Gallant laughed, and not pleasantly. "Are you trying to intimate that I've got to offer a reward, sergeant?"

"Intimate nothin'. I'm talking to yuh as one practical man to another. Is it worth two hundred bucks to you to get that sample-case back to-morrow mornin'? Or ain't you a practical man at all?"

Gallant waved a hand. "Oh, I guess as far as that goes I'm what you'd call practical," he said. "But this stuff of mine has been stolen and taken away. You can't deliver it to-morrow morning. These birds who took it moved too fast."

"So?" inquired Riordan, a rising inflection in his voice. "Wait a minute."

He pushed one of the buttons on his desk, and when the doorman entered, he said:

"Bill, you go out and mosey round an' see if yuh can find Mr. Willis. Young Mr. Willis, I mean. He might be down to the chophouse. Tell him I'd like to have a word with him when it's handy."

The doorman, his face blank almost to the point of dumbness, saluted and withdrew. Riordan hitched in his chair, blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling, and leered at Gallant.

"Yuh know, Mr. Gallant," he said, "the police business is queer. Sometimes yuh can lay your hands on a guy quicker than others. Sometimes yuh can recognize who done a job by the way it is done.

"An' in cases like that, sometimes the guy what done the job would rather pony up an' take a reasonable profit for his time than go to the expense of hirin' a mouthpiece an' fightin' a case through the courts. Understan' what I mean?"

Gallant answered that he was afraid he didn't.

"Well," went on Riordan, "I'll explain. There's some crooks that works alone, and there's others that work in mobs. A mob has got outside men, tip-off men, what don't do no dirty work. Now supposin' a tip-off guy had been watchin' you. Not here, but in other cities where yuh been.

"An' suppose he's wise to the fact that you ship your stuff like regular baggage, so yuh can charge insurance to your expense account an' put that much extry in your jeans. Just supposin', yuh understan'. I ain't sayin' nothin'; I'm just explainin' this to you.

"Well, supposin' the main mob is in this city. Supposin' they stand pretty good with the governor, or the mayor or some big politician. There's all kinds of friendships, or whatever yuh want to call it, in this world.

"An' supposin' the tip-off man tells the mob here that yuh got a trunkful of fifty thousand dollars' worth of stuff, an' that you're careless with it.

"Well, supposin' the mob pulls a fast one an' gets your trunk. It ain't worth any fifty grand to them, because they can't unload this stuff at retail prices. They got to peddle it where they can and at a great reduction.

"An', keepin' on with the supposin', yuh understand, suppose they get your trunk, or sample-case, or whatever it is; an' in gettin' it they tip their hand. Yuh come here an' raise a holler, an' after lookin' the plant over I come to the conclusion this here mob has done the job.

"An' I call up the Senator, or the influential party, whoever he may be an' I tell him I got the mob's number on this job. An' I says to him: 'What will it be, Senator? Shall I pinch the boys, or will they blow back?'

"An' supposin' the Senator says to me: 'Well, the boys may have bungled this a bit, but they put in their time, an' so they ought to be paid. Get me five hundred berries an' I'll send the stuff back.' Things like that's done, yuh know.

"Now, as a practical man, what are yuh goin' to do? I tell yuh this can be fixed for two hundred. There may be some hagglin' over it, but it can be fixed for two hundred.

"Would you rather have your stuff back for that, and not have any fuss with the firm about shippin' this stuff as baggage, when it ought to 'a' been insured expressage; and not have any fight with the insurance people; or would yuh rather have me go pull these guys, and then yuh go into court an' fight the Senator's influence and drag, and get bawled out all along the line. You're a practical man; don't two hundred bucks strike you as a cheap way out of a bad stink?"

"I've heard about propositions like that," said Gallant. "And you may be right; it may be the practical way. But I don't feel that you're right; I don't think you know who stole this stuff yet.

"Besides, I'd have to wire the firm for the two hundred—I haven't got that much with me; and I'd have to explain to them in the long run. So it looks to me like I wouldn't be any better off; besides which I'd be taking a chance of being gypped. No, I don't make any deal."

"Yuh don't think I can deliver it, eh?" demanded Riordan.

"Frankly, sergeant, I don't."

There was a knock at the door, and in response to the sergeant's call, Inspector Willis entered the room.

"Mr. Willis," said Riordan, "shake hands with Mr. Gallant. Mr. Gallant is the party that lost that sample-case. I've been tellin' him a proposition, but he don't seem to take kindly to it. What I said was that if he'd promise to fork over two hundred bucks, you'd see that he got his sample-case at his hotel to-morrow mornin'. He don't think it can be done."

"I've seen harder jobs than that done," said Willis, looking at Gallant.

"I don't doubt it," said the salesman. "But I'm not in a position to try it out this time. In fact, I don't believe the sergeant here has the right dope at all."

Willis shrugged his shoulders.

"Tell yuh what you do, Mr. Willis," said Riordan. "Seein' is believin'. You meet Mr. Gallant at the Belmont-Grand to-morrow at nine in the morning. You have with yuh some of his stuff, the Senator 'll let yuh have some. If Mr. Gallant recognizes his stuff and is convinced then that it's all right, you and him make a deal. Is that all right?"

"I'd play hell walkin' around with that stuff on me," objected Willis.

Riordan waved a hand. "Don't talk like that," he said. "Nobody will bother yuh. Yuh'll just be havin' a conference with Mr. Gallant. It 'll be private. After he sees you've got the stuff, maybe he'll be more willin' to talk to yuh. How's it look to you, Mr. Gallant?"

"I think it's all poppycock. I don't believe you can get that stuff. I don't believe you've got any line on it. I think you're tryin' to put up some kind of a stall. I don't know what it is, but I think you're stalling. Now get me right. I've been robbed. I've reported it to you.

"It's your business to arrest the thieves, if you know who they are, and not try to dicker for them. But I'm positive the men got clear away and that you don't know any more about 'em than I do."

"Yuh reported this thing to your firm yet?" asked Riordan.

"No, you told me to wait till I saw you."

"Well, you've seen me," snapped Riordan. "Best thing you can do, I guess, is to get out of here and wire your firm. But remember, I give yuh a chance to act like a practical man. I'll be here till midnight, an' if yuh change your mind, gimme a ring."

Gallant hesitated a moment, then rose slowly from his chair and moved to the door.

"I'll walk to the hotel and think it over," he said. "But right now I'm not inclined to do anything. I don't like the looks of it."

"You think it over," said Riordan, as his caller left.

CHAPTER V

"Buzzing" the Night Clerk

THE minute the door closed behind him, he slapped Willis on the back.

"You did just right, boy," he said. "Never mind what it was all about; I'll tell you later. Now you jump out the back way and down through the drill hall, and trail that guy. If he goes to a telephone before he reaches the Belmont-Grand, get into the booth right after he's through and trace the call. Then phone me. Jump now."

Willis hurried out the rear door of the private office, and Riordan smiled a satisfied smile to himself. A moment later he reached for his phone and told the headquarters operator to connect him with the Belmont-Grand. Soon he was talking to one of the operators on the hotel exchange.

"This you, Gertie?" he asked. "Oh, it isn't Gertie, eh. Well, listen, sister, this is Detective Sergeant Riordan,

down at police headquarters—yes, that's it. Now get this right—you've got a guest there by the name of Gallant. He'll be in pretty soon. If he telephones, I want you to listen to his call and get me the number he's calling, and the party he talks to, if possible. Get that?

"No, I don't care what he talks about. I just want to know whom he's calling. You do that, girlie, and I'll see that you get tickets to the policemen's ball. Yes, Riordan is the name. When you get the information, call headquarters and ask for me. If you don't get any information, don't call me—yes, that's the idea. Thanks, good-by."

That done, Riordan turned to the reports that had come in while he was out to supper, and when they were attended to, began to post his books on various cases that had come under his direction. He was still engaged at that when his telephone rang.

"This is Willis," came the voice over the wire. "The party didn't telephone. He walked around through the theater district awhile and then went to the Belmont-Grand and got his key and went upstairs. I'm at the hotel now."

"All right," snapped Riordan. "Come on in."

He had barely hung up and turned to his records again when the door was opened and Sergeant MacCallum reappeared, his eyes snapping and his face flushed.

"Matt," he burst out, "how do you get this way?"

"What's the matter now?" growled Riordan, but the smile in his eyes belied the tone of his voice.

"How'd you know the boys would find a sample-case, that's what I mean?" answered MacCallum.

"Find some watches, too, did they?"

"One watch, Matt. And a brooch and a lot of tissue paper. The sample-case was lying on the shore of the river, at the foot of Corbett Avenue.

"There were auto tracks near by, showin' it had been hauled there recent, for the grass was still pressed down. The case was busted open and upside down, with the lid thrown back. Under the case was the watch and the brooch and the tissue. The boys brought it all in in a side-car. Cannon and Emmett found it."

"All right, you done fine. Put it in the property room, with the other junk you found in the truck. You're a good cop, Mac, and you got good boys. Maybe you'll get a nice set o' witness fees out of the criminal court for this night's work."

"Well, listen, Matt, don't you want to see this stuff? How do you know it's what you're looking for?"

"No, I don't want to see it. Not tonight. I got something else to worry about. Much obliged."

"But tell me—"

The jingling of the telephone cut off MacCallum's question. Riordan held up a hand for silence and reached for the receiver.

"Detective Sergeant Riordan speaking," he said.

"This is the operator at the Belmont-Grand," came a girlish voice over the wire. "That party you was asking me about called the Hotel Savoy just now. Asked for Major Perkins. I listened in. He says: 'How are you feeling, major?' 'Very comfortable, thank you,' says the other party.

"'That's good,' says the party here. 'I was afraid you might not be getting on so well.' 'Oh, I'm all right,' says the party at the Savoy. 'Thank you for calling.' That was all they said, sergeant."

"Girlie, you're a wonder!" exclaimed Riordan. "Tell me who you are, and I'll see that you get something good."

"Operator Number Seven, sergeant."

"All right, I'll not forget. Good-by."

He hung up, slammed the roll-top of his desk shut, and swung across the room to his locker for his cap and coat.

Into a rear pocket he thrust a pair of handcuffs, and from a shelf he took his automatic and put it in his shoulder holster.

"You sit in here," he said to MacCallum. "You can have your calls transferred down here. I got to go. If anything breaks, call Captain Brady."

And with that he was through the door and into the outer room.

"Stacy," he shouted to Willis's partner, "stick your rod under your coat and come along."

As he went through the gate he hesitated an instant to say to the civil clerk:

"When Willis comes in tell him to go down to the Union Depot and find Halloran and stick with him. MacCallum's going to sit in for me, give him a hand if he needs any help."

Stacy joined him at the elevator, and the two of them were dropped to the main floor, where they swung through the lobby and out to the garage.

They piled into Riordan's roadster, and a moment later were purring along over the pavement at a good, steady clip; dodging in and out of the evening traffic and taking a course to the southern portion of the city.

"One of the things I like about you and Willis," said Riordan, after they had covered several blocks in silence, "is that you never ask questions. You use your heads, and if you don't know what it's about, you wait till you're told.

"Here awhile back I used Willis for a stall with a guy that I was tryin' to get to fall for a shake-down. Willis didn't know what it was about, but he answered sort of non-committal when I threw a question at him. When he got the drift he began to stall. That showed he was using his head. You'd 'a' done the same."

Stacy laughed softly. "Did the guy shake down?" he asked.

"No, but he told me what I wanted to know. If he'd fallen for the shake-down I'd sure been up against it. Now listen: we're goin' to the Savoy Hotel. Quiet place and very respectable it is. I don't think they know what to do if a cop drops in on 'em.

"I'm in uniform and so I'm not going in. I'll stop across the street and down the block a little way. You're to go in and buzz the night clerk.

"You're supposed to be a friend of Major Perkins, who's stopping at the house. Probably there's somebody with the major. That's what I want to find out. The major, you're supposed to believe, is ill. You don't want to see him; you just were passing and stopped to inquire how he was getting along.

"But get this—don't act like you were too anxious. I don't want the clerk to get excited and call the major. Don't let the clerk get the idea that you're worried about the major. Act like you was a sort of a good-natured, high-toned friend of the major, maybe like you had half a bun on. See? Just an inquisitive caller.

"Yammer round, though, and soak up all the dope you can. Don't tip your mitt that you're a dick. If the clerk don't get talkative, beat it. Use your head, and get what you can. If there's anybody round that you think might be the major, why get all mixed up and tell 'em you got the wrong party. Get the idea?"

"Sure, I get it. You want me to buzz the clerk without tippin' my hand."

"Exactly—just that."

CHAPTER VI

After Their Man

INSPECTOR STACY, when the time came, did his work well. He was always a careful and natty dresser, and during his brief visit at the Savoy he acted as friends of guests of that apartment hotel should. He was only there a brief time, and soon was back beside Riordan's machine at the lower end of the block.

"That clerk's a right nice fellow, sergeant," he said. "I think he'd give me his shirt if I wanted it. Well, it seems the major is much worse; so much so that his son took him out just a little while before I dropped in.

"The clerk says the major was out automobile riding and his throat got worse, so his son is going to take him up to Hot Springs for treatment. They went to the train in a taxi just a little while ago, he says."

Riordan jerked his watch out and looked at it.

"You turn right around and go back," he said. "This time you want to wonder how long the major 'll be away. You ask the clerk if they took all their baggage with 'em, or if they left their heavy stuff, like they were coming back. Make it snappy, maybe we haven't got much time."

Stacy moved up the block toward the hotel, and Riordan, starting his car, drove to the upper corner, circled around and came back, parking almost in front of the Savoy.

Leaning out, he beckoned to the uniformed carriage man standing outside the portals of the hostelry. The man stepped forward eagerly, then, as he saw Riordan's uniform, his manner grew quickly less servile.

"You know Major Perkins and his son?" snapped Riordan.

The wonderfully costumed man nodded his head.

"You call 'em a taxi just a little while ago?"

Again the gaudily costumed attendant nodded.

"Where'd they say to drive to?"

"I didn't hear the address," answered the carriage man.

Riordan started forward. "Yuh want me to climb out of here and pick yuh to pieces," he demanded. "Where'd they tell the taxi bandit to drive 'em?"

The flunky considered briefly, and then as Riordan snapped the door of his roadster open, answered suddenly:

"They wanted to go to the Belvidere Hotel; at least, that's what they told me to tell the chauffeur."

Riordan sank back in his seat. "Much obliged," he said, and slipping his gears in, sent his car slowly down the block. At the corner he pulled into the curb, and was presently joined by Stacy, who heeded the sergeant's motioning and climbed in as the roadster moved off.

"The clerk says he doesn't know whether they're coming back or not," he said. "He said they didn't have any heavy baggage, only the grips anybody would take on a short trip.

"They took those with them when they left. As they didn't leave any forwarding address for their mail, the clerk is inclined to think they'll be back, or that he'll hear from 'em."

"He will," said Riordan grimly, driving steadily, though at no great speed. "What else did you get?"

"Not much, sarge. The clerk is a nice guy, but he doesn't know very much. The major seems to have made a hit with him, but I got the idea he doesn't think much of the major's son.

"He talked like the major was a nice, pally old chap; but I guess the son high-hatted him, or something. Nice dump, that Savoy. First time I was ever in it."

Riordan nodded his head, and drove in silence for some time. At last he said:

"Well, if they're going to Hot Springs they sure picked a rotten time of night to start. The best train they can get is the Overland, and that would put 'em into Hot Springs about half past three to-morrow morning. And at that time o' night everybody up there's either asleep or drunk. I know, I've been there."

He jerked the car around a corner suddenly, drove a little faster, and pulled up in front of the Belvidere. There he tapped the siren button on the dashboard, and a brief, banshee wail came from under the hood. Two

or three taxi drivers, lounging in front of the hotel looked up, and one of them stepped forward.

"Where's the starter?" asked Riordan.

"Get him in a minute, sergeant," said the taxi man, darting within the hotel entrance. A moment later the taxicab agent stationed at the Belvidere came out and leaned over the door of Riordan's machine.

"Something the matter, sergeant?" he asked.

"No, just curious. You know anything about a taxi pulling up here some time in the last half hour with two guys in it to pick up some baggage?"

The starter thrust his cap back and scratched his head.

"Yes," he answered. "About twenty minutes ago. Black and White cab, it was. Feller in a soldier uniform, looked like a shavetail, got out and went into the hotel. Come back in a minute with a bellhop packing a big Gladstone bag. There was an old codger in the taxi with his head all done up in a muffler."

"Yuh hear where they wanted to go from here?"

"I sure did, sergeant. Union Station. I come out to see what the driver was waitin' right here in front of the door for, instead of pulling up out of the way. And while he was explaining to me, this shavetail guy come out with the bellhop taggin' him and lugging the Gladstone."

"All right, much obliged," said Riordan, and letting his engine slip into gear, he sent his roadster at a good pace along the thoroughfare. At the Union Station he ran it into the areaway back of the baggage entrance, parking it as far back as possible so that it would be out of the way of any trucks that might come in.

"You go scout around for Halloran," he said to Stacy. "He'll be in the waiting room or out on the causeway near the train gates. Stick with him. Maybe Willis 'll be there, too.

"Tell Halloran to look out for a guy in soldier clothes, with an old man with him all bundled up in a muffler. I'll be round when the ruckus comes off, but tell Halloran to wade right in, whether he sees me or not."

Stacy climbed out and disappeared. Riordan walked over to the baggage room entrance and, going in, walked about. Some of the clerks knew him and nodded, others looked inquiringly at his uniform. The night superintendent, seeing him, left his office and came to his side.

"Somebody goin' away that you're interested in, sergeant?" he asked.

"No, Gibbs. I'm just waitin' for a friend. This blue and brass I got on is so conspicuous I thought I'd wait in here instead of going out where the crowd was. If I was to go out there, now, there'd be six women in six minutes asking me when the next train left and did it stop at Bingville and what time was it, and would I mind the baby while they got a drink.

"I been a harness bull on the depot beat, an' I got plenty of it then. I can loaf in here and look out through the doorways, and spot the guy I want when he comes along. How's everything, Gibbs?"

"Can't complain, sergeant. Got a good gang now, and they know the ropes. Don't have much trouble. And the holiday jam is over and the summer rush hasn't started yet. By the way, got anything on that trunk robbery over at the South Side yet? I heard one of the special agents talking about it."

"I should worry about a trunk job," laughed Riordan. "Of course I sent a coupla the boys over to buzz around. But that's all. Let the special agents worry; it's on railroad property, ain't it?"

The superintendent nodded. "Yep, that's right. Well, I'm glad it didn't happen here. You got no idea the amount of hell the higher-ups can raise over a thing like that, sergeant."

Riordan laughed, and Gibbs moved back to his office. The sergeant strolled back and forth near the doors leading to the train platforms, carefully keeping out of the way of passing truckers and baggage handlers.

From his position he had an almost unobstructed view of all the train gates and of the causeway leading to them.

Passengers were passing through at intervals, but there was no great rush. The early theater crowd had already departed, while those commuters who had stayed down town to supper after the shows had not yet begun their final flight to the late trains to the suburbs.

Most of the travelers then passing through the gates were Pullman fares for the various sleeping cars attached to through trains due to pull out around midnight. A few people, mostly couples, were walking up and down the causeway.

Here and there a man walked slowly or stood smoking; while there were a few of the ever-present idlers that are always to be noted about a railroad station of any size.

Suddenly Riordan noted that the interest of those in the causeway seemed to be focused on something going on in the waiting room. Two or three men turned and ran through the swinging doors, and many of those who had been walking up and down hurried to the windows and stood looking curiously through the heavy panes into the brightly lighted room at the head of the train shed.

The detective sergeant moved briskly from one of the baggage room doors, hurried across the causeway, pushed through a small crowd that had congregated in front of one of the doors, and entered the waiting room, where a tightly packed mass of people was milling around at the end of one of the long settees.

"Here, what's going on here?" shouted Riordan. "Stand back, you folks. Gangway! What's all this about?"

He bored his way to the center of the group, to behold the burly form of Halloran towering over a frail-looking man, and to see Willis and Stacy having quite a struggle to hold an athletic-looking young man in smart military uniform.

"Here, cut it out," said Riordan. "What's the fuss?"

The young man in olive drab tried to wrench himself from the grip of the two inspectors. Failing, he turned to Riordan. "If these thugs are policemen," he said, "tell them to let go of me."

Riordan looked at the speaker inquiringly.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

The young man again tried to jerk free before he answered.

"These men—it's a damned outrage," he said. "They came up and said they were policemen and wanted to look through my baggage. Said I had booze in my grip. Suppose I have? They've got no right to search without a warrant."

Riordan had been looking over the olive drab uniform and taking in all its details.

"Yuh got licker in your grip, have yuh?" he asked.

"Of course I haven't."

"What have yuh got in it, then?"

"None of your damn business," said the young man, devoting all his energy to an effort to break free from the two who gripped his arms.

"You'll get hurt, first thing you know," said Riordan. "Better be nice. Which grips are yours?"

Station porters were crowding in and pushing the ring of curious spectators back.

"These three grips right here are mine," answered the young man. "Mine and my father's."

Riordan motioned to two of the porters. "Pick that stuff up and take it to the stationmaster's office," he said. "Come on, we'll all go, and get out of this crowd."

The older man, whom Halloran had been guarding, suddenly developed surprising activity and made a rush away from the big inspector. He was getting well clear of the burly man's reach when he collided with Riordan's suddenly extended foot, and he would have sprawled to the floor had not Halloran's hamlike hand just then closed on his collar.

And so, surrounded by station porters, and with the depot beat patrolman bringing up the rear, they moved to the stationmaster's office.

The stationmaster had gone home for the day, but a porter switched on the lights.

CHAPTER VII

In Room 486

"EVERYBODY out now but us," said Riordan, motioning to the uniformed patrolman, who had joined the party to do guard duty at the door. And when the room was cleared of all but his aids and the two prisoners, he turned to the older man.

"You, with all that shawl round your throat," he said. "What's the big idea?"

The elderly man wiggled in Halloran's grasp.

"I am a sick man, sir," he answered. "I have done nothing. This is an outrage."

"Uh-huh, I guess so," answered Riordan. "Where were you going when all this happened?"

"With my son here to—"

"Hot Springs," cut in the younger man. "My father is ill and I was—"

"Shut up," said Riordan peremptorily. "Willis, can't you gag him? If he opens up again, dig your knuckles in his neck and see if you can't dislocate his vocal chords, or something." Then, turning back to the older man, he continued:

"Where were you going?"

"Hot Springs. What is the meaning of this?"

"There is a lot of Hot Springs. Which one were you aimin' to take the train for?"

The older man did not answer.

"Which train?" snapped Riordan.

"The midnight train," answered the prisoner.

"Rotten guess," commented the detective sergeant. "There isn't any, in the first place, and the train that you might call that doesn't go to Hot Springs at all, no matter which Hot Springs you mean. What's your name?"

The old man shook his head and pressed his lips firmly together.

"Take him to headquarters, Halloran," said Riordan. "Better pick out a nice, comfortable taxi for him. Keep him in my office till I get in. Don't bother him any, just keep him there."

The uniformed man at the door let the two of them out, and Riordan turned to the younger prisoner.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"See here," replied the prisoner heatedly, "I want to know what's the idea of all this? You have no right—"

"What's your name?"

There was a knock at the door, and, looking through the glass, Riordan saw an Army officer outside. He motioned the patrolman to admit him. The officer—he was a captain of infantry—glanced about the group and then spoke to Riordan.

"Can I be of any assistance, sergeant?" he said. "They told me outside that a brother officer was having some difficulty."

Riordan grinned. "Take a look at him, captain."

The prisoner had turned his face away, but Willis and Stacy held him up straight for inspection. The Army man looked eagerly at him at first, and then looked appraisingly. He turned to Riordan finally with a slightly embarrassed expression.

"Excuse me, sergeant," he said. "I guess I was misinformed."

"It's all right, captain. Don't blame

you a bit. I guess down in the crowd there they thought he was the real thing. Looks like it, to one who doesn't know."

The Army man nodded his head. "Personating an officer," he began, "is a pretty serious—"

"You said it, captain. But this bird isn't doing that. You can buy old uniforms at any secondhand store. But when you cut the buttons off and put on metal doo-dads like that, which ought to be on some flapper's sport coat, and sew beading and metal mesh on the collar where insignia ought to be, you're not personating an officer unless you talk too much.

"And this bird doesn't talk; he just high-hats 'em, He's wise—a little bit."

The Army officer nodded and smiled. "What did you get him for?" he asked.

"I don't know yet," answered Riordan. "I just dropped in when the boys here had fastened on to him. I understand it's some sort of a booze case. I brought him up here to get the fuss out of the waiting room while I'm waiting for the wagon."

The military man nodded, saluted, and the patrolman opened the door for him to depart.

"Now," said Riordan, turning back to the prisoner, "what's your name?"

"Go to hell and find out."

"Quite a long name," commented Riordan. "Where do you live?"

"The same answer goes."

"No, me bucko, it doesn't," laughed Riordan. "Now listen. In spite of what you heard me and the captain talking about, I can lay a charge of personating a United States military officer against you. Up at the Hotel Savoy, see?

"This is no jump pinch, like you're making believe you think it is. I've been right behind you, all the way from the Savoy to the Belvidere, and then down here. And maybe longer than that. You're all through now, though you don't know it yet. So I tell you what you can do: you can come along nice and quiet, or you can start a fuss and get laid out and come along anyway on a stretcher. Which is it to be?"

The man hesitated a moment, then looked down at the floor. "I'll come nice," he said.

"All right. Gimme your baggage checks."

Willis and Stacy released their grip on the prisoner, and he took a step forward and shook his shoulders.

Then he put his right hand down, as if to reach into his pocket for the requested checks, moved it with a swift sweep toward his hip, and then froze into immobility with his arm still half crooked. Willis's revolver was pressing firmly against his spine, and he knew the feeling of it.

"Also resisting arrest and being illegally armed," said Riordan levelly. He pulled his handcuffs from his pocket and snapped one about the man's left wrist, and then reached around and snapped the other about his right.

"You must think you run up against a bunch of rummies," he said. "This young feller behind you, who beat you to the draw, is one of the best shots on the coast. And I don't admit being any slouch myself, but you were so slow on that play I didn't have to reach.

"You must be from east of Chicago, bo; you're not quick enough to come from the West."

The prisoner hung his head, but made no reply. Riordan motioned for Stacy to frisk him, and the man's pockets yielded a cheap .32 caliber revolver, some money, two bunches of keys and a baggage check. Riordan gave the check to the uniformed man.

"I guess you can go now," he said. "There won't be any more fuss. Take that baggage check down to Gibbs, in the baggage room, and tell him to pull that parcel back, whatever it is, and hold it at the door down there for me. Then you call the wagon and tell 'em to wait at the baggage room entrance. We'll be down in a minute."

"See what else he's got on him," said Riordan. "We got to do something to kill time while we're waiting."

Stacy went over the man's upper clothing. A wallet yielded two tickets for San Francisco and Pullman accommodations, also some fifty dollars in currency.

There was a receipted bill from the Savoy Hotel, made out to Major Perkins, and a receipted room card from the Belvidere made out to "E. Jenkins." Two cigars, a package of cigarettes and some matches made up the rest of the matter.

"Where'd you pick up the old man?" asked Riordan of the prisoner.

"He's my father—"

"Say, listen, bo; don't keep on stalling, or I'll get right mad and slap yuh a coupla times. Where'd you pick up the old man?"

The prisoner shook his head. "I tell you he's my father," he repeated.

Riordan shook his head. "Stick to it if you want to," he said. "As a matter of fact the old man is a watch-dog, wished onto you. Now you think that over, and the rest I've told you, while you're riding up in the wagon.

"I'll talk to you again later. Maybe, you know, you're not the bird I'm after. I may have just picked you up as I went along. If you act nice I might let you down easy. Think that over too."

Then he turned to the two inspectors. "One of you," he said, "go round up a porter to carry these grips down to the baggage room. The other of you take this bird down to wait for the wagon. When it comes, put him and the grips in, and the trunk or whatever that other piece is that Gibbs will turn over to you.

"When you get to headquarters, put the stuff in Captain Brady's office, but don't open it up. Put this bird upstairs and book him to me for investigation. I'll be in pretty soon, and you wait around till I get there. I got to make a call on the way in."

His call was at the Belmont-Grand. He first paused at the news-stand and purchased a two-pound box of chocolates. Upon its wrapper he wrote: "To Telephone Operator No. 7, from Detective Sergeant Riordan."

Then he walked over to the telephone desk and shoved it through the window, nodding and moving on the main desk at once.

"What room's Peter Gallant in?" he asked the clerk.

"Four-eighty-six, sergeant. Want me to call him?"

"No, I'll go up. Tell him there's a gentleman on the way up to see him, if you want to."

He smiled as the clerk turned to his telephone, and a moment later stepped from the elevator on the fourth floor.

Familiar with the hotel, he went directly to the room he sought and knocked on the door. It was opened in a moment by Mr. Gallant, who was in his shirt sleeves. Riordan pushed into the room without waiting an invitation, and closed the door behind him.

"Put on your coat and come down to headquarters, Gallant," he said. "I got something I want you to see."

The salesman bridled. "Really, sergeant, I don't know that I'm curious about things at this time of night."

"You want that stuff that was stolen, don't you? You wired your firm yet?"

"Of course I want it. Yes, I've wired the firm. I told them of the offer you made me—about two hundred dollars. I fancy you'll hear from them, possibly in a way you won't like."

"That 'll be nice, Gallant. Well, put on your coat and come down anyway. I got something that will interest you a whole lot."

"The only thing that interests me is my samples."

"That's what I've got."

Gallant, who had been standing near the foot of the bed, leaned suddenly against the enameled rail over which a

spare blanket was draped. Then he slowly straightened up, and forced a smile.

"Excuse me," he said. "I wasn't expecting that. Relief from my anxiety, coming so suddenly, made me dizzy. You've really recovered it?"

"Uh-huh. That is, I think it's your stuff. I want you to identify it. Put on your coat, I've got my car down at the door."

Gallant looked about the room a moment, then went to the closet and donned his vest, coat and hat. "I'm surely surprised," he said.

"I figured you'd be," said Riordan, with a dry laugh.

He led the way to his roadster, and all through the drive to headquarters said nothing. Nor did Gallant attempt any conversation. They left the car in the police garage, and rode to the second floor in the jail elevator.

CHAPTER VIII

In Story Book Style

"YOU'RE lucky," said Riordan, dryly, as they stepped out of the lift. "Most people who ride up in that car go clear to the roof. That's the way we take prisoners up."

Gallant made no answer as he followed Riordan in to the inner office. Inspector Halloran was sitting in the chair at Captain Brady's desk, and the elderly man picked up in the depot was sitting back against the wall.

He had looked up as the door opened, shown no interest when Riordan entered, but quickly cast his eyes down as he saw Gallant.

"Sit down, Mr. Gallant," said Riordan, going to his own desk and swinging his chair around before he dropped into it. "Make yourself comfortable, and I'll explain all this thing to you." He waved a hand at a pile of baggage grouped in the corner behind the door. "But first I want you to hear something."

Gallant sat down, but did not lean back in his chair. He seemed more ill at ease than excited. Riordan, looking at Halloran's prisoner, spoke up.

"What's your name, you?" he demanded.

The prisoner looked at Gallant pleadingly.

"Sergeant, I don't want to prosecute that man," said the salesman.

Riordan turned at the interruption. "You don't want to prosecute him?" he asked. "What do you mean? Who said anything about you prosecuting him? Do you know this man?"

"Why—er—no. No, not at all."

"Well, then, what's the idea of saying you don't want to prosecute him?"

"Why—er—I thought, seeing as he's in here, after what you said, that he was—that he might be the man who stole my samples. That was natural, wasn't it?"

"I don't know as it was so natural, Mr. Gallant. There's a lot of people in police headquarters to-night. Do you think they're all implicated in your job, just because they happen to be in here?"

"No, not at all, sergeant. It was my mistake. I guess I'm a bit upset, with all the excitement I've had."

"Oh, that's it, eh. Well, why wouldn't you want to prosecute this man, supposing he was mixed up in your case?"

"Why—oh, because—he looks so—so pitiful."

Riordan turned back and looked at the prisoner.

"You happen to have a key in your pocket that would open that Gladstone bag over there?" he asked.

The old man nodded slowly. Reaching down at his side he drew forth a small bunch of keys, and separating one, held it out.

"Try it and see, Halloran," snapped Riordan.

The big sleuth took the key, crossed the room, and dragged the grip forward. In a moment he had it unlocked and open. Its interior revealed,

carefully packed and boxed, an assorted collection of jewelry.

"That your stuff?" asked Riordan, turning to Gallant.

The salesman studied Riordan's face for several seconds. "Yes," he said.

"How do you know? You haven't looked at it."

"I guess it's mine. Those boxes on top look like mine."

"Well, get up and look at it. Check it over. I want it identified."

Gallant went to the open grip and shifted the boxes about, opening some, merely glancing at others. After some minutes, he replaced the packages and turned around.

"Yes, it's my stuff," he said.

"Is it all there?"

"Yes, all of it."

"You're a liar by the clock. There's two watches, a brooch and some stickpins downstairs in the property room. You don't seem very fussy about checking it, or very elated at getting it back."

Gallant went to his chair and sat down again. He mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"It is all so strange, so unexpected, sergeant," he said. "I guess I'm not myself. If you don't mind I'd like to go back to my hotel now. I'll come down in the morning and check it over. It 'll be safe here all night, won't it?"

"Yes, it 'll be safe here all night. But you're not going to your hotel. Not yet."

He turned to Halloran's prisoner. "What's your name?" he demanded.

"Jones."

Riordan snorted. "Is that so? Listen, you haven't been searched yet. Want me to search you, and then ask you how it comes the papers and stuff in your pocket don't say Jones on them?"

The old man shook his head. "Please," he said, "I am a broken reed. Do not make it any harder than it must be. I did not like the plan in the first place; but I gave in. I knew it was wrong, now it is proved so."

"That's as plain as the nose on your face," said Riordan. "The whole thing's wrong. It was wrong from the start. Now what I want to know is this: Where do you come in on it? You don't look like the kind of a man, not at your age, who'd play a hand in a gyp game like this. How do you come to be in the play?"

The elderly man rocked from side to side in his chair. "God help me," he said, "I'm his father." And he pointed a trembling hand at Gallant.

"What's your business?"

"I own a small jewelry shop at Buchanansville."

"Oh—so that's it." Riordan turned and called for the jail.

"Tell Stacy and Willis to bring that guy down," he said.

The room was silent until the two inspectors entered with the man in the olive-drab uniform.

"You thought it over, and got ready to talk yet?" asked Riordan.

"What do I get if I talk?"

"Nothing. You don't have to talk. I've got this whole thing. I had it the minute this man here, this salesman, came in and give me the song and dance about the robbery and his list of samples. He's been reading these stories about diamond thieves and the way they work, and he figured he could put it over with this stuff.

"He figured it all out, and not knowing anything at all, he overplayed his hand. So you don't have to talk, bo. But if you want to loosen up, why I might tell the district attorney what a good State's witness you'd make.

"You want to go back upstairs and think it over some more? If you do, maybe the salesman here will belch and want to be State's witness himself."

The younger prisoner snarled. "Him? He can't belch nothin' on me," he said. "Why, it was him that framed it. He was down to the State's capital last month, an' I'd just got through doin' a stretch in the big house.

"I was in a beanery gettin' a cup o'

cawfee, when he come in an' said he had a proposition to make. He's been keepin' me for the last month, an' I can prove it. I can tell you where he had me, an' who seen him come to talk to me, an' everythin'."

"Well, keep that stuff for the D. A.," said Riordan. "He rung in the old man on you for a watchdog, too, didn't he?"

"He did."

"Yeah. I knew it. An' if you'd got away with it, you were figurin' on beatin' it, and keepin' the stuff yourself, too. But you didn't get away."

After the inspectors had left with the man, Riordan turned to Gallant.

"Trouble with you," he said, "is that you don't know very much. You got good ideas, all right, but you haven't had practice enough to develop what you might call technique. You sure you wired your firm that I tried to shake you down for two hundred berries for the return of this stuff?"

Gallant nodded his head.

"Well, that's good. It 'll bring one of your bosses down here with a lawyer. They'll both appreciate you. You're so clever. First place, you wait till you know your friend had made his get-away before you squawk. Then you insist on lookin' in the baggage car for your trunk, so there won't be any pursuit till they got that flivver truck out of sight.

"Then you stall round the station, giving this printed list to the station agent and tellin' him to give it to the railroad dicks. Then you come up here and stall me along. Everything to gain time. I suppose you thought I was so dumb I'd fall for a list of sample goods made out with the values at retail prices?

"Any real guy would have known that a salesman don't figure retail at all; he figures either wholesale or manufacturin' costs. Then when I make you this offer of getting your stuff back for a price, you won't have anything to do with it. Why? Because you're sure it's all safe on the road. But after you leave here, you get leary, and you telephone the Savoy Hotel from your hotel, using a prearranged code meaning for them to beat it, that it's all quite clear to-night, but it may not be so later on. Oh, it was simple.

"You frame this good, you do, even to getting a room at the Belvidere where your friends can pack the stuff, after they've left those fool clews in the truck and on the river bank under the busted sample-case. You figured you could sacrifice a coupla watches and some stickpins to make real mysterious clews.

"You were good, you were—you tipped your hand right from the start. And you were so good that you were going to rope your poor old father in on it and make him be your fence. You're a fine specimen, you are."

Gallant, his face flushed, rose.

"You can't prove it," he said.

Riordan laughed. "Do you want to bet I can't? You wait till your boss gets down here in answer to your wire. You know I can prove it.

"Now, listen, when you get out of this you want to go straight. Never mind readin' these stories in the magazines. They don't always work in real life—not unless you know how, anyway. And you'll notice in the stories that the guilty guy always gets caught, too. That's the one truest thing; in stories and in real life."

Riordan turned to Halloran.

"Take 'em upstairs, big fellow," he said. "Book Gallant for grand larceny. Put the old man down as 'hold for witness.' To-morrow we'll put it up to the district attorney, and let him figure out what he wants to do.

"Give the old man a good room and make him comfortable. It's too bad about him. Then you can report off; it 'll be time. And tell Stacy and Willis to beat it, too."

THE END

"Well," she rasped in an assumed voice. "Shall I pass muster?"

The Invisible Web

By H. Ashton-Wolfe

EDITOR'S NOTE.—*The following story is one of a series about the work of Dr. Edmond Locard, Chief of the Lyons Laboratories of the French Secret Police, written by the well-known criminologist, Mr. Ashton-Wolfe, who is a personal friend of the great detective genius.*

No. 3—The Missing Canine

A True Story

The Lovely Mlle. Chavannes With Her Beauty Lures a Notorious Jewel Thief Into the Open While the Secret Police Close In

EVERY man who travels much and who has a weakness for seeking adventure in the bypaths of the world's great cities, must inevitably arrive at the conclusion that mankind is strangely complex and burdened with queer contradictions.

Although fundamentally all men are alike, he will soon realize that in every human being is an unknown quantity which absolutely defies analysis and which will cause a man or woman to react in an entirely unforeseen manner to sudden stress or long pent-up emotion.

Every student of the criminal mentality must learn to expect the unexpected—a paradox, apparently, yet it fits in with my own belief that even in the worst apache there must be some grain of manhood, some atavistic remnant of honor and loyalty which

will urge him at least to keep faith with his own tribe.

I have always tried to think that even such ferocious murderers as were Bonnot and Garnier, the infamous motor bandits, might have become good and useful citizens under more favorable circumstances.

When Bonnot, besieged by hundreds of armed police, intent only on his destruction, lay dying from a dozen wounds, his last thoughts were for his friends. In the midst of flying bullets and the din of battle, he wrote a letter with faltering hand, and proclaimed the innocence of those who had been arrested.

Unfortunately for this reassuring belief in human virtues, I have repeatedly met creatures so utterly vile, so entirely bereft of any better feeling, that my theory has been shaken to its foundations and all but overthrown.

Such an inhuman soulless monster was Isidor Heilbrunn, an Alsatian Jew, nicknamed "Le Youpin." Never did the avenging blade of a dagger strike more opportunely than when it sheared through the thread of *his* evil life. None of us felt sorry when we found that the woman who had killed him was beyond our reach, for we should have been sorely tempted to let her escape.

Jacques Laughton, chief inspector of the Sûreté* at Lyons, had always impressed me as a man utterly without sentiment. He was a machine, only to be set in motion by a crime—a man who knew neither fear nor pity. He scrutinized every one with a specialist's bias, and believed all men and women to be potential criminals. Great was my surprise, therefore, when one day while we were waiting for M. Duprez, the magistrate, to arrive, he turned to me after a long gloomy silence and said: "She is the sweetest and most beautiful girl in the world! Don't you think so, too, my friend?"

I stared dumfounded. Laughton had a habit of saying queer things in the most unexpected manner—as though he believed that you inevitably followed his thoughts—but this from him was too much; I held my sides and roared with laughter.

"Who in Heaven's name—is this wonderful girl, Laughton?" I gasped. "Surely you don't mean that apache girl we arrested?"

My friend scowled fiercely and walked angrily up and down the room without replying, until I began to fear I had seriously offended him. Suddenly he stopped and planted himself squarely before me.

"I'm an ugly beast, I know," he said, with strange bitterness, "but I can't help it—I worship her."

"But who is it, man? You haven't told me yet."

"Mlle. Gilberte," he replied, sinking his voice to a whisper. "The new assistant. What do you think of her?"

"For once I agree with you, Laughton. She is beautiful, clever, and charming."

Laughton seized my hand and shook it warmly.

"Thanks, my friend," he cried, as though I had conferred a great favor upon him. "I am going to marry her. I have decided that quite definitely, you know."

I dare say I looked startled, for experience had taught me that when Laughton spoke so seriously nothing could turn him from his purpose. Yet such a courtship seemed utterly ludicrous. Mlle. Gilberte Chavannes was truly beautiful, not more than twenty-five years old, with wonderful hair and complexion, and such marvelously clear gray eyes that it was a delight to encounter her gaze.

She had entered the Sûreté laboratories some six months previously as assistant to our chief, in order to study criminology. Although charming in her manner to every one, she appeared to live in a world of her own, and we

* Headquarters of the French Secret Police.

had never exchanged more than the usual formal greetings.

I knew that Laughton was still young in years, but somehow he conveyed the impression of being long past middle age, and his strange, cruel hawk's face and weird, jet-black eyebrows made it difficult to imagine that he could ever find favor with graceful Gilberte Chavannes.

"She is to be transferred to the Anthropometrical Department, is she not?" I asked curiously.

"Yes," Laughton said. "She is greatly interested in our photographic records. I often wonder if there is not some secret reason for her choice of profession. Have you noticed the sad and brooding expression which overshadows her face when she believes herself to be alone?"

At that moment the inner door opened and Mlle. Chavannes entered. Laughton bowed awkwardly, but his fierce expression softened into a happy smile.

"The judge awaits you, sirs," she announced, "and I warn you that he is very irritable."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," my friend replied. Then turning to me he snapped: "Come on, I know what's annoying him."

We entered the office of the magistrate—a sharp-featured, saturnine man, whose wonderful power of forcing a confession from the most sullen, obdurate criminal had made him the foremost investigating judge in Lyons. He greeted us coldly, and at once opened the sheaf of documents before him.

"I have been instructed to investigate these jewel robberies, M. Laughton, of which apparently the perpetrators cannot be traced. Nor, it seems, have you discovered where all the stones are sold. Are your agents quite useless?"

"It is not that, monsieur," my friend answered calmly. "This gang either does not sell its loot or else they sell it somewhere far away. We are in constant touch with every jeweler and fence in France and England."

"I see your report speaks of a man named Heilbrunn. What is he?"

"I should not call him a man," drawled Laughton. "He is a monster, an evil creature; even his form is not human."

"I don't mean that," said M. Duprez testily. "I gather that you believe him to be a receiver of stolen goods?"

"He is the cleverest fence in France, without a doubt, monsieur, but we have no tangible proof as yet—he is too cunning to take any risks."

"What do you know about him?"

"Oh, we have his chart—he has been arrested several times on suspicion, but never convicted. Here it is," and Laughton placed some documents on the table.

"My God, what a hideous beast!" the magistrate exclaimed, staring with disgust at a photograph. "You are right—he is scarcely human. H'm, nothing to help us here.

"'Isidor Heilbrunn, Israelite, born in Mulhouse in 1878, speaks French and German with a strong accent, short stocky figure, almost a hunchback, long arms and slender white fingers, nails always carefully polished. Face pear-shaped, protruding light blue eyes, no chin, mouth unusually large, teeth black from chewing betel nut, straggling red hair, long hooked nose. Traded for many years in the Pacific. Arrested in 1906, suspected of helping convicts to escape from Numea—released for want of evidence. Deported from British South Africa in 1908 for I.D.B. Wounded in 1909 in Sydney for presumed theft of pearls from Chinese smugglers with whom he was known to deal secretly.'

"A pretty record," said the magistrate thoughtfully when he had read the chart again, "and you believe now that he is the man who is behind all these robberies?"

"Yes, monsieur. We are watching

him closely and I think we shall trap him yet."

While Laughton was speaking, Mlle. Gilberte had picked up the photograph of Heilbrunn from idle curiosity. No sooner had she glanced at it when she became deadly pale, and her eyes opened wide with terror. Laughton sprang forward to support her, for she appeared about to faint.

"What is it, mademoiselle?" he asked gently. "Do you know this monster?"

"No—no—only his evil face terrifies me."

"No wonder," growled M. Duprez. "But you'll get used to such types if you stay with us; think no more about him." Then to Laughton: "Get to work, gentlemen; we must trace these stolen jewels. Report to me immediately if you discover anything which may help this investigation."

Laughton picked up his papers and, with a lingering tender look at the girl, beckoned me to follow.

"I felt sure there was some mystery—that sweet girl is here with a purpose. God help the Jew if he has harmed her in the past. I must look into this—it may incidentally lead us in the right direction. Hello, Voltaire, what is the matter?"

Our energetic colleague, Jules Voltaire, had come dashing up the stairs, his eyes alight with excitement.

"Great news," he gasped. "Another jewel robbery. Messrs. Laurent just phoned up. As my illustrious ancestor said—"

"Oh, hang your illustrious ancestor," broke in Laughton. "Tell me what's happened, man."

"I have no details yet, but the jewelers have reported the disappearance of one of their employees, and with him a bag containing a fortune in emeralds."

"Come along then, both of you," said my friend. "We'll go and interview the manager—it's not far."

Despite his agitation, M. Laurent was very concise in his replies to Laughton's rapid fire of questions, but he could tell us very little beyond the fact that the Countess Castiglioni, an Italian lady living at the Continental, had called and requested that a collection of emerald necklaces, pendants and rings should be sent to the hotel, stating that she wished to select several pieces of jewelery for the wedding of a niece.

Such a request was nothing unusual, but of course every precaution was taken against trickery. The man they had sent was a trusted employee who had been with the firm for ten years. His name was José Martinez, and he was a Frenchman, despite his Spanish name. It was not the first time that Martinez had been intrusted with jewels of great value. The man knew well that he ran a certain risk, and always went armed. The jewelery was carried in a stout, but inconspicuous leather bag, which was lined with steel netting, and locked automatically.

It was a rule that in order to prevent substitution he should never place the bag anywhere except on the table on which he exhibited its valuable contents.

On this occasion he had left about eleven o'clock, and should have returned by one. At 2 P.M. M. Laurent had telephoned to the hotel, and learned, to his amazement, that Martinez had left with his precious bag shortly after one o'clock. He had even stopped to chat a moment with the manager of the hotel and had shown him some of the stones, remarking rather whimsically that his dream of a big commission was not likely to materialize since the countess had thought the jewels much too expensive.

He had also told the manager that he would call again with a cheaper selection. We obtained a photograph of Martinez and a description of the clothes he was wearing from M. Laurent, and drove at once to the Continental.

The director of the hotel was unable to tell us anything further than that the Countess Castiglioni was well known, paid her bills regularly, and was reputed to be wealthy.

We were fortunate in finding the lady at home. While Voltaire put a few questions to the countess, I saw Laughton's keen eyes flickering over every part of the room and noting every detail. The countess was a handsome woman with hard, masculine features and a frigid manner which I thought was somewhat exaggerated.

She gave us to understand that she was well aware of the unpleasant position in which the disappearance of the jeweler's assistant placed her, and that she resented it. She had seen at once that the emeralds were too expensive and had sent the man away.

The porter gave us the only bit of information of any value. He had called a taxi for Martinez, and while holding the door open for him, heard the assistant order the chauffeur to drive to Messrs. Laurent. It was a simple matter to find the taxi driver, and with his assistance we were able to follow the missing man's progress step by step.

As we advanced in our search, so our amazement increased. It appeared as though from the moment he entered the cab, José Martinez had suddenly lost his reason. When half the distance to his firm's premises had been covered, he had suddenly ordered the chauffeur to turn and drive to the Petit Vatel—a restaurant noted for its Epicurean dinners. The Petit Vatel has a huge glass frontage, and through this the driver saw his passenger greet a number of elegant men and women and settle down to luncheon at a table, which, judging by the profusion of flowers and glittering glasses, had evidently been retained and decorated for their coming.

The commissionaire had then paid the taxi driver, who had returned to his usual rank outside the hotel.

Good fortune awaited us at the Petit Vatel. Pranzini, the dapper little head waiter, was bubbling with information about the luncheon.

"Certainly!" he exclaimed, when Laughton asked whether he had noticed a group of men and women. "This morning I receive de order to prepare a table for ten people—plenty of flowers, and de menu—*ma!*" and he spread out his fingers with a truly Italian gesture. "De best of everything. De signor who ordered said: 'Pranzini, you know what a good lunch should be—so—'"

"Yes, yes," Laughton said impatiently. "I know your talents, Pranzini—but this is a serious matter, never mind the menu."

"Oh, but monsieur, de menu is de best of all, for it has de finger-marks of de luncheon party;" and Pranzini grinned with delight at our astonishment.

"You see," he continued, drawing us into a corner, "I love to observe human beings. I am what you call—observant. Psychology—no? In my profession that is necessary. But I also love to—to—be a detective—as an amateur naturally. I observe all kinds of trifles and try to guess what a man or woman may be. Why? Life is dull without a hobby—and lately I have started to collect menus with finger marks.

"Some day, maybe, I get the thumbprint of a great poet, painter, or murderer. To-day come this party. They were what you call strange. The women look like demi-monde and de men—adventurers.

"Then, behold, I see M. Martinez, whom I know well. He greet them and sit down with them and I hear him tell my assistant Desiré to put de bag he carry on de seat.

"'It's full of emeralds, Desiré,' he say, 'so be careful.' My God, I lift de bag and it was very heavy. Now I think how strange for a man who carries jewels to be so careless. So I

prepare some menus with a little wax mixture of which I have de secret and I hand it to each one to hold—"

"Pranzini, you are a great man," Laughton exclaimed delightedly. "You shall have a testimonial from headquarters if we find Martinez."

"Madonna, he has disappeared?"

"Yes, and with him the emeralds. Go on, what happened?"

"Well, as soon as I had the menus I write on the back a description of de man or woman who held them. Now I get them—right away."

Pranzini hurried away, and returned with a box in which were ten cards. On each one we saw several faint impressions of those whorls and ridges which to many a man have spelled prison and worse.

"Splendid," Laughton exclaimed, reading the terse remarks penciled on the back of each card.

"But read de menu, monsieur," Pranzini insisted. "Dese people had a good luncheon."

"Yes, I see—but that does not interest us."

"Monsieur, in de books I study, I read 'never neglect anything.' I know M. Martinez. He tell me many times that he is dyspeptic and he never drink wine."

"Good Lord," Laughton gasped, sitting down hurriedly. "Thanks for the lesson, Pranzini. If you ever want a job at the Sûreté—"

The little Italian rubbed his hands and cackled with triumph: "Eh, I catch you dere? To-day M. Martinez eat and eat—and drink Pommard and Cliquot; and he smoke cigars, which he never did before. That is very strange, unless he has been playing a part and now he throw off de mask. I have here de best of all," and he opened a small box.

"Why, it's a piece of cake," said Voltaire disgustedly.

"Truly it is, and in it you will find de teeth marks of M. Martinez, who bit into it and then left it. That will be good proof that it was truly M. Martinez who was here to-day with all those people."

"Anything else, *Sherlock?*" asked Laughton faintly.

"No, but it is enough—isn't it?"

"It is, and we most humbly thank you. Now as to the lunch?"

"That is the best—dey laugh, dey drink and dey speak like—well not like ladies and gentlemen should. I saw de jeweler's assistant open his bag and pass it round, and one lady she put on a necklace of emeralds and say, 'I'll keep this myself.' Then the man next to her say, 'Shut up, you fool,' and take the necklace away. Dey left at three o'clock; two big cars were waiting and dey drove away."

"Any idea where they went?"

"Yes—to the races, but they are over at five, and it is now nearly six; they will have gone."

"How do you know they went to the races?"

"The man who said 'shut up' to de lady, he called to de chauffeur where to drive, and Jules at de door tell me."

"But why didn't you phone us at once, while they were at lunch?"

"Oh, monsieur, that I cannot do; I might be mistaken. How could I be sure it was a case for de police. Perhaps I lose my job, no?"

"Quite right, Pranzini. Well, thank you is all I can say now. We'll take these things—but you shall have them back. Were the cars hired?"

"Yes—from de Garage du Rhône."

Laughton's grin of delight was the Italian's reward. Thanks to this last piece of information we tracked the defaulting Martinez from the races to a café, and from there to another restaurant, but although we were close behind, he had always just left.

Our amazement at the man's career of debauch grew hourly. It was as though he had purposely left a trail as clear as that of a schoolboy's paper chase. We could only imagine that the man had truly become insane.

It was nearly midnight when at last we ran him down in an infamous dance hall. Watching the whirling couples of soldiers, sailors and apaches, our attention was attracted by a swarthy fellow whose drunken antics were amusing every one. Laughton pulled out the photograph of the man we were searching for and showed it to me. The drunken fool was Martinez.

"He has got rid of the bag of jewels," my companion whispered. "We must go to work cautiously. You, Voltaire, get a dozen men from the nearest commissariat and place two at each exit. When I blow my whistle join me with the others. No one must leave, in case the bag is here."

Unfortunately just as my friend was about to signal, some one noticed one of the uniformed police and gave the alarm. There was an immediate rush for the doors. Laughton and I forced our way though the excited crowd toward the spot where the assistant was last seen, but he had disappeared; nor could we find him, although the premises were searched from cellar to roof.

It was unbelievable that he had got away, for police had been placed on guard at every door and window. As a last resort every one was ordered to stand against the wall while we examined each in turn. Suddenly we heard Voltaire shout, and saw him appear from behind a curtained recess which we had overlooked. He was struggling with a man who was dressed only in shirt and trousers, and whose round, vulgar face seemed strangely familiar.

"I found him trying to crawl into a cupboard," Voltaire said. "He is not the man we are after, but we'd better take him with us. I fancy that he is wanted at the Sûreté, although for the moment I can't place him."

We were greatly disappointed, but nothing else could be done, so after leaving several men on guard at the dance hall we drove to headquarters, where our captive was locked in a cell for the night. Although detectives continued to search until dawn, Martinez had utterly vanished since the moment the alarm was raised at the dance hall.

Laughton felt intensely humiliated at his failure; he would not hear of rest until the menus had been photographed and the prints enlarged. A plaster impression of the piece of cake was also taken. Pranzini had helped us more than he knew, for the following day when the records were searched, we found that one of the guests at the luncheon had been a notorious thief known as Jean Tricot. Laughton was visibly relieved.

"Things are not so bad as they appear," he said. "It is a nasty tangle, but this thread leads straight to our friend Heilbrunn, and the Jew spells jewels to me—— Sorry—I did not intend a pun. Has the laboratory enlarged our prisoner's finger-prints yet?"

"Yes," I replied, "the special department has them. The chief has already questioned the fellow. His name is Raphael Vinieux and he says that he is an actor."

"H'm—well—they'd better hold him another day. By the way, I wonder if his other clothes have been found? Funny that he should have been in that place dressed only in shirt and trousers, no shoes even. What the dev—"

The door had burst open and Voltaire appeared, flushed and breathless.

"Come along—quick—we've got Martinez."

Laughton sprang forward excitedly.

"Where—is he alive—has he the jewels?"

"He is alive and at the Hôtel des Voyageurs in La Roselle. The hotel fits the squalid and dirty suburb. Goodness knows how he got there; a doctor is with him now. He was asleep when we arrived, and he looked dazed as though he had been drugged—"

"That means no jewels, eh?" Laughton snapped.

Voltaire nodded gloomily.

"Naturally! Dubonnet, the landlord of the hotel, telephoned half an hour ago; he said he'd read about a missing man and thought his lodger might be the one."

The Hôtel des Voyageurs was just a tumbledown tavern and lodging house. In a small room on the first floor we found two police officers guarding the door. Lying on the dingy bed, pale and disheveled, was the man we sought. He seemed barely conscious of our presence and muttered and moaned feebly. The doctor whom Voltaire had summoned, shrugged his shoulders at Laughton's questions.

"I can say nothing as yet. The man appears to have been poisoned. He is very weak. When I came I found him sitting at that table, with his head on his arms. Near him was an overturned bottle of cognac. You see—the liquid has soaked into his clothes. He was fast asleep—"

"Asleep? You mean he was drunk?"

"Well, monsieur, that is not so certain. Truly his eyes are bloodshot and his breath smells of cognac, but his pulse and breathing are not those of a drunken man. I have injected caffeine and camphor, yet as you see it does not sober him. My opinion is that he has been drugged."

We examined the room—it contained but the barest necessities, and there was no sign of the bag of jewels. The empty bottles which littered the floor we packed and sent to the laboratory. The man was then removed in an ambulance under the guard of two officers.

Dubonnet, the landlord of the hotel, a vile, fawning creature, related that Martinez had come the night before, accompanied by two women. He appeared to be very intoxicated, and his companions helped him up the stairs.

Several bottles of spirits had been sent to his room, and the women had left some time later. They had paid for the lodging and the drink, remarking jokingly that their friend needed a good night to sleep off the effect of the wine he had swallowed. Dubonnet had not paid any attention to the appearance of the women; such an occurrence was nothing unusual. He had gone upstairs once and heard the man snoring. It was only because he continued to sleep through the day that he had telephoned for the police.

"Did he carry a bag?" Voltaire questioned.

"No," Dubonnet said. "Nothing at all."

With this we had to be content.

"I shall lay the whole case before the chief!" Laughton exclaimed when we left the place. "It's too complex for me. What do you think, Voltaire? Do you see any light?"

"When a case is full of contradictions the most absurd and impossible theory will be the right one, that is what my illustrious ancestor—"

"You're a fool, my friend," Laughton interrupted rudely, "and your ancestor, as you call him, never said that."

Voltaire's eyes twinkled. "Perhaps not, but it's true all the same. You'll see that the truth in this business will be quite absurd. I have a theory—"

"Well, then for Heaven's sake, out with it."

Voltaire shook his head. "Not until we have more data. Meanwhile I'm going to watch that landlord. I don't believe his story. I'll change my face and return. Expect me later."

With that Voltaire jumped into a passing taxi and drove off.

"Clever chap, that Jules," Laughton muttered. "If only he wouldn't try to make us believe that he is a descendant of our national Voltaire."

We were fortunate in finding the chief at the laboratory. He was examining some photographs and the plaster molding of the piece of cake, and greeted us with a curious smile.

"Well, my children, you've achieved a mixed result, I hear. Have you ex-

amined these things?" and he pointed to the objects before him.

"No, monsieur, not yet. We came to ask your advice."

"You won't need it when you examine these. Wait—Mlle. Chavannes is bringing me some documents."

Laughton quickly adjusted his tie and placed a chair ready for the girl, who came a few minutes later carrying some papers. I noticed that she was very pale.

"Now," said the chief, "let us take things in their order. Thanks to that clever Italian waiter and his menus we have traced some of the guests who lunched with Martinez. They are well-known rogues and two of them are cronies of Heilbrunn. He is at the bottom of this, of course. We have also a plaster molding of a set of teeth. You'll notice that the left canine is missing. I shall have to call on Pranzini. He is wasted as head waiter; his place is here.

"Martinez was known as a steady, honest, trustworthy man, married and father of a family. I am informed that he suffers from dyspepsia, is a non-smoker and an abstainer, yet he suddenly runs off with jewels worth a quarter of a million francs, lunches heavily, drinks, smokes, and spends his time with disreputable women; and he does all this so openly and foolishly that every one sees him.

"You were able to follow his trail quite easily, until you arrived at the Bal Parisien, where he disappeared in most amazing fashion in spite of your police. Twenty-four hours later you find him weak and ill in a poor lodging house, minus the jewels. Well, what does that suggest?"

Laughton stared at his chief with a perplexed expression. "The fellow went suddenly mad, I imagine."

"Oh—that's your theory? Wait. Mlle. Gilberte has brought me a report from the doctor at the infirmary. Martinez is recovering rapidly, and I have allowed his wife to see him; here is his statement. Martinez declares that he went to the Hotel Continental with his bag attached by a chain to his wrist.

"When he was shown into the salon by a page boy, the Countess Castiglioni was sitting on a couch, before which a table had been placed. He displayed his wares one by one and carefully replaced each piece in the bag when she had examined it.

"He remembers that he handed her a pendant, but when she held it up to catch the light it slipped from her fingers and fell to the floor. Naturally, he stooped to recover it. Up to that point his tale is clear and concise, now it becomes strangely confused and fantastic.

"Something happened when he attempted to pick up the pendant. He says he has a dim recollection of some pungent stifling vapor squirting into his face from under the couch, and that it robbed him of all power to move. He believes that while he sprawled helplessly on the carpet, some one bound his hands together and carried him into a small, dark room.

"After that he can remember nothing but a series of very terrible dreams and a feeling as though he had drifted through long periods of insensibility alternating with dreadful nightmares. When this cloud of horror lifted he was in the lodging house, and a man, probably the doctor, was trying to revive him, but he has no idea how he came there. Well—"

Laughton laughed. "A pretty story. Unfortunately he was seen to leave the countess's rooms; he spoke to the manager of the hotel and even showed him some of the jewelry. He was seen and recognized at the Petit Vatel by Pranzini, who says that he appeared quite normal, and I saw him at the dance hall. Do you suggest that he did all this in a trance or while suffering from —what d'ye call it—mnemo—well, loss of memory?"

Our chief was about to reply when a shrill, poignant cry came from Mlle.

Gilberte. She had risen and was staring at us with dilated eyes, shaking in every limb, her trembling hands groping as if for support. So startled were we that no one moved. Suddenly speech came to her with a rush.

"Oh, M.—M. Laughton—I understand at last—oh, the clever fiends. It is the same trick which ruined my poor daddy and made him a convict. I knew that I had seen that horrible Heilbrunn before. It must have been in Bordeaux. That man who left the hotel with the bag was *not the real Martinez!*" With a rapid, violent gesture she dragged some papers from her blouse—I saw that they were cuttings from a newspaper.

"Look!" she cried. "Five years ago Pierre Chavannes—my daddy"—her voice broke and her eyes filled with tears—"was a trusted employee of a famous firm of jewelers in Bordeaux. He also was sent with valuable stones to a lady—the Duchess Elvira Vladiroff, a Russian. He, too, was seen to leave with his bag and was found some days later in a small hotel.

"Dozens of people came forward and stated that he had waded through orgy after orgy before the police finally discovered him. His defense was that he remembered nothing, but the jury found him guilty, and he is now in Cayenne, eating his heart out. My mother died of grief and shame.

"Daddy swore to me that he was innocent—that while some one who looked like him had stolen the jewels, he had been unconscious and a prisoner. That is why I am here. I promised to devote my life to the hunting of the criminals. M. Laughton—"

My friend was intensely moved—we all were. That passionate cry was eloquent of long, pent-up agony of soul.

When the poor girl had regained some measure of composure—I noticed that Laughton in his confusion was stroking her hair and calling her my poor child!—our chief recalled us to our senses with sharp, incisive orders.

"That settles it, gentlemen. I didn't know about this additional proof, but I had already decided that some clever scoundrel had masqueraded as poor Martinez while the man was kept a prisoner. I telephoned a moment ago to the hospital and learned that Martinez has *no teeth missing in front;* that proves that it was not he who left those marks in that piece of cake. I have ordered the thumb-print of Martinez to be taken, it will be here in a moment—come in." The door opened and a gendarme entered.

"Ah, here it is, and here are the menus and the chart of your prisoner, now compare them!"

As we eagerly bent over the inked impressions, Laughton gave a cry of surprise.

"Why, the thumb-print marked Martinez on the menu is the same as that of our prisoner Vinieux."

"Yes, and I have already ascertained that Vinieux, whose real name is Bourgignon, has lost his left canine tooth. He is the man who disguised himself as Martinez. I have discovered that he was formerly on the stage. He is evidently a very clever actor.

"Now you see why your fake Martinez was able to disappear so easily at the dance hall and why Vinieux was only dressed in shirt and trousers when the alarm was raised? The fellow simply slipped behind the curtain and got rid of his make-up and the assistant's clothes. His own were probably hidden there and he was dressing when Voltaire caught him. It was all part of the plot. So was the finding of Martinez at the Hotel des Voyageurs.

"The landlord is one of the gang and as soon as the unconscious man had been brought there, he informed the police. They feel sure that whatever the story which Martinez may tell, he will be thought guilty and convicted, like poor M. Chavannes, and that suspicion will never fall on them.

"Of course the countess is an accomplice also. It's a clever scheme,

and but for that Italian waiter, might have deceived us all. You see, so many people believe they saw Martinez with a bag of jewels after he left the hotel that even now we have no case for a jury. They would laugh at us. We must act with great caution.

"We want the brains of this gang, Isidor Heilbrunn. He is the devil who planned it all. Vinieux and the others are only his tools. We must let the Jew think that we are completely deceived. Release Vinieux and apologize for his arrest. Watch where he goes. Let some one constantly shadow the countess, and if she goes out search her rooms. One of them will surely lead us to Heilbrunn's real headquarters. I am convinced that if we raided his house in the usual way, we should find nothing. There are sure to be secret exits.

"When we know where the gang meets, some one must enter the place as a spy in order to catch them together and discover where the jewels are hidden. I'll leave the details to you, Laughton, but be very, very careful."

For long minutes Laughton sat still, lost in thought, then he rose abruptly and seized his hat and stick.

Mlle. Gilberte held out her hand to him across the table. "It's my father's pardon you are fighting for, monsieur," she said with trembling voice, "and the reputation of this poor man Martinez. If I can be of any use I insist on helping."

Laughton bowed and kissed her hand in silence. At the door he turned, and looking at the girl with passionate devotion in his eyes, exclaimed, "I shall not fail you, mademoiselle."

"That's what Voltaire was hinting at, I'm thinking," I said as we descended together. "The old fox sensed the truth."

Laughton nodded. "I'm becoming stupid, but I'm grateful for the chance to help that dear girl. I knew there was some great trouble overshadowing her life. Just let me get to grips with that Heilbrunn. I'll drag the truth out of him."

Orders were at once given for our prisoner to be released, and two of our best men were chosen to watch his every move. Great caution was necessary, but we felt that at last the net was slowly yet surely closing around the Jew. Voltaire grinned when I told him what we suspected.

"You see—the impossible theory. I said so. I followed that fat innkeeper to the house where the Jew is known to live, but we dare not risk alarming Heilbrunn or he may slip through our fingers again. However, like every one of us, he has a weak spot in his armor—that is where we must strike."

"What is his vulnerable point then, Jules?" Laughton asked.

"He has two—pretty women and jewels. Now, if you'll promise not to throttle me, I'll suggest a plan. Mlle. Gilberte is pretty, very pretty, and it's just possible if she went to the Hotel des Voyageurs and played the part of a thief who wants to get rid of some stolen gems, that Dubonnet would take her to Heilbrunn. Once there she'll have to flirt with the dog and report on all she sees."

"Not for anything in the world would I let her do such a thing," Laughton cried angrily.

"*You* will not *let* her—rubbish! As a matter of fact I've already spoken to the girl, and she is coming to show us her make-up. I shall watch and so will you, and no harm can come to her. I'll wager she will play the part splendidly. Here she is."

I gasped with surprise, and so did Laughton. Mlle. Chavannes had transformed herself with a few deft touches into a perfect apache girl. Yet she had used very little rouge or paint, nor had she chosen those helps to disguise which can always be detected by the sharp eyes of cunning criminals. The change was entirely in her speech, attitude and clothes.

A coarse sneer disfigured the pure

lines of her mouth, the hair was untidy and adorned with a showy comb, while the dress, ill-fitting but gaudy, had just that appeal to man's brute instincts, which the women of the streets know so well how to produce. It was a triumph of skillful disguise.

"Well," she rasped in an assumed voice, enjoying our amazement. "Shall I pass muster?"

Laughton shook his head sadly.

"How could you, mademoiselle. I shall dream of this nightmare masquerade.

Instantly her attitude altered, the lines of her face softened, and she crossed swiftly to where my friend stood.

"It's for my daddy," she said softly, "so you must forgive me, monsieur."

"Of course," broke in Voltaire, "don't be a fool, Laughton. It only shows how clever mademoiselle is. Now listen, my child. I am going to become a drunken cabby and drive you to La Roselle, and from the moment you enter the Hotel des Voyageurs, you'll have watchdogs always within sound of your whistle.

"I shall post several armed men at the corner, ready to rush the house if you are in danger. Dubonnet is one of the Jew's men; let him think you have a chance of making a rich haul, but be reticent—don't tell him anything. Hint at wonderful jewels, which you can obtain, and if he takes you to the Jew pretend to be very suspicious and crafty.

"Don't tell Heilbrunn any made-up story. He is too cunning and would surely trip you up. Only hint at things, that will draw him. Above all you must not appear eager. And don't make yourself too ugly; a pretty girl is the beast's weakness."

"I understand. Come, gentlemen, let us start."

The plan worked admirably. At first Dubonnet pretended to be indignant at the girl's suggestion that he might help her to get rid of stolen trinkets, but when she carelessly displayed a fine diamond which she had taken as a bait, he made an appointment for the next evening.

Although Dubonnet did not leave his hotel during the day, he had evidently communicated with Heilbrunn and received minute instructions, for when Mlle. Gilberte arrived a car was waiting, and to our delight we saw our plucky decoy leave in the company of the infamous Tricot, whom we knew to be a toady of Heilbrunn.

We were well hidden and ready for instant action when they arrived at Heilbrunn's house. Instead of entering, Tricot rapped on the door of a building adjoining it, which we had believed to be tenanted by a well known firm of dealers in silks. With fast beating hearts we heard the door open and shut. It was an ordeal, to wait, pistol in hand, in tense silence.

If Mlle. Chavannes succeeded in speaking with the Jew alone, or if she saw that a raid would give us the evidence which we wanted, she had been instructed to get near the door and terrify Heilbrunn with a shot from her pistol. This was to be the signal for our attack.

It was a risky plan, but we counted on the cowardice of the monster. He was no fighter, and we felt sure that he would never face a weapon. Two dreadful interminable hours passed, and Laughton, haggard with anxiety, was about to order the attack, believing that something unforeseen had happened, when a roaring detonation split the silence, followed by a hoarse yell of pain. It was our signal.

Instantly we were at the door and windows, and the heavy crowbars we had brought ripped and tore away the woodwork. Laughton had just reared a slender iron ladder against the house, when a shrill, prolonged scream, followed instantly by a horrible bellow of rage, made our blood run cold.

Laughton leaped to a window ledge and hurled himself through the glass.

Shots were being fired continuously by the police surrounding the building, in order to terrify the inmates and prevent them from harming the girl. It was a trick we had learned from the apaches.

Voltaire had followed his colleague through the window and I was about to do the same when the door gave way. A fearsome sight met us as we burst into the room from whence the scream had come. Tricot was lying on the ground nursing a shattered arm, while in a corner was a heap of struggling, writhing bodies, with Laughton underneath, and Voltaire, half strangled by the fellow Dubonnet, trying in vain to help his friend.

Our arrival put an end to the fight. We quickly dragged Laughton free of his assailants, while our men overpowered and handcuffed them. He was bleeding from several stabs, and for a moment groped blindly, gasping for breath, then a terrible cry burst from his swollen lips:

"The girl—in God's name—the girl! Heilbrunn has her! There is a secret passage hidden by a panel somewhere; I heard him dragging her through it, the damned scoundrel—"

As if in answer to his cry we heard another scream from far away which was instantly stifled. It was no time for niceties. Voltaire pushed a pistol into the stomach of Tricot, who was still squirming on the floor.

"Quick, you dog," he barked. "Which way have they gone?" and the hammer of his weapon clicked ominously.

Tricot was inarticulate, so great was his terror, but he pointed to a large picture on the wall.

Laughton tore it away, and we saw a yawning hole. That chase down the dark tunnel was a nightmare. The passage was so narrow that we impeded each other's progress in our eagerness to reach Gilberte. Suddenly a beam of light shone in our faces, and a snarling voice spat vile curses.

"One step farther and I'll cut the girl's throat. Trap me, would you, eh? You don't know Isidor Heilbrunn."

We stopped, horrified by the threat. We could see nothing clearly, but we heard gasping sobs which made Laughton grit his teeth with stifled rage. Keeping the light shining into our eyes, Heilbrunn slowly retreated, panting and dragging a heavy body. We were afraid to move for the girl's sake, and we dared not fire in the direction of the hateful, sneering voice.

The despair on my poor friend's face was terrible to see, yet for the moment we were helpless. I don't know how long this intolerable situation would have lasted—madness was hovering near us all—when suddenly a horrible, choking cough which swelled to a shrill gurgling yell of terror, burst from the Jew. His torch clattered to the ground. and we heard the soft revolting thud of steel biting into flesh.

"At last, my God, at last I have you at my mercy; ten years I've waited, you shall never ruin another innocent life as you ruined mine."

It was a woman's voice, hissing and snarling through clenched teeth, while thud upon thud punctuated her words. We directed the rays of our lamps toward the sound, our nerves taut with horror. I shall never forget the scene which the flickering rays disclosed, it haunts me yet in my dreams.

Heilbrunn was staggering drunkenly, blood spouting in streams from his neck; at each blow he squealed like an animal, while with crimsoned, quivering hands he strove vainly to cover his gaping wounds. Behind him like an avenging fury swayed the woman we knew as the countess. Her arm rose and fell savagely, rhythmically, and the knife which she grasped, hacked and slashed at the shrieking wretch.

I remember that Voltaire cried desperately: "Stop—stop! Enough, you beast!" but when, breaking the paralyzing spell of loathing which had gripped us, we rushed forward, the Jew was

already dead, and the woman lay, a twisted heap, beside him—she had taken her own life.

Huddled against the wall we found poor Gilberte Chavannes. She had been mercifully spared the atrocious scene we had witnessed, for she was unconscious. Laughton lifted her tenderly and bore her in his strong arms to a car, leaving us to see to the ruffians we had captured.

When we returned to the house, shaken and weary with the strain of the last ten minutes, we found the police masters of the place. The men were already safely shut in a police van. We ordered the body of Heilbrunn and that of the woman to be removed from the tunnel and placed in a room.

What a house that was. We discovered no fewer than five secret hiding places, the doors cunningly concealed and moved by electric switches. Two of these holes looked like cupboards and had exits leading by underground passages to distant streets; while several sliding doors in the walls opened into the adjoining warehouse.

We had taken a great risk in allowing the girl to enter there alone, but without her assistance it is probable that the leader of the gang would again have escaped. We collected evidence enough to send all the men to the penal settlements for life. In a small safe hidden under the floor were the jewels stolen from Martinez. On the scene of the tragedy we later discovered a bag filled with gems, which Heilbrunn had evidently attempted to carry away. Most of them were identified as the proceeds of recent robberies, but some were never claimed.

When Tricot, whose real name was Janex, learned that his leader was dead, he broke down and answered all our questions. The woman who had killed Heilbrunn was named Mathilde Celeste. When she was still a young girl the Jew had involved her in a devilish scheme through which she had unwittingly killed her own brother. Since then he had forced her to commit crime after crime until escape from him had become impossible.

No doubt her hatred of the man who had dragged her down to utter misery, had slowly grown through the years until it had culminated in the terrible vengeance which we had witnessed.

It was this Mathilde Celeste who had impersonated the Duchess Elvira Vladiroff in Bordeaux when Gilberte's father was convicted. She had then become the Countess Castiglioni. Tricot admitted that he was hidden under the couch when Martinez called with the emeralds; when he had stooped to recover the pendant, which the pseudo countess had dropped purposely, Tricot had squirted a liquid given him by the Jew into the man's face. What the liquid was he did not know, but it acted instantly and caused the unfortunate man to collapse.

Martinez had then been undressed and pushed into a cupboard. Vinieux, who had studied the voice and mannerisms of the jeweler's assistant had put on his clothes, donned wig and beard and cleverly impersonated him. It was this touch of genius which made the Jew's scheme so diabolical, for thus the employees of the hotel were convinced that Martinez had left with his bag.

Moreover, in order to show that everything was normal, Vinieux, as Martinez, had stopped to exhibit some of the emeralds. A trail of wild debauch was then left to make it appear that the man had betrayed his trust. Martinez had been maintained in a dazed condition by repeated injections of morphia, and removed at night to the Hotel des Voyageurs.

When this statement had been signed, Vinieux was brought in, but he furiously denied the whole story and accused Tricot of inventing it. Unfortunately for him there was the damning evidence of the finger-prints and the missing tooth.

It was a dramatic moment when at

the trial the piece of cake, now hard as cement, was produced, and Pranzini, excitedly waving his arms, explained how it had been obtained. Thereupon Bourgignon alias Vinieux, also confessed, and admitted that Gilberte's father had been robbed by the same method.

Laughton gave his evidence in a voice shaking with emotion and implored the court to grant M. Chavannes a new trial.

The ruffians we had captured were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, but Tricot and Vinieux received lighter sentences because it was proved that they had also been in the Jew's power.

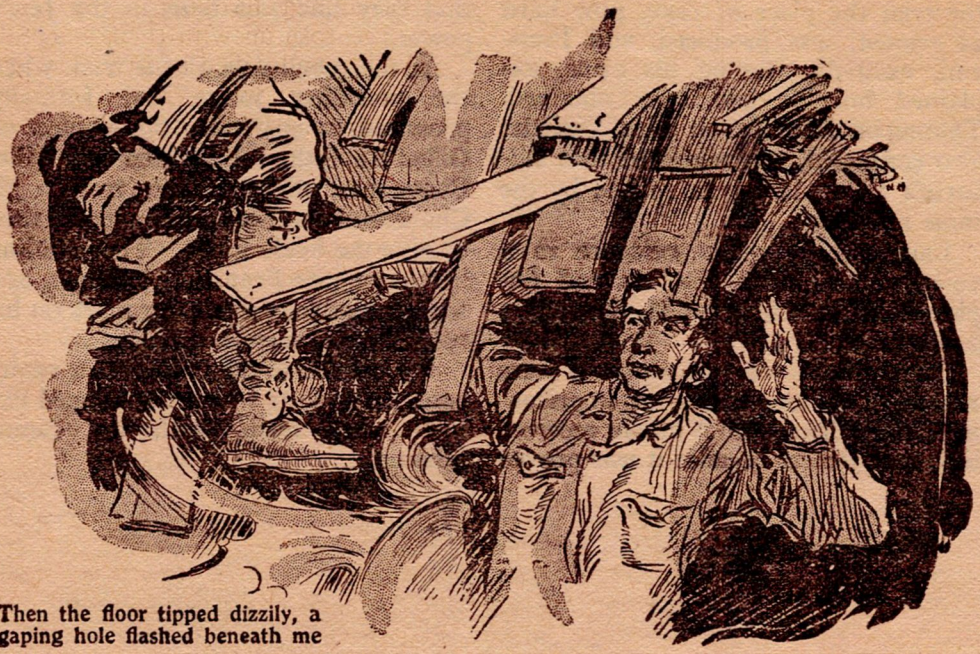
At the conclusion of the trial, when the presiding judge had formally promised to apply for the pardon of Gilberte's father, Laughton and Mlle. Chavannes plighted their troth. M. Chavannes returned to France in time to give the bride away. The wedding breakfast was Pranzini's triumph, and we all cheerfully made our mark on his now famous menus.

My present to the bride was a vanity case, the lock of which was shaped like tiny ivory teeth, with the canine missing.

Every Suicide Costs $2,800

EVERY person who kills himself in California cheats the State out of two thousand eight hundred dollars. If the State could reach out and hand the despondent man a check for that amount just as he was about to kill himself, society would save money.

This figure was arrived at by a State official who compiled statistics which showed the average yearly number of suicides to be nine hundred, with an economic loss of two million five hundred thousand dollars. He figured that the sum of two thousand eight hundred dollars was the economic value of a Californian at the age of forty-six, which is the average age of those who take their own lives in the State.



Then the floor tipped dizzily, a gaping hole flashed beneath me

Signed With Lead

For $100,000 Mr. Cuttle's "Client" Offers to Call Off His Murderers, But Tug Norton Decides to Do Business With a Gun

By Edward Parrish Ware

ASSOCIATION with men of education and refinement had acted as a whetstone upon his rougher edges, and a competent tailor had done much to soften the native ruggedness of John Q. Billings. But when he opened his mouth in speech he upset the plebeian frijoles.

He had a voice like a heavyweight bullfrog, and about as much knowledge of pure-quill English as I have of high-brow Martianese.

Stripped to his hide, he resembled a bred-in-the-bone patrician in the same way a broad-ax does a Turkish scimitar.

John Q. was a powerful man—one to be reckoned with in any company. Forceful as a pile-driver, resourceful as a National bank, shrewd as a pawnbroker, and, when so minded, as destructive as a tornado. He reckoned his wealth in millions, and was, although entirely self-made, a man of broad generosity.

Billings set no great store by money—after he got it. But woe unto the man or men who got in his way while he was getting it!

Such, briefly, is a feeble word-picture of one of the monarchs of lumber in the great Southwest.

When I stepped off the local passenger at the mill town of Billings, in the Missouri Ozarks, the big lumberman was awaiting me, pacing up and down a

cinder-covered space which served as a platform. Throttling a legal-sized envelope in a brawny fist, broad face mottled with red rage, he fairly foamed with words the moment we were closeted in his office.

"By God, Norton!" he cried, stamping up and down the floor. "They've killed a man for me! Dan Britton, one of my engineers! Murdered him, damn 'em!"

The telegram which had brought me from my office in Kansas City had given no particulars, but I knew that the case would prove to be of considerable importance, else Billings would not have called me. I had, though, hardly expected a murder.

"Sit down," I suggested, "and get a grip on yourself. What's that you're pulverizing in your right paw? The real cause of your present eruption, or I'm much mistaken."

He sat down, stared at the letter for an instant, then tossed it on top of the desk by which I sat.

"You're right," he agreed, struggling for composure. "But about the murder, first. Dan was shot from ambush, Norton—without even a dog's chance! The work of the damned hillsmen!"

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"I'll make that clear," he replied. "Here's the situation in a nutshell:

"My company, Ozark Development, has one hundred thousand acres of virgin timber in one tract, near Deerfoot Lake, thirty miles from here. We want that timber down here at Billings. The big mills here were built for the purpose of making lumber out of them very saw-logs. We can't get the logs here except by rafting 'em down Deerskin River. Deerskin don't run enough depth at all seasons for our purpose, so we set in to construct some locks and dams along its course, so we could control the flow.

"At first it looked like we'd get the thing over without any trouble. Then, about two weeks ago, hell broke loose. Them damned hill-hoppers, back on Deerskin, rose up with their long-barreled rifles and defied us to touch their river! Get it, will you—*their river!*

"Our construction crews were ordered to hike out of the hills—and they hiked. Our work came to a standstill—and, in short, Norton, we are facing the prospect of absolute failure, and after an investment of nearly three millions in the project!"

"You were not unbusinesslike enough to try to put locks and dams in Deerskin without a permit from the county?" I demanded, no little surprised.

"Certainly we have a permit!" Billings exclaimed. "But it ain't worth a damn to us! We complained to the county officers. They promised much, and did nothing. The Governor of the State won't interfere, either. It's a job we've tackled on our own hook, and will have to finish on our own.

"Up to a few days ago, the damned ridge-runners were content to merely fire their bullets over the heads of our men when they tried to resume work on the river. But at last blood has been shed. Dan Britton has been slain—and I mean to make 'em pay for him!"

"I repeat: How do you know the hillsmen killed Dan Britton?"

"Who else would have any reason for putting one of our men out of the way?" he demanded heatedly.

"No one, maybe. But that's something for the future to determine. When, where, and how did the killing occur?"

"Sometime yesterday. Dan had gone up the river to Deerfoot Lake, to make some needed calculations. A native, hired by us as a boatman on several trips, paddled the boat. They departed day before yesterday morning.

"At about two o'clock yesterday, two hunters—city men—came down and reported the finding of a dead man near Deerfoot, on the riverbank. He had been shot. It proved to be Dan. The sheriff made a stab at investigating

—but, Norton, how can you expect a sitter and a spitter, like him, to get anywhere in such a matter? He didn't. Coroner returned an open verdict. That's all—except that I sent for you at once."

"There were hunters about," I pointed out. "Maybe Dan met with an accident. Had you considered that possibility?"

"Hell, yes!" he snapped. "But, Norton, just chew this over: The two hunters who notified us about Dan were carrying late-model repeating rifles. Dan was killed by a round, hand-molded bullet, fired from an old-fashioned muzzle-loading rifle—such as the average hillsman uses. Now what you say to that?"

"Looks like the work of a native," I confessed. "Where was the boatman, when it happened?"

"Nobody knows. He was not at the scene of the killing, and he has not been located since. He's probably the scoundrel that done it, though he didn't impress me as the sort that would pull such a trick. However, when dealing with these hill-hoppers, you can't ever be certain of anything!"

I didn't agree with him there. Perhaps because I had a better knowledge of the native character.

"In trying to take over a river which has, for generation after generation, been regarded by the natives as their own peculiar property," I pointed out, "you might well expect a certain amount of bitter opposition. The hillsmen, as a class, stack up pretty well, Billings—don't forget that."

"But think of the benefits they'll automatically get out of our big development!" he exclaimed. "They don't seem to consider that!"

"A development they neither understand nor desire," I rejoined.

"Well, what the hell!" Billings cried angrily. "Is progress, which we represent, to take a sock in the jaw from the horny fists of a lot of ignorant backwoodsmen who are determined that things shall never change? Tell me that, Norton!"

"A sock in the jaw doesn't mean a thing to Old Man Progess, if he's got the right sort of stuff in him," I pointed out. "He does most of his advancing on crutches, and with at least one arm in a sling, if I've read the record correctly.

"But getting back to the business actually in hand. You had some definite idea in sending for me. Suppose you spill it."

"Just read that letter," Billings said, pointing to the crumpled envelope he had tossed onto the desk. "I received it this morning. Damn it all, Norton—but go ahead and read it! You'll see for yourself!"

II

I FISHED a wrinkled sheet of paper from the envelope, smoothed it on my knee, and read:

THADDEUS T. CUTTLE
Attorney At Law
Oak Ridge, Mo.

Such was the printed head. The text ran:

JOHN Q. BILLINGS,
Ozark Development Co.,
Billings, Mo.

Dear Sir—I am writing at the instigation of a client who has, by his own words, studied your problem in the hill country exhaustively, and happily hit upon a solution.

You have, he begs to remind you, upward of three millions invested in the Deerskin project, but have not, as yet, floated a single stick of timber down the river. He wishes to say that it is his opinion you never will log your tract, unless the opposition can be prevailed upon to allow it.

Therefore, in the firm belief that you will look kindly and favorably upon the solution he has to offer, my client proposes:

Upon payment of fifty thousand dollars at once, and a further payment of a like amount when his contract is fulfilled, he will guarantee to dissolve all opposition to your operations on the river and in the hills, and to reconcile the interests of yourself and the hills-

men. He will do more. Said client positively agrees to bring about a much to be desired coöperative relationship between your company and those who now threaten destruction.

This, client says, may seem, at first thought, a preposterous proposition. It is not, however. It is, as he terms it, mighty good insurance.

One hundred thousand to protect three million!

It is inconceivable that you should hesitate for one moment in taking advantage of this offer, client believes, since your alternative is to accept a huge loss in money—as well as a severe blow to your pride.

Your communication, if addressed to me at this place, will be promptly forwarded. May my client hope for a reply without delay?

Yours truly,
THADDEUS T. CUTTLE.

P. S.—Client expresses keen regret over the recent tragedy on upper Deerskin. It is his belief that such a thing would never have occurred, had you been at peace with the natives. No doubt you will see, in that affair, a further reason for placating the opposing element.

T. T. C.

No wonder Billings had been choking with rage!

That postscript was worthy of the brain of a Bismarck. It said, in effect:

"See what has happened already? Do you want some more men killed? If not, come through!"

"What makes it so nice, from the vantage point of 'client,' as well as that of Mr. Cuttle, Attorney at Law," I observed, folding the letter, "is the fact that the thing is not at all illegal—so far.

"Ozark Development needs aid. Client offers it—for a price. Perfectly legitimate. Perfectly monstrous, of course—nevertheless, entirely legal. My lid is doffed to this client, and to Mr. Cuttle!"

"Damn the client and Cuttle, too!" Billings blazed. "What do you read in that letter, besides what the infernal rascal typed on it?"

"That this client bird is at the bottom of your trouble," I told him. "He's been laying for Ozark Development all along, and now proposes to milk it good and proper. The issue is clearly defined. Pay this bandit's price, or pack up and go elsewhere. Just that."

"Do you think there is a way to smoke him out?"

"Very likely."

"Then go to it!" snapped the lumber monarch. "Get him, and get the man who killed Britton! I'll spend a million to bust them two, if they ain't actually one and the same, into little pieces—but hanged if I'll put out a single thin dime for blackmail! Go to it, Norton—and damn the damages!"

I took Billings at his word.

The first move was to interview Sheriff Tobe Leathers, at Oak Ridge, the county seat. Billings had never before heard of Mr. Thaddeus T. Cuttle, Attorney at Law, and, among other things, I needed to get a line on him.

Oak Ridge lies ten miles off the railway, having been established long before the whistle of a locomotive ever frightened the deer and offended the ears of the residents of that part of the country. It is a picturesque village, scattered over the side of a hill which is washed at its base by the blue waters of Deerskin.

III

I FOUND Leathers in his office in the weather-stained courthouse, a square building of native rock about which the business houses hovered, and made myself known to him.

"I'm plumb puzzled, Mr. Norton," he declared, accepting one of my cigars. "When this here lumber concern fust come into th' county, th' folks back on Deerskin didn't raise no hell about it a-tall. In fact, they seemed kind of glad. It meant that they would have a chance to git some real money fur their land, which th' lake th' company aimed to build fur storin' water in would cover, and which most of it ain't fitten fur nothin' but boats nohow.

"Then, all of a suddenty, them same hill fellers ups with their rifle guns, an' says Ozark Development can't touch th' river. They is dead sot against locks an' dams an' arteefishul lakes—an' that settles it! An' me—I don't onderstand whut brung about th' change, no more'n I does why sometimes th' wind blows, an' sometimes it don't."

"Suppose you give me a little dope on a party named Thaddeus T. Cuttle," I suggested. "Practicing law here."

"Is he a frien' of yourn?" Leathers asked, looking at me curiously.

"Don't know him from a side of bacon," I replied. "What about him?"

"Opened up a law office here about a year ago," Leathers informed me. "But don't seem to pay much attention to gittin' a practice. Pussonly, I thinks he's a shyster."

"Has he a partner, or is there anybody hereabouts who seems to spend a good deal of time in his company? A native, or old-timer, I mean."

"Not as I knows of."

"All right. More about the shyster later. What about this fellow who started out with Britton that day?"

"Curt Narramore, he is. Good citizen, fur as I knows."

"Any idea what became of him? Do you think he's hiding out, or that he might have been concerned in the killing?"

"Sometimes I thinks one thing, an' sometimes ernother," Tobe replied. "Right now, howsumever, I ain't thinkin' nuthin' much erbout Curt. He's got me plumb puzzled."

So that was that. Tobe wasn't thinking. At least, not out loud. I let that string go.

"Have you got the bullet the coroner removed from Britton's heart?" I asked.

Tobe produced it, taking it from a box in his old-fashioned safe.

"That's whut done th' business," he offered, passing the ball of lead to me. "Hit him plumb in th' heart, an' must of come frum considerable distance, else it would of gone on through."

I nodded. Tobe's reasoning was good, as far as it went—but, I was thinking, it might be short of the full distance. However, I did not offer any comment. I studied the bullet.

"Not battered in the least," I observed. "Didn't encounter any bones. I'll keep it for the present, Leathers, if you don't mind."

"Keep it, if it'll do you any good," he consented readily.

I dropped the ball of lead into a pocket of my vest, and, believing that any further time spent with the sheriff would only be wasted, was rising to depart when the door opened and a caller came in.

The man who entered the office was of medium height, stockily built, and about thirty-five years old. His face was tanned to a color resembling walnut stain; his hair, worn longer than common, was straight as that of an Indian, and coal black. His eyes, set in deep caverns, were of like color, and the brows formed a straight, bushy ridge above them, meeting just above the bridge of the nose.

A singularly attractive sort of person, was my thought. When he spoke, in a drawly, slurring voice, the attraction grew.

"Howdy, Tobe," he gretted, giving me a nod. "'Lowed I'd look in on you an' see whether them vote blanks done come. We'll need 'em on Brassy Bald, come 'lection time, so's to vote you-all back into office," he pointed out, grinning. "Is they here?"

"They ain't come yit, Lark," the sheriff replied. "Thought I done told you-all, las' time I seed you, that they wouldn't git here frum th' printer ontil th' middle of November—"

"That's right!" Lark cut in. "Come to remember, you done jist that. But, no harm done I reckin. See you-all when I comes down river again."

He departed—leaving me wondering who he was, and what his reason for

calling on the sheriff had really been. Something confidential, probably, which he was unwilling to broach before me. The vote blanks had served him as a subterfuge. That was plain.

"Who's your dark-skinned friend, Leathers?" I queried.

"Him? Oh, that ain't nobody but Larkin Broaddus, th' miller up at Brassy Bald," was the careless answer. "Anything further you-all wants to ax about?"

"Not right now," I replied. "Let me know if you get news of the whereabouts of that fellow Narramore," I enjoined him. "A message left with Billings, at his mill office, will reach me."

Deerfoot Lake being my next objective, I secured a light bateau, stored blankets and outfit aboard, and prepared to set out. Before leaving, however, I was to establish contact with another interesting person—and without going a single step out of my way to do it.

Mr. Thaddeus T. Cuttle was the interesting person to whom I refer. Just as I was in the act of untying my boat he stepped out of one and looped the painter over a stump.

He looked legal—if you get my meaning. Sharp features, small, unwinking eyes, skin overcast with a slight pallor, were outstanding features. About forty, I judged him to be. His hair, as I noted when he removed his broad-brimmed, soft felt hat, was brownish-gray; his head too large to suit his thin, frock-coated figure. Drab as a fish-gar's belly, was how I ticketed him.

"Going to have a try at the finny tribe?" he queried jocularly, eying the tackle in my boat. "Fine sport, especially at this time of the year—late October. Cuttle is my name—Thaddeus T. Cuttle. Attorney."

"Norton is mine," I supplied. "Kansas City. On a little vacation. Fishing any good, lately?"

"Depends a bit on what species of fish you angle for," was the reply, accompanied by what I thought was a significant stare from his pale eyes. "Bass are striking, I understand, but strangers are likely to find poor sport, I'm told. Hope you prove an exception, however. Glad I met you. Drop in and see me—when you get back."

"Thanks," I replied. "I probably will."

Mr. Cuttle seemed amused. He smiled broadly, turned and walked leisurely toward town. From his general attitude, I gathered that he either knew me for a cop, or strongly suspected my character.

"Which," I said to myself, as I paddled up the stream, "makes no difference a-tall, as Brother Leathers would say. We break even, Mr. Cuttle, on that head. I know—not only who, but what you are. And that's that!"

IV

CERTAIN features of the case were revolving in my mind. It was significant, to say the least, that Mr. Cuttle, attorney at law, should have dropped in and opened an office at the county seat directly after Ozark Development purchased its big tract of timber, and announced its intention of using Deerskin as a highway down which to float its logs. Highly significant, when you consider that such small volume of legal business as the county offered was already taken care of by more than enough local Websters, and that a newcomer would soon starve to death, unless he had plenty of capital and the will to squander it.

Significant, too, that he should make no effort—according to Tobe—to get practice; then, all of a sudden, bob up as the legal pilot in what promised to be the biggest transaction the county had ever witnessed.

That Mr. Cuttle should, in fine, uncover such a gold mine as "client" would prove—should he succeed in milking Ozark Development.

It was pretty certain, in my mind,

that Cuttle had settled in Oak Ridge for the express purpose of enriching himself at the lumber concern's expense. That he had foreseen the coming situation, when Ozark would ram right up against trouble—had, it might well be, made certain that Ozark would ram into trouble.

The rugged character of the country, deep hollows and high ridges, cut with numerous streams and studded with huge bowlders, forbade the building of a logging railroad. The cost would have been greater than any profits which the company could hope for. To log the tract with oxen and mules was not to be thought of, since the nearest railway lay thirty miles away from the timber. Deerskin River, then, was the only avenue down which the big sticks could profitably come.

Cuttle had informed himself regarding that. But he could not, I believed, have swung the thing alone. He must have as a partner a native, and one with almost unlimited influence among his own kind. No stranger, "or furriner," could have incited the hillsmen to rise against the lumber company. That was certain.

"Cuttle is the brains, and Mr. Native is the power that swings the country into line," was my conclusion. "And both are cold-blooded fish, to put it mildly. Britton was killed as a sort of emphasis to the letter which Cuttle sent out directly after the deed was done. If that isn't as monstrous a piece of cold calculation, as well as criminal depravity, as ever happened, then, Tug, you're losing your judgment of values."

But Ozark Development hadn't paid a dime of the demanded hundred thousand—and, if I knew Billings at all, it never would. He'd rather throw the three millions over his shoulder, I knew, than pay one cent of extortion money. So far, then, Cuttle and client had gained nothing. They had only managed to put themselves in the way of being hanged.

Somewhere in the vicinity of Deerfoot Lake, near which Britton had met his end, I hoped to find the evidence needed. Possibly I'd be able to locate Narramore, the missing guide, and get some telling facts from him. At any rate, the neighborhood of Deerfoot was mighty good hunting ground, as I sized it up.

On the north bank of the stream, at long intervals, could be seen large heaps of material which had been brought in, at considerable expense and no end of trouble, by Ozark Development, to be used in building the proposed locks and dams. But all that was just so much waste, unless the trouble could be wiped out; the ban of the hillsmen lifted.

After two hours' travel through as wild a section of country as I have ever seen, and also as picturesquely beautiful, I crossed the last line of Ozark Development's property, recognizing the location by means of certain landmarks about which I had informed myself. Then came evidences of timber operations on a large scale. Many sawlogs were piled along the bank of the stream, and the thunder of big trees, as they crashed down, could be heard at intervals.

"Fine trees," I observed. "But, I'm thinking, there'll be a lot of blood on some of them before they reach the saws."

As though in fulfillment of my prediction, the boom of a rifle crashed into the silence which had wrapped the placid river, and the blade of the paddle in my hand was split with a bullet.

I dropped the handle, threw myself flat in the boat, and reached for my repeater. Just as I pumped a cartridge into the firing chamber, a second report echoed over the river, and another slug came my way. It spudded into the port gunwale of the boat.

"Close shooting," I acknowledged. "But how the devil did those bozoes get a line on me so soon?"

Since I couldn't answer that, I dis-

missed the query, and got busy about more important matters. The bateau was drifting down stream, being carried nearer the spot whence the rifle men had ambushed themselves. Judging from the difference in the sound of the two reports, there were at least two of them at work. And I certainly had no wish to come closer within range than I was.

The spare paddle lay under my hand, and I slid it farther toward me, ready for quick use. Then I nosed the barrel of my rifle over the port gunwale, covered the patch of buckbrush from which I had seen wisps of smoke curling, and began combing it with lead. I aimed low, spaced my shots, and knew to a gleeful certainty that I'd make it mighty uncomfortable for the tenants of the bush, even if I failed to register a bull's-eye.

Presently another ball came my way, whining over my prone body with its teeth bared, so to speak. Judging from the slowness of their action, they were using muzzle-loading pieces—the favorite weapon of the hillsmen. That was in my favor, but the boat was drifting rapidly in to shore, which pointedly wasn't.

When I had half emptied the magazine of my gun, a man suddenly broke cover on shore, staggered a few feet toward the river, then tossed his arms high and tumbled forward.

I held my fire, for it was plain that he was no longer a menace.

Boom!

The rifle in the brush sent a slug into the bow of my craft, driving splinters into my face. It was the shot I had waited for. Before the bushwhacker could reload I hoped to be elsewhere.

Snatching up the spare paddle, I got to my knees and sent the bateau racing for the shore, heading upstream toward where a fringe of brush clustered at the water's edge. Reaching cover, I leaped out and ran down shore toward the place where I hoped the remaining pot-shooter still lay concealed. He probably would not leave such good cover until convinced that I had cleared out.

As I neared the location, I ceased to run, and went forward with due caution. He would have had ample time to reload, and I didn't want him to have another chance to blow me in two. Those long-barreled muzzle-loaders are most damnably destructive at close range.

Careful as I was, I was presently to learn that my quarry was equally so—and brainy along with it.

I came within thirty paces of the ambush, took cover behind a big oak, and got ready to cut that particular patch of brush into shreds. The butt of my gun was against my shoulder, and I had sighted on the spot into which I meant to begin throwing lead, when a slight sound—a rock clattering down the side of the ridge—caused me to drop flat on my stomach and look backward.

Standing partly exposed, his legs hidden in the brush, lower features masked by a blue bandanna, stood a man with rifle to shoulder—the muzzle trained on me.

At the precise instant at which I dropped down the boom of his weapon rang out, and the bullet it spat would have centered my body, but for my abrupt change of position. As it was, the ball buried itself in the trunk of the oak.

I skidded about, end for end, and took a snapshot at what I could see of him. That wasn't much, for, having missed with the single charge his rifle carried, the gunner was promptly on the run. Just a bit of gray cloth was my target—but I registered a hit.

The next instant I was after him. But my bullet, wherever it had slugged him, had not done much damage. At least it had not stopped his get-away. Before I reached the cover into which he had darted, he was evidently well on his way.

I turned back, searched the patch of

buckbrush on shore, found no one there, then had a look at the dead man beyond.

A middle-aged native, he proved to be. A search of his body revealed nothing by which I could identify him, so, after carefully examining the bullets in his pouch, I returned to the place where his partner had taken off.

If my bullet had hit, as I was very certain it had done, then there would be blood on his trail, most likely. Finding the trail would present no little difficulty, however, so I set about it.

V

AFTER perhaps fifteen minutes lost in hunting for it, I found the trail. A splash of blood on the leaves betrayed it. A bit farther on I came upon another crimson stain, and shortly thereafter determined that the quarry was, after all, having rather rough going. That, in short, he was dragging his left foot.

"Got a slug in the leg," I read from that. "Probably making for a hang-out somewhere. Judging from the signs, he won't be able to go far."

Presently the trail turned, almost doubling back on itself, angling north and east. On top of a ridge, where it led, I paused and gazed briefly at the nude peak of a mountain which reared above the lower peaks that lay between, and which, under the sun's rays, threw off a peculiar brassy radiance.

That would be Brassy Bald, I concluded. And the bald was washed by the western extremity of Deerfoot Lake. Somewhere near the base of the majestic, golden-topped mountain, Britton had met his end. I was, it seemed, being led in that direction.

I descended the slope of the ridge into a hollow, found that the blood trail again changed directions. Half a mile on, a smear of blood, more noticeable than any of the others, showed where the injured man had rested, and bandaged the wound. He had used part of his shirt for the purpose, as strips of checked cloth left on the spot indicated.

For a matter of a mile thereafter there were no more crimson splashes to guide me—then, with startling suddenness, a cabin of unbarked logs materialized before me. It stood in thick timber at the end of the path, and so nearly of a color with its surroundings that I was upon it without warning. I promptly ducked into cover, and surveyed the place.

The door of the cabin stood open, but no smoke issued from the stick-and-mud chimney, nor was there anybody in sight. No voices could be heard.

Well, I could do no good for myself there. Action was in order. I had to see inside that cabin, so I set about it. Creeping from tree to tree, crouching low and moving stealthily, I reached a point ten feet from the open door. So far as I could distinguish in the darkness of the interior, no one was within.

"He may be piled up in a bunk," I thought. "Anyhow, I'm betting this is the place he was making for, and that he isn't far off. So here goes!"

I slid from concealment, a gun in hand, darted over the doorsill—and kept right on across the floor until I came to the opposite wall, where I turned, back against the logs, ready for trouble.

No trouble came, however. Swift probing of the murky corners with my eyes, a glance at the bunks against the walls, failed to reveal a human presence.

Had my man, more desperately wounded than I had believed, played out before reaching the place, and crawled into the brush to die?

That was indeed a possibility. But somehow, I couldn't believe it. Somebody had opened the door of the cabin, and, I reasoned, only a short time before I arrived. A padlock, hanging open on a chain, indicated that the door was customarily kept locked. Because

of that, I deduced that the door had not been long open.

And somewhere near, I felt certain, the wounded man was lurking.

At that instant, my eyes having become accustomed to the murky interior of the windowless shack, I discovered something on the floor that put my doubts to rest.

A tiny trail of blood lay on the puncheons, leading from the doorsill to a shelf against the wall near the fireplace. On the shelf was a tin washbasin.

What was missing from that shelf?

The question popped into my mind —and the answer came on its heels.

A water bucket—of course!

Naturally the man would want fresh water in which to bathe his wound, and he had gone to a spring for it, taking the bucket with him.

Seeing which, it behooved me to be wary.

The next instant I slid across the floor, grasped the rungs of a ladder which led up to a trap in the ceiling, and scuttled to the loft above—voices outside being the driving force behind me.

Two men were talking, and in the voice of one I caught the strong tones of anger. Seemingly, they were standing still, about twenty or thirty paces from the cabin, and toward the front. I slid across the creaking boards, found a hole between the logs, and looked out.

Leaning against a tree, his face working in anger, was a man whose appearance struck me as being familiar. He began speaking, and the sound of his voice completed the circle of memory.

"Lark Broaddus!" I exclaimed softly. "The miller at Brassy Bald! No wonder that ambush was arranged so promptly! If Tobe Leathers didn't tip him off, then I'm a liar and the truth ain't in me!"

Then, with startling abruptness, the face of Leathers himself was before me! The man to whom the miller had been talking, and whose back had been toward me, turned round—and the sheriff of the county was revealed.

That, I confess, was something I had not expected.

"We've got to git him, Tobe!" the miller was saying emphatically. "He's a hell-raiser right. Got Curt Narramore dead center, and dang nigh finished me in the bargain! Sunk his lead in th' calf of my laig, an' I reckin I'll be limpin' eround fur some time to come. Cut will be put out somethin' fearful, when he hears erbout it—an' no mistake."

"Well, reckin you can't blame him fur bein'," Tobe replied. "He done his part plumb correct. Spotted this here Tug Norton when he got offen th' train, an' notified you-all. You come in th' office an' seed him fur yoreself—then you an' Curt laywayed him, an' done as pore a job of it as a body'd keer to know about! It's shore hell, an' no mistake!"

"Well," snapped Broaddus, his brow darkening, "maybe you can do a better job of gittin' him! Whut you standin' thar bawlin' at me fur, when that hell raisin' cop is rangin' eround somewhere clost? Whyn't you go atter him?"

"I aims to," was the quiet reply. "Cut sent me up to git a report on how things went, an' a report is whut he's goin' to git. Afore to-morrer is past, I'll put my lead into that feller whereat it 'll do th' most good—frum my viewp'int. Cut hisself will probably be to see you to-morrer. So long!"

VI

LEATHERS, shouldering his rifle, stalked off eastward into the timber. Directly afterward, a heavy boot smacked on the floor below. The miller of Brassy Bald, full water bucket in hand, was entering the cabin.

I recalled the animal attractiveness of Lark Broaddus—personality to burn. He'd fit in with my notion of the native who could influence his fel-

lows to fall for Cuttle's scheme. Among a certain class of younger hillsmen he would undoubtedly be a leader—and I had been convinced at the outset that the trouble was coming from a certain group of men, and not the mass of inhabitants of the Deerskin River section. That idea was growing as the moments passed.

Cuttle, Leathers, and Broaddus—all in the thing up to their eyes!

Curt Narramore, probably only a tool, had doubtless led Britton into ambush, then hid out. Well, he was out of things now, at any rate. He had paid.

I was standing under the south slope of the roof, and the trap was on the north side. My problem was to get across the floor, the boards of which were merely laid across the rafters and not nailed, to the trap. And it was a problem, too.

I moved slightly—and a board creaked. Listening intently, I heard water splashing into a basin below. Broaddus had not heard. I made another start.

Progressing inch by inch, I moved across the floor until almost in its center—then the floor tipped dizzily, a gaping hole flashed beneath me, and I went down, feet foremost, like a shot.

The infernal racket created by the loose boards, some of which made the descent endwise with me, must have temporarily paralyzed the native by its unexpectedness. The basin in his hand, filled to the brim, went to the floor with a tinny rattle, deluging the place with water. A gasp and an oath from Broaddus—and we were, the next second, standing eye to eye.

"Whut th' hell—" he began, eyes wide with astonishment.

"It is hell, ain't it—dropping in on a perfect stranger that way!" I exclaimed, interrupting—at the same time letting him have a look into the muzzle of a forty-five. "But, on the square, I couldn't help it. Didn't plan it It just happened."

"Well," he demanded, eyes beginning to glitter, "whut did you climb up thar fur? Whut bizness you-all got here?"

"A reasonable question," I replied agreeably. "I climbed up there, after following your blood trail from the spot where you and Curt Narramore tried to bushwhack me. Didn't want to be too prominent, should you and friend Leathers decide to come in. Satisfy you?"

"No!" he exploded. "You-all never follered me frum nowhar! I don't know nuthin' erbout no bushwhackin'!"

"How about that shot leg?" I asked, pointing.

"That? I done that accidental!"

"Accidental or not," I told him, tilting the muzzle of my gun a trifle for emphasis, "get busy and dress the wound. I don't want you bleeding to death. Get busy—or I'll hogtie you and do it myself!"

He obeyed. The wound was not serious, I noted. Just a hole through the calf of his leg.

A long-barreled muzzle-loading rifle stood against the wall, and I took possession of it, and the bullet pouch which hung from the ram-rod. After discharging the ball it contained, greatly to the owner's astonishment, into a tree before the door, I examined the inside of the barrel as far down as possible, then carefully scrutinized every bullet the pouch contained.

"Dan Britton was shot to death by a man who used a muzzle-loading rifle, the barrel of which was poorly rifled, it having been worn from long use," I jerked out suddenly, my eyes fixed on his. "Because of a lack of proper rifling, the bullet lacked force. It had the carrying power to reach Britton's heart, but not to pass through. The barrel of your weapon has hardly any traces of the rifling left. That's one thing I want to call to your mind."

"My rifle is my business, an' not yourn!" he snapped. "Whut air you-all tryin' to git at, anyhow?"

I thumbed a ball of lead out of a pocket of my vest and, holding it between thumb and forefinger, exhibited it.

"This bullet killed Britton," I told him. "It was later taken from his heart. Do you recognize it?"

"Hell, no!"

"You certainly ought to," I pointed out, "because you molded it with your own hands."

"That's a damned lie!" the native screeched, his long, talonlike fingers writhing spasmodically. "I never seed that bullet a-fore! Howcum you-all to put it onto me?"

"Because," I said quietly, "every bullet your pouch contained was run in the same mold in which the one that killed Britton was run. The mold has a tiny crack in one side—but it is deep enough to leave a slight ridge on the lead. Not enough to notice, unless looked for—but it is there just the same."

Rising, I went to the mantel-board above the fireplace and took therefrom an article without which the cabin of the hillsman is not properly furnished. A bullet mold.

Opening it, I examined the two halves minutely. One of them had the tiny crack I was looking for. Most such molds have little imperfections peculiar to themselves, as I knew.

"Broaddus," I told him coldly, "when you fired upon Dan Britton you signed your own death warrant. Signed it with lead. Just as plainly as though the slug that killed him had borne your name upon it, the imperfect mold, and the bullets contained in your pouch, identify you as the killer. Do you want to talk, give me the dope on your associates, so you'll have company when you go to the gallows?"

"I ain't goin' to no gallows!" he snarled. "An' you-all kin go to hell!"

"Eventually, perhaps—but not just now," I returned. "Maybe I can think up a way in which to trap Leathers and Cut—"

At that instant my glance rested upon a fiddle which hung on the wall—and my next question must have been a surprise to Broaddus.

"Are you a fiddler?" I asked.

"Of course, I am!" he snapped. "Whut you think I got a fiddle fur—to call hawgs with?"

"And," I mused aloud, paying no attention to his reply, "Cut is likely coming to see you to-morrow. Good! Maybe friend Leathers, failing to find me and sink his lead, will be with him. Let us hope so!"

Under vehement protest, Broaddus stripped off his clothes and, after I had fed him some food which I prepared, laid down in a bunk and permitted himself to be bound with a rope—all under the muzzle of my gun. Then I gagged him with that blue bandanna he had used for a mask.

Next morning, just after daylight, I dressed myself in Broaddus's clothes. Being fully his height, the garments fitted fairly well. After I had dressed, I cut away the lower part of the left trouserleg, bound my left shank from ankle to knee in a bunglesome and noticeable manner, then, fiddle and bow in hand, repaired to the shade in front of the cabin. Sitting down in one chair and resting my bandaged leg on another—where it would be easily seen—I pulled Broaddus's old felt hat low over my eyes, and, with fiddle under chin, struck up a tone.

I am not exactly a master fiddler, but "Old Zip Coon," "Buffalo Gals," "Arkansaw Traveler," materialized quite acceptably under my bow.

The sun rose above the trees, climbed on toward the meridian, and I accompanied it on its journey with the whining strains of the fiddle.

About ten o'clock I heard voices in the timber. I kept right on fiddling, not turning my head—but my nerves were as taut as the strings on which I played.

"Hi, thar, Lark! How's that there laig comin' on?"

Side by side, Tobe Leathers and Mr. Thaddeus T. Cuttle, Attorney at Law, approached from the edge of the wood. Never doubting that they were looking at Broaddus, bandaged leg, fiddle and all, they came right up.

The strains of "Old Zip Coon" ended in an abrupt discord, the fiddle dropped from my hands, and I arose suddenly —a six-gun in each fist.

"Lift 'em high, gents!" I ordered. "The string is played out!"

There was a moment of intense silence. Then:

"Hell!" yelled Leathers. "It's that damned Norton!"

His right hand flashed under his coat, came out gripping the butt of a gun—and the next instant my lead caught him just above the buckle on his belt.

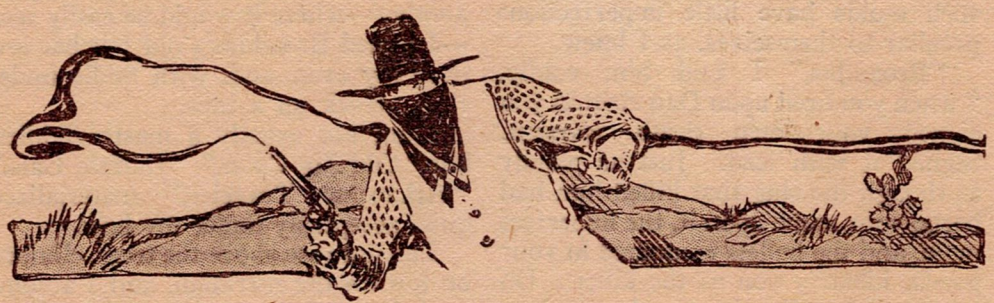
When the sheriff crashed down, clawing the air aimlessly, Cuttle almost completed a tardy draw. But before he could clear the muzzle of his gun from the holster, I dropped him with a blow on the head from the barrel of mine. He doubled up like a log jack-knife, and lay still.

That ended my case for Ozark Development. With the capture of Cuttle and Broaddus, brains and brawn respectively behind the plot, opposition to the lumber project collapsed. Billings soon had logs for his saws—and they floated down Deerskin, without much blood on them after all.

Broaddus, trapped by means of his own hand-molded lead, finally owned up to it all. He had shot Britton from behind, after Narramore, the tool, led him up for the slaughter. For which crime he was promptly hanged.

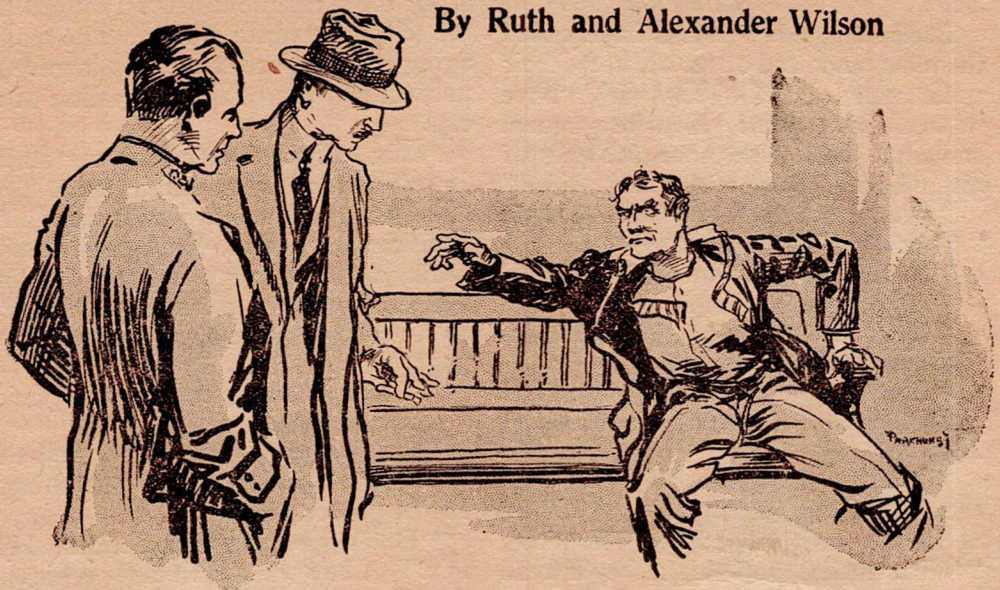
Mr. Thaddeus T. Cuttle, attorney at law though he was, shot down through the trap shortly after his accomplice fell—which was one time when justice was meted out in full measure.

For it's bad enough when ignorant, untaught men turn criminal, but when a man of education, training, intelligence goes haywire, the sooner the hangman pops his neck, the better for all concerned.



Killers Have Blue Eyes

By Ruth and Alexander Wilson



"Call me a liar, then—call me a liar!" Hymie cried, and the veins in his neck swelled

Arty Beele's Trade Journal for Gangsters Gives a Second-Rate Gunman a Full Page Spread

"EVER since Arty Beele's been here the paper's become a trade journal for gangsters," complained Gibson. "It's the same no matter where he goes. Looks to me as if they follow him on purpose so they can get free publicity."

He wrote a head on Beele's story announcing a renewal of gangster warfare, still grumbling. As eldest copy reader it was his prerogative. But he cocked an ear better to hear Beele himself who, sitting on the telegraph editor's desk, with his battered Stetson hanging over his beaky nose, was discoursing nasally.

"Hymie Jacobs and Ted Moran killers? They think so! They're second-rate gunmen, and yellow in the bargain. I'm telling you, a killer's got blue eyes. Believe it or not, he has. Harry Breslin had blue eyes. They were as blue as a June sky. And Harry was a friend of mine. He was the last real killer I knew.

"Jacobs and Moran? They're a couple of shifty, brown-eyed bums that couldn't get away with their racket in a town like Chicago—or even New York.

"I'm glad they are sore at each other and the sooner they bump each other off the better their gangs 'll like it.

"Maybe you don't know it, but they're the guys that sneaked up on Breslin when he was taking his daughter to the movies and shot him without giving him a chance."

Beele fished a cigarette out of his side pocket. "Got a match somebody?"

Somebody supplied a match and said, "What would Breslin have done if he'd been gunning for Hymie and Ted?"

Beele laughed. "He'd have called them up and told them to keep their rods well oiled. Then he'd have walked into their favorite saloon, smiled at them with those blue eyes of his and drilled them with a shot apiece."

"Well, after all," demanded Gibson, "what's the difference?"

"Difference in what, Gib?"

"Difference in technique."

"It's not technique," Beele explained. "It's ethics."

"Are Hymie and Ted the two rival gangsters you're panning in this story, Arty?"

"They're the ones, all right, and they'll know it when they read it."

Some satirical voice inquired, "What makes you think they'll read it?"

Before Beele could answer they became aware of a commotion at the door. A slender, swarthy man had pushed aside the office boy and was advancing toward Beele. He stopped before the desk, arms folded, and inspected him with exaggerated interest from head to foot.

Beele returned his gaze, smiling faintly, but not pleasantly. Nobody spoke. Then Beele said, "Hello, Hymie."

"You lousy rat," said Hymie conversationally. "Been tellin' people I'm yella, have ya?"

"Aren't you?"

Hymie's lips curled back from his teeth, he glanced about the unmoving circle of faces that showed only amused interest, and swung his fist squarely to Beele's jaw.

Arty Beele fell back on the desk and a husky cub reporter pounced on Hymie and twisted his arm back in a hammer lock.

"All right," said Beele, sitting up with some effort and rubbing his chin. "Let go of him, Buck. It's just his impetuous nature. Your right's not bad, Hymie."

The occupants of the cubby-holes about the local room had scrambled to the telegraph editor's desk. The managing editor, since Beele was involved, uncertainly offered his suggestion of a cop.

"Nix, chief. Don't spoil my stuff. Hymie's due for a run in with Ted Moran's crowd and we can't have him handicapped. Why, yes, Hymie, I still think you're yellow. But so's Moran. For God's sake go out and plug Moran so we can get some news for the front page."

"You're a lousy rat," said Hymie.

Beele laughed.

"An'," said Hymie, "if I find the heels that 've been tellin' you things, they'll go for a ride."

"Don't spoil my connections, Hymie." A boy was distributing copies of the first night extra. "Read about yourself in the paper, Hymie."

Hymie shuffled toward the door. "I'll get you yet, you louse," he said conversationally.

"And maybe I'll get you, Hymie, if Moran doesn't get you first."

Beele fished for a cigarette. "With two shots of wild-cat Hymie loves to think he's mean, but I know better."

"After that little crack on the chin, you still think he's yellow, huh?" queried Gibson.

Beele blew a spiral of smoke lazily. "Oh, hell, yes," he replied. "I don't think so, I know it."

Gibson shook his head. "You're just the same as you ever were, Arty. You think you know it all."

Beele tilted his Stetson over his nose and smoked unconcernedly. The office boy, who had been listening with enjoyment, here remarked, "'S a lady to see you, Mr. Beele."

"Lady? For me?"

"Some jane, too."

"Some nut, I bet. What's she want?"

"I dunno. I'll ask her if you want."

"Never mind. She can't punch me in the jaw anyway. Let her in."

But she had already come in. She went up to Arty, who stared at her astonished, a slim lithe girl walking very fast, and threw her arms around his neck as the preface to an emphatic kiss. The local room gasped.

"Arty's certainly taking them on the whiskers to-day," said Gibson.

"Even you would—from somethin' like that," murmured the cub, straightening his tie.

They stared at the spectacle of Arty hugging the girl in return.

"June! Little June Breslin! Last time I saw you you were still in school. How's tricks?"

"Same as ever, Arty," said the girl, smiling at him. "How are you?"

"Glad to see you, girl. Boys, I want to present you to Harry Breslin's daughter." He introduced the circle by name.

She said "How do you do," to each of them in a quiet firm voice that came rather oddly from one so youthful-looking. She could not have been more than twenty-one, but she looked like seventeen. Her glittering blond hair was clipped short, and her plain-tailored suit was almost boyish. But the assurance in her manner belied her looks; it indicated the confidence of experience.

"How's Chi?" Beele asked.

"Still shooting, Arty—you'd love it the way things are now."

Beele drew her a little to one side and the men at the desk resumed their work.

Beele asked, "What brings you here, kid?"

"Nothing special. I just wanted to see the East. Dad always promised me a trip out here. I couldn't go at first because—well, it wasn't the same going without him. But I've finally made the break."

"Just here for the trip, then?" asked Beele.

"And to look up a few friends."

"Me, for instance."

"I always did love you, Arty."

"Sweet child," said Beele. "But I didn't know you had any special friends in Philadelphia."

"You forget I'm grown up now, Arty," she said reproachfully.

"That's so. A girl will grow up. And make friends. I guess you're right. And I guess you'll run into some of your father's old crowd if you stick around long enough."

"Oh, I don't think I'll be here very long."

"Uh-huh." Beele blew some smoke out of the side of his mouth. "Have you figured that you might run into Hymie Jacobs or Ted Moran?"

She looked at him without a change of countenance. "What makes you ask that?"

"I just wondered. They've been here for awhile."

"They don't bother me," she said. "I've got to beat it now, Arty. I've got a date. Maybe you can pick me up to-night and buy me some food. Or are you broke?"

"I can always borrow five," Beele assured her. "I'll give you a ring. Where are you staying?" he asked as they went out to the elevator.

"The Madison."

"That's where Ted Moran lives."

"Is it?" she asked indifferently.

They had reached the elevator.

"So you're stopping at the same hotel where Moran stays, eh?"

She paused to adjust her hat by the reflection of the elevator door. As the car stopped and the operator shoved the door open she thrust one fist into her jacket-pocket and threw up her head.

"The fact is, Arty, I called Ted up awhile ago," she said, and stepped into the elevator. "See you later," and she blew him a kiss as the car started down.

Beele walked slowly back into the local room.

"Damn pretty girl," said the cub.

"Why," said Beele, "do you like blue eyes?"

II

BEELE came back from his dinner about six thirty, just as the city editor clamped the receiver back on its hook.

"Get busy, Arty."

"What is it?"

"They've just pinched Hymie Jacobs for knocking off Moran!"

"The call came from the Hall?"

"No. The district man called up from the Madison Hotel."

The phone rang again. The city editor answered, said "O K," and hung up. "City Hall this time. They've got him at the detective bureau now. Hop to it."

"Was Moran shot in his room at the hotel?" asked Beele quickly.

"I don't know. For God's sake step on it and find out!"

Beele ran down the stairs without waiting for the elevator.

Four minutes later he said, "Where's Ryan?" Ryan was the captain of detectives in charge of the murder squad.

"In there," said Ryan's assistant. "Talkin' to Hymie Jacobs." He pointed to the door of the little room where after-the-arrest interviews are conducted.

Beele knocked at the door. Ryan himself opened it and scowled. "What do you want now, Arty?"

"Nothing," said Beele, edging in. "Just want to find out if Hymie needs a lawyer."

"Lawyer? What that guy 'll need is a rabbi—won't you, Hymie?"

But Hymie, necktie loosened and collar unfastened, sitting hunched up in his chair, simply glared.

"What you got him in for, Ryan—snatching a hand bag?"

"Well, not exactly, eh, Hymie?"

"Picking pockets?" Beele suggested.

"Guess again, Arty."

"You tell me, Ryan."

"Murder."

"What'd he do—poison somebody's beer?"

"Oh, nothing as classy as that. Hymie just paid a visit to Ted Moran at his hotel and put a bullet between Ted's eyes. Nice little job, too," said Ryan.

He turned to Hymie. "Look, Hymie, here's a man 'll tell you if you come through with the straight goods you'll get off easier. There's plenty we know about you we can't pin on you. Those diamonds we found on Tony Lapin, f'r instance, and that old Mrs. Baxter that had her skull mashed in. But this time we've got the works on you. But you will play dumb.

"I told you seventeen times that if Moran tried to plug you first and you hauled off and shot him, that's self-defense, see? And you've got a damn good chance to beat the rap. Is that what happened? Did Ted pull his rod first?"

Hymie maintained the traditions of the captured gangster by silence.

Beele began to laugh. "Go easy, Ryan. Hymie never killed Moran."

"What?"

"I said Hymie never killed Moran. Hymie can't shoot straight enough to hit between the eyes. And besides, Moran always had him buffaloed. You're way off, Ryan. Whoever knocked off Ted Moran could shoot straight and wasn't afraid of him. And that would never be Hymie Jacobs—holy cats, if Moran'd pulled a gun on him Hymie'd 'a' got down on his knees and died of fright."

Beele was watching Hymie with a covert glance; the gangster's hands were trembling and his face was pale. "You're all wrong, Ryan," he continued. "Don't forget it took nerve to knock off a guy like Ted Moran. When Hymie shoots a man he shoots him in the back. That's more Hymie's style: walk up on a guy and plug him from an alley when he's at arm's length. Let the boy go, Ryan. Let him go out and shake down a few panhandlers."

He paused for breath. Ryan cleared his throat and looked somewhat puzzled.

Beele went on, "Has it got around yet that you've pinched Hymie for this?"

"I don't think so," said Ryan.

"Well, you know me, Ryan. I guess I have more friends that are racket guys than any police reporter you or Hymie ever knew, and Hymie 'll tell you they all read my stuff—same as the police do. And if I were sure that Hymie did this job I'd be glad to give him a swell write-up. It would get him a lot of respect. But what the hell, cap! I'd be cheating my public!

"And besides, I wouldn't want to see even a guy as yellow as Hymie go to trial for something he didn't pull. I'm a regular guy. It's my business, just like you, Ryan, to find out who killed Moran. But I know Hymie didn't do it. He just hasn't got the guts."

Hymie was livid.

"You're a damn lair," he snarled.

Beele chuckled. "Say, kid, when you get sore even those beautiful brown eyes of yours give you away! They get yellow. Come on, Hymie, give us the low-down, now; you are yellow, aren't you?"

"I'd like to show ya how yella I am!"

"You mean to say you're not?"

"Damn right I'm not! I wasn't afraid to smash you right in your own office, was I?"

Beele's mouth tightened, then he smiled. "Ever know a reporter to shoot a guy in the back, Hymie? Next thing I know you'll be tellin' me you killed Moran!"

Hymie took a quick breath. His fingers tightened on his palms, and in his eyes the brown irises showed a gleam of red. Ryan and Beele watched him avidly. Then he said, "Gimme a cigarette."

Ryan glanced at Beele; the reporter made an almost imperceptible movement of the head.

Ryan said smoothly, "Not right now, Hymie."

Hymie uttered a hoarse ejaculation. "Moran was a rat, just like you, Beele!"

"Sure he was, Hymie. But a guy like you's afraid of mice."

They could see Hymie's muscles tighten. He said quickly, "That's what you say. What'd ya say if I toldja I killed him?"

There was an instant of tense silence. Then Beele said coolly, "Oh, I'd call you a liar, that's all!"

"Call me a liar, then—call me a liar!" Hymie cried, and the veins in his neck swelled.

Ryan was on his feet. "You admit killing him, Hymie?"

"Damn right. I'll kill any rat that thinks I ain't got enough nerve to. What'n hell do I care—it's self-defense, ain't it? Ain't that what it is, cap, self-defense?"

"Sign your name to that," said Beele easily, "sign your name to it, Hymie, and I'll give you the write-up of your life. I'll give you a write-up that 'll smear you on every front page from here to Chicago."

"Gimme a cigarette," said Hymie.

Beele gave him a cigarette and a match.

"I'll call a stenographer," said Ryan, "and we'll get it all down just the way it happened, Hymie. You'll be all right when we get it all down."

"I'm all right now, cap."

"Sure, but we might as well get it all down and get it off your mind. Then maybe the district attorney 'll let you be bailed out."

"How d'ya mean—ain't it self-defense?"

"Well, it can't be more than manslaughter. What do you think, Arty? You'll get bail O K."

"It's O K with me right now," said Hymie. "Only I ain't signin' nothin'."

"What's that?"

"You heard me," replied Hymie. "'F I sign to it I'll be railroaded." His

eyes sparkled shrewdly. "I'm no sap. I've changed my mind. I never killed Moran."

Ryan snatched the cigarette out of Hymie's mouth and yelled, "What'n hell you pullin' now?"

"You heard me," Hymie repeated. "I ain't pullin' a thing. Only I didn't do it. And I ain't gonna be foxed into no confession. I've seen guys get theirs that way before." He glared at Beele malevolently. "Sure, I'm yella. Sure. An' what of it?"

Beele fished out a cigarette and lit it. Then he said, "Just step outside, will you, Ryan? I want to talk to Hymie on the q. t."

Ryan looked doubtful.

"Go on, Ryan, I won't eat your prisoner. I'll call you in a few minutes."

"Well—" said Ryan, and he walked out. He sat down at his desk in the outer office, and still wondering what Beele could have to say to Hymie, took Hymie's automatic out of his desk drawer and examined it casually. It was a .38 caliber Colt. The clip was full, but Ryan knew that enough time had elapsed between the killing of Moran and Hymie's arrest for Hymie to have replaced the discharged cartridge.

Ryan had seen the gun before—he had once confiscated it, in fact, and Hymie had hired a lawyer to get it back on some legal technicality.

"These birds get used to gats like some people get used to fountain pens," he said to himself.

Then the door of the little room opened and Beele stuck his head through.

"Bring in your stenographer, Ryan. Hymie's changed his mind again."

Ryan said, "Do you mean it this time, Hymie?"

"He means it," said Beele grimly.

The color had drained out of Hymie's face and he was pale under his swarthy skin. Ryan called a stenographer. Directed by Beele, Hymie dictated a confession which alleged self-defense. Then Hymie was led away to the cell-room.

"What'd you do to him, Arty?" asked Ryan.

"Just talked to him."

"Just talked to him? What about?"

"Nothing much. You've got the confession. What more do you want?"

"I want to know what you said to Hymie."

"What's in it for me if I tell you?"

"What do you want?"

"Usual terms. Just remember the story's mine until our next edition hits the street."

"What'd you tell him?"

"Just between you and me, Ryan?"

"Just you and me, Arty."

Beele walked toward the door. "I just told him to expect a phone call from a lady."

"Yeah."

"That's all, Ryan. I just told him—well, that's what I told him. Just that a girl was looking for his telephone number."

III

THE men at the copy desk looked up as Beele came into the room. He was smiling. His battered Stetson was tipped over one eye. He fished out a cigarette and said, "Got a match, somebody?"

"You must be feeling good! What are you so chipper about anyway?" demanded Gibson.

"Nothing much. Got five until Friday?"

"My God!" exclaimed Gibson mockingly. "You are feeling good. Did Hymie Jacobs kiss you or something?"

"No—not exactly. Hymie just came across with an interview—an exclusive one."

"Confessed that he killed the boyfriend Moran, I suppose," said Gibson with heavy sarcasm.

"Just that little thing," replied Beele. "Just as a favor to Arty Beele. Yes, sir. Signed, sealed and delivered, and a carbon for the copy desk!"

He threw the carbon at Gibson. "And maybe I won't give the boy a write-up—watch me. But it won't be the kind he's looking for."

The office boy came hustling up. "Hey, Mr. Beele," he panted, "onna telephone. It's the outside one, the pay station by the front door."

Beele threw down his butt and was out in the hall running down the stairs. In the little booth he closed the door tightly before he said, "Hello."

"That you, Arty?" Ryan's voice came over the wire. "Listen, I promised you this story's all yours, but I don't know if it's the same story!"

"What's eatin' you, Ryan? What've you got?" Beele demanded hoarsely.

"Listen. I'm calling you on this wire because I don't want your switchboard man in on this. But right after you left I found out the bullet that killed Moran's a .32. Get that? And Hymie's gun's a .38. There's no mistake about it. I know Hymie's rod. It ain't likely he borrowed another to get Moran. You know how those guys are about their rods. But hisn's a .38!"

Beele was silent for a moment.

"Well, Arty, what do you say?"

"What do *you* say, Ryan?"

Ryan's voice was full of disgusted rage. "I say that if he's gonna get off again it's a dirty, lousy shame! Hell, Arty, he should have gone to the chair for killing that Baxter woman, and—"

"And Harry Breslin," said Beele softly. "But what's worrying you, Ryan?"

"He'll repudiate the confession, that's what. I just know it!"

"You don't know a thing," said Beele. "You got that confession in the safe?"

"I'll say I have!"

"Give it to the district attorney in the morning. When a guy's yellow, he's yellow," said Beele, and hung up.

He walked slowly up the stairs to the local room. The men at the copy desk eyed him as he approached a vacant typewriter.

"Say," said Gibson derisively, pointing to the copy of Hymie's confession, "according to this the boy did a good job of killing. Do you still think killers have blue eyes?"

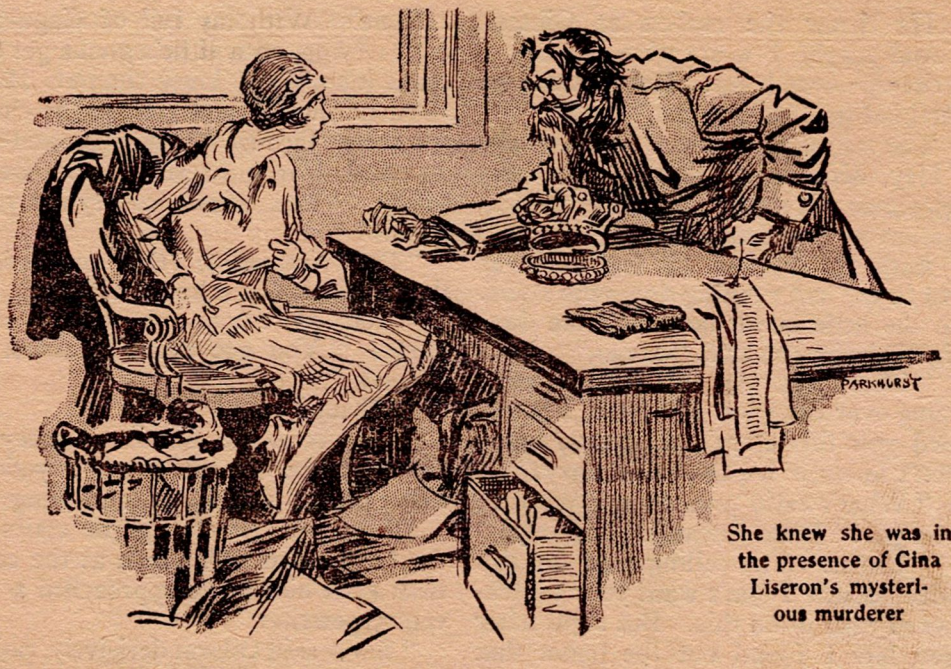
Beele gave him a stare, and a faint smile, a longer stare, and a fainter smile.

"I know they do," he said, and passed on.

West's Bad Men Were Blond

COLD killers had frosty coloring in eyes, hair and complexion, according to the history of our Western frontier. Like all the noted killers of the West, Billy the Kid was a blond. Wild Bill Hickok, Ben Thompson, King Fisher, Henry Plummer, Clay Allison, Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Frank and Jesse James, the Youngers, the Daltons—the list of others is long—were all blond.

Furthermore, the West's Bad Men were not lowering heavy brutes, but most of them good looking. Wild Bill Hickok, beau ideal of desperadoes, was the handsomest man on the frontier.



She knew she was in the presence of Gina Liseron's mysterious murderer

The Telephone Murders

Swift Death Came to the Carnival Queen and Sent a Fair Detective on the Slayer's Trail

By Leon Groc

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

SNATCHED from her inconspicuous life as a stenographer, Marguerite Robin leaped into fame overnight when she was chosen as the city's "Queen of Carnival."

Thousands lined the streets for a glimpse of her on the day of her triumph—a triumph she never lived to realize.

For she was hurriedly called to a telephone booth just before she mounted the throne of her gayly bedecked float—and was found murdered in the booth half an hour later, a dagger plunged into her back.

But what made the mystery more astounding was that the famous actress, Gina Liseron, who was talking to Marguerite at the time of her death, also was murdered by the same means.

Even the great detective, M. Raffinot, was baffled by the mysterious circumstances, and in a half jest with his daughter Yveline, a cub reporter, he accepted her challenge to solve the strange murders.

With innate genius Yveline conceived the idea of secretly entering the home of the murdered actress. She was accompanied by Marguerite's sweet-

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for December 8

heart, Jacques Servan, and another man.

They succeeded in entering the actress's home, but were barely inside when they were startled by the sound of muffled footsteps.

CHAPTER VIII

A Family Gathering

HOLDING their breath and excited by the sudden pounding of their hearts, the three listened. The stairs creaked lightly, as if under the weight of some one mounting with extreme precaution.

"He is coming in here," whispered Yveline.

Their eyes had grown accustomed again to the dim light.

On one side of the room heavy curtains hung from the ceiling, and they slipped behind these. The door swung open noiselessly, and a man entered carrying an electric torch which cast its beam ahead of him, leaving his face in the shadow.

He swung the shaft of light across the room in a semicircle, like a searchlight, until it came to rest on the bookcase, toward which he moved deliberately.

But the reflection of the light, thrown back from the glass door of the bookcase, illuminated his face for an instant. Through the opening of the curtains Yveline caught sight of a profile, set off by a sweeping mustache, which she recognized. She had thought before that the silhouette was familiar; now she was sure.

"Hello, dad," she said quietly, stepping from her hiding place.

The man started, and the torch twisted in his hand, throwing the light full on his face. It was Cesar-Alexandre Raffinot. The sudden appearance of his daughter had apparently dumfounded him.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded in a hoarse tone.

"Just what you are doing," laughed Yveline. "With my two assistants, I am carrying on a little extra-legal investigation."

She drew the curtain to one side, revealing Jacques and Tiburce, who bowed with ironical respect before the famous detective whom they had just outwitted at his own game.

"Oh, very well, then," grumbled Raffinot, "if you have taken possession here—"

He made a gesture as if he were about to withdraw and leave the field to his daughter.

Yveline realized that he was irritated at finding her there ahead of him, and extended her hand toward him impulsively.

"Don't you want to give up this foolish rivalry and let us work together?" she asked.

Raffinot, who was already at the door, turned and smiled.

"No, daughter," he said; "go ahead and amuse yourself. I have serious work to do."

"Just as you wish," said Yveline dryly, annoyed in her turn.

Cesar-Alexandre laid his hand on the doorknob, then paused, and turned once more toward his daughter.

"By the way," he said, "how did you and these other two people get in here?"

"How did you get in yourself?"

"I might tell you that that is my business, and that I am your father, and that I am beginning to get tired of finding you everywhere I go. But, nevertheless, I will let you know that I have a permit from the inspector, that one of the men from headquarters came with me to let me in, and is waiting downstairs for me now to finish my investigation.

"But I prefer to come back when there aren't so many people here. In the meantime, would you mind telling me how you got in?"

Yveline appeared unruffled by this display of paternal anger, and replied in a tone of triumph:

"We came in by the same route the murderer took!"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

She could not resist the temptation to take the famous Raffinot down a peg, and prove that she was not a collaborator to be scorned.

While Tiburce remained impassive and Jacques grinned slyly, she explained the steps she had taken—omitting only what the engineer had told her and any reference to the sealed box. She pointed out the bookcase and the opening in the skylight; described the cramp-irons, the rope ladder, and the furnished room.

Raffinot listened with growing amazement. He seemed dazed by his daughter's discoveries, and, while she talked, mopped his brow with a scarlet silk handkerchief. When she had finished he stammered:

"But this is marvelous! Do you mean to say you found all that out yourself?"

"Am not I your daughter?"

She expected this handsome reply to evoke a display of pride and paternal love. But, either from professional jealousy or some more intimate emotion, Cesar-Alexandre Raffinot gave no sign of pleasure or tenderness.

"Well," he said coldly, "since you are my daughter, will you do me the favor of going back home where you belong, and not going out again in the middle of the night without my permission—especially with men whom I do not know—or else know only too well?"

Yveline made a gesture of rebellion, which she checked at once.

"Since you are going to play the noble father," she said, "I can only submit—"

Raffinot seemed appeased, but Jacques, who had flushed at the detective's last words, stepped toward him. "Monsieur," he began, "I—"

But Yveline interrupted him.

"Please," she begged, "don't quarrel with dad."

At the appeal in her tone Jacques's anger softened and in his heart he excused the father because of the daughter.

During this scene Tiburce had not stirred. And it was on him that Raffinot turned, as if realizing that the ex-convict had been an important factor in Yveline's success.

"As for you, Curly-Head," he said harshly, "I forbid you to run around any more satisfying every whim of this foolish young girl."

Tiburce remained silent. One would have said that he had not heard the detective's words.

Meanwhile, Yveline glanced at the watch on her wrist and remarked:

"Well, dad, so I am to go home? Would you mind telling your men from headquarters to let me out? I'll see you again soon, Jacques! To-morrow, Tiburce!"

Vaguely uneasy at this obedience to which he was not accustomed, but flattered nevertheless, Raffinot consented with a gesture and accompanied his daughter down the stairs.

Left alone in the studio, the other two consulted for a moment, and then retraced their steps along the route laid out for them by Gina's murderer. When they were once more on the gutter, Tiburce replaced the movable pane, and then made a final examination of the grounds.

"Oh, ho!" he exclaimed. "Here is something precious!"

He had just found a round, cloth-covered button bearing the stamp of a tailor on the back, which had apparently been torn from the coat of the murderer as he was making his escape.

"Let me have it," said Jacques eagerly.

But the old man shook his head and slipped the button into his pocket.

"For Mlle. Yveline," he said.

Meanwhile, Raffinot, having put his daughter in a taxi and given the driver the address, returned to the studio,

where he spent the next two hours in a search that was apparently fruitless, for he returned home in a distinctly bad humor.

The amateur detective occupied an apartment near the Champ-de-Mars. Everything was quiet when he entered.

"She's probably sound alseep by now," he thought. He paused before Yveline's door, but, hearing no sound, tiptoed quietly to his own room.

In spite of himself, he felt some twinges of remorse at his severity with Yveline, whom he usually spoiled. A widower for the past ten years, he adored his daughter. During his long trips all over the world, while he had been accumulating his fortune, he had thought only of her and worked only for her.

When he had finally settled in Paris and taken her from the boarding school, where she had received an excellent education, he had enjoyed having her as the charming and gay mistress of his home.

Then how did it happen that he was not pleased now at discovering in her the same gifts of logic and intuition on which he prided himself? What subconscious and obscure motives prevented him from letting her work with him?

Such was perhaps the theme of his meditations when the telephone crackled in the silence of the house.

Although accustomed to being disturbed at any hour of the night by appeals for help in knotty problems, he trembled at this unexpected ring.

"Hello! M. Raffinot? This is the Paris *Daily*. Hold the line a minute. Somebody to speak to you."

And Cesar-Alexandre heard the voice of his daughter:

"Hello, that you, dad? I hope you haven't worried about me. I am at the office. I tried to get you on the phone twice, but I guess you hadn't come in. I am just finishing my article, and will be home in a little while."

"Your article?"

"Yes, and it is going to be a knockout! The readers of the *Daily* will hold their breath to-morrow when they read a detailed account of how the murderer entered Gina's studio."

"You mean to say you are going to publish—"

"Of course I am! You seem to forget that I am a reporter and not a detective. When I make an investigation, it is to write about it, and not to tell it to the judge! Well, I'll see you later."

And she hung up.

It was fortunate for Yveline at that moment that she was out of her father's reach. For Raffinot's exasperation was by now so acute that, had she been in the room with him, she might have had her ears boxed for the first time in her life.

CHAPTER IX

A Sensational Scoop

UNTIL the day when the mysterious drama of the "Telephone Murder" had taken place Yveline had been treated with some disdain, at least from a professional point of view, at the Paris *Daily*. While the men with whom she worked all recognized her charm, and spoke of it, they could not take her seriously as a reporter.

But, little by little, she had won them over, by her good fellowship and her lack of coquetry. In the editorial offices she announced: "I am one of the boys here." And on this basis she was gradually accepted by the other reporters, who had no time to waste on chivalry during working hours.

Contrary to the general opinion, a reporter's life requires a devotion and consistency of effort that few other professions exact. In the newspaper office, more than anywhere else, one must have the sacred fire, be prepared to sacrifice his personal life, and renounce forever any hope of regular hours for sleep or meals.

The other reporters were skeptical of the idea that this elegant and delicate young lady could stand the gaff for long. Without wishing to discourage her, they waited with some amusement for her to get enough of it. Until now she had had no chance to show her mettle.

She had been given little items to follow up, where she had merely had to record the facts. And it was pure luck that she had been assigned to help the man who was covering the Carnival parade, since the police station of the Fifteenth Ward had happened to be in her district.

The brilliant story she had turned in concerning the double crime had suddenly brought her into notice. And even then she had said nothing about the "little sealed box," which she was reserving for a more sensational article later on.

Similarly, because of her promise to Jacques, she had omitted most of her interview with him.

But the news she was bringing to the paper to-night was t h r i l l i n g enough for her to have no need of anything more.

When she entered the offices she was welcomed with a series of questions, revealing the passion with which everybody, including the reporters, had been following the strange and sanguinary history of the double murder.

"Well, Raffinot, what's new? Did they arrest the murderers? Have you found out how your little Queen of Queens got killed? What startling news have you got this time?"

Yveline replied, with a smile: "I drew a plum this time, boys."

She hurried toward the desk, to make sure that space was held open for her.

The editor received her brusquely.

"Look here, young lady, this is no time to be bringing your stuff in. You know that we've got to have a story on that murder business. The public is interested. And I need copy, lots of copy, even if there is no news—"

"But there is news!" exclaimed Yveline. "Big news!"

And in a single breath she told him all that she could of Jacques's confidences: that Marguerite and Gina were sisters, that they had apparently belonged to a great family of the old régime in Russia, and that they had escaped from the country during the revolution—

But the editor interrupted her.

"We know all that," he said. "The police dug that stuff up, and Parquet has done a story on it."

Yveline was abashed for a moment, but then continued more calmly:

"I have something else, too. I know how the murderer of Gina Liseron got into her studio and how he got away. I know the room he lived in before the crime. I have gone over the same path he took."

And she outlined her adventure of that evening, except for her meeting with her father.

When she had finished, the editor remarked:

"Not bad. Now hurry up and get it on paper."

He consulted his watch and added: "Let me have the first half of it as soon as possible. We are late as it is."

Disappointed by this lack of enthusiasm, Yveline returned to the outer office and set to work.

But she did not know her editor, who concealed an ardent spirit, a high professional conscience, and a real passion for his job, under his dry manner.

She would have been reassured if she could have heard him phoning to the managing editor of the *Daily*, as soon as she had left the office: "That little Raffinot kid is a wonder. She has just brought us in a story that'll put your eye out. I think we'll have to give her a raise next month."

In any case, "the Raffinot kid" was finding her ardor revive as she drew up her account of the evening. She

wrote fluently, without rereading or polishing her sentences, with the result that she produced a vivid, clear, and moving article—a little masterpiece of reporting.

The rumor of her exploit had spread through the office, and when she had finished a number of reporters came up to congratulate her.

"That youngster will go far," prophesied one of the veterans, an old newspaper man who had grown white-haired in the harness and was the terror of all the cubs.

Yveline, complimented and exultant, had no doubt that she was already launched as an "ace" among reporters. She had taken a mischievous delight in telephoning her father, but she did not suspect that her success had only provoked his anger.

The revelations that appeared the next morning in the *Daily*, under the signature of Yveline Raffinot, aroused a storm of interest, not only in the public, but in police circles as well, where c o n f u s i o n and irritation reigned.

Though the murder of the Queen of Queens still remained inexplicable, the method, if not the motive, of Gina Liseron's had been deciphered. There was now at least a clew—and a promising one at that.

The unlucky janitor, who had had the idea of making a few extra francs by renting out a furnished room to strangers, was surrounded by a swarm of reporters, detectives, and amateurs. Eventually he was summoned before M. Legerbier, the investigating magistrate, to whom he reported in a state of terror.

His eyes timidly on the floor, he listened to a severe reprimand and learned that he had been lacking in common honesty when he had rented a furnished room without the knowledge of the owners of the building; also that he had violated the police regulations by failing to report his tenant at the station.

The judge added that the case was an extremely serious one and mentioned "moral complicity" in the death of Gina Liseron; and when he considered that the poor janitor was reduced to defenselessness, he informed him that he would receive his testimony.

To tell the truth, most of M. Legerbier's energy was wasted. The janitor asked nothing better than to the allowed to talk, and it would not have been necessary to make him writhe first on the spit. He naïvely made this clear himself, when his examination was finished, by remarking to the magistrate, who was congratulating himself on the successsful result he had obtained:

"Besides, your honor, I have already told all that this morning to the young lady who came from the *Daily*. You can read it in the extra they're crying outside now."

M. Legerbier flushed with annoyance. By giving the whole story to the papers before reporting it to the inspector, this fool had spoiled the triumph of the police.

He dismissed him, therefore, with little ceremony, and then signed a warrant for the arrest of "One Dimitri Avinoff, presumably a Russian subject," whose description was given according to the statements of the janitor.

After which, he sent out for a copy of the extra of the Paris *Daily*, where he had the humiliation of finding all the details, collected that morning by Yveline.

The last occupancy of the furnished room dated from two months ago to a day—which, as Yveline pointed out, was the day after Gina had moved in.

The suspected tenant was a man of medium height, fairly stout. He wore a long, black beard, which concealed the lower part of his face. His eyesight was evidently weak, for a pair of yellow spectacles sat astride his nose. He was dressed simply, but respectably.

He spoke a more or less correct French, though with a foreign accent, and gave his name as Dimitri Avinoff. The janitor had noticed that he seldom spent the night in his room, and usually was there only a few hours during the day.

On the day of the carnival he had come a little before eleven in the morning, and had left hurriedly about a quarter after one—that is to say, immediately after the approximate hour of Gina's death. Since then he had not returned, although he had paid his rent for three months in advance. On his last visit, he had carried a cumbersome bundle away with him under his arm—no doubt the rope ladder, suggested Yveline—and had left nothing in the room.

In reply to questions from Yveline, the janitor had declared that, in taking care of the room, he had never noticed any anarchistic pamphlets, bombs, nor explosives of any kind.

And the poor fellow, realizing from these questions that Dimitri Avinoff was suspected of being a terrorist, had turned green and all but grown sick at his stomach from retrospective fear.

Finally, when Yveline had asked where he had first known his tenant, he had replied that the latter had been introduced to him by the preceding tenant, who had occupied the little room for several years.

The former tenant was named Aristide Bonafigue, and lived at present in an attic in the rue Mouffetard.

On reading this part of the interview, M. Legerbier gnawed at his lips. It had not occurred to him to ask that question.

And probably that impudent girl, who had the cheek to outwit the police, had carried her investigation to its logical end and hurried to Bonafigue's. He expected to find an account of her visit in the article.

But, for some reason, Yveline had apparently neglected this. There was not another word about the former tenant. The article concluded with a series of general deductions, which were no doubt of great interest to the public, but certainly of none of M. Legerbier.

"This time," he murmured, "she won't get ahead of me."

He set about at once drawing up a summons for the said Aristide Bonafigue, rue Mouffetard, but was interrupted by a knock on the door. The doorman entered with a card in his hand and grumbled:

"This man insists on seeing you, your honor. He says it has to do with the Avinoff case—"

The inspector seized the card and, after a glance at the name, exclaimed:

"Providence is playing into my hand! Send him in at once."

On the card was printed:

ARISTIDE BONAFIGUE
Lyric Tenor and Instructor of Voice

CHAPTER X
A Way to Fame

THE art of music had evidently supplied the newcomer with little nourishment, for he was as gaunt as any ascetic in the desert. His clothes fluttered about his body in nameless shreds, exuding a mingled perfume of stale tobacco and spoiled meat.

Yet Aristide Bonafigue prided himself on the elegance of his manners. He removed the grimy rag that served him as a hat with a sweep that would have done honor to the *Three Musketeers*. Then he bowed and placed one hand on his heart to emphasize his opening words:

"I trust, your honor, that I may be of humble service to the cause of justice in our country, and therefore I have come to lay my voluntary testimony before you, in the hope that it may shed light on your darkness."

He bowed again and waited.

"Never mind bowing," said the magistrate. "Sit down and tell me

what you know about Dimitri Avinoff."

"The truth is, your honor, I don't know him," replied Bonafigue simply.

M. Legerbier's table rattled under the blow it received from the palm of his hand.

"Are you making fun of me?" he demanded. "Did you, or did you not, introduce Avinoff to the janitor of the house where you used to live? And, furthermore, what are you doing here now, if you don't know the man we are looking for?"

Aristide settled himself in the armchair he had taken and said deliberately:

"Let us distinguish clearly, your honor, between two different situations. It is true that I introduced a man known as Dimitri Avinoff to my ex-janitor; but that does not prove that I was acquainted with him. I will tell you just how it happened.

"Two months ago I left the house one evening, wondering where and how I was going to dine—the life of an artist, your honor, has its ups and downs—"

"No doubt, no doubt," interrupted M. Legerbier.

"Well, as I came out of the house, a man with a black beard and spectacles stopped me and asked, with a strong foreign accent, if I were "the great opera singer, Aristide Bonafigue?' The fact is, your honor, I never sang in anything but light opera, and it has been twenty years since I have done that.

"Since then, I have lived by giving music lessons, which, as your honor may know, are not well paid. But it seemed to me that there was no need to explain all that to the stranger. Put yourself in my place, your honor: what would you have done?"

A clearing of his throat and a gesture of impatience were the only reply M. Legerbier granted to the singer's question. The latter continued:

"After that, the stranger offered to set me up to a glass of beer. I accepted, on condition that we have a sandwich with it. So we fell to talking while we drank—and no doubt we drank a good deal while we talked.

"At any rate, he happened to remark that he would be willing to pay five hundred francs to live in the neighborhood of the Champs-Elysees, where he wanted to find a furnished room.

"Well, it looked like a chance to me, and so finally, for five hundred francs—which I needed badly—I introduced Dimitri Avinoff—at least, that was the name he gave me—to the janitor, as an old friend of mine who was visiting Paris and whom I wanted to give my room up to. And that was all there was to it, your honor."

"Humph! Well, you can sign your deposition, but it doesn't amount to much."

The stenographer, who had taken down his story, presented the paper to Astride, who signed it with a magnificent flourish, replying at the same time:

"That is true, your honor. The young lady said the same thing when I told it to her."

"What young lady?"

"A little blond reporter who came to see me this morning. She said it was my duty to report what I knew to you, but that it was not worth an extra of the *Daily*."

This time M. Legerbier did not have enough strength left to grow angry. He waved the lyric tenor from his office and consoled himself by scolding the stenographer.

Meanwhile the mysterious Dimitri Avinoff had achieved a celebrity in Paris that the greatest scholar or singer might have sought in vain. Every one was speculating on the "bearded Russian," who was suspected of the murder of Gina Liseron, and copies of the extra containing the janitor's story melted away like snowflakes in June.

The janitor himself lost his job, but received offers of so many others that

he was able to look them over and take his choice. When the humble rôle of Aristide Bonafigue in the case became known, the singer found in twenty-four hours the engagement he had dreamed of for twenty years.

And, as all things end in a song, he was soon appearing nightly in a music hall, where he delivered a composition known as "The Confession of the Bearded Russian"—a tempting mixture of humor and sentimentality.

Yet these sensational discoveries concerning Gina's death still afforded no satisfactory explanation of the murder of Marguerite Robin in a telephone booth with the door bolted.

One puzzling detail, discovered this time by the police after the autopsy, completed the confusion in all minds: the wound that had resulted in the death of the actress had been caused by the same dagger that had slain the Queen of Queens—or, at least, by one of identical make.

Various absurd theories were built up on this fact. A medium, who was expert in the art of controlling ectoplasm, gave out an interview to the effect that the dagger had passed through the walls of the booth and struck down Marguerite Robin of its own will, at the command of Gina's murderer.

And what was more extraordinary still, there were many people who accepted this hypothesis, and professors who expounded it in technical terms which were the more convincing because nobody understood them.

Yveline Raffinot merely shrugged her shoulders at this childish theory of the murders.

"The problem has not yet been stated correctly," she said. "There is an error somewhere in our premises. And when we find that, the solution will follow of itself."

But during this delay, Dimitri Avinoff had apparently vanished from the face of the earth. Since the Mid-Lent Carnival, no one in Paris had seen the bearded Russian with the yellow spectacles.

CHAPTER XI

In Search of a Coronet

CESAR-ALEXANDRE RAFFINOT had mastered his irritation toward his daughter, and the little family scene that had occurred in the middle of the night, at Gina's studio, was not repeated. As in the past, the detective left Yveline complete freedom of movement.

In fact, it seemed at times as if Raffinot was both jealous and proud of her swift and brilliant success.

But the investigation had come to a halt. The promising results obtained at first had brought forth no sequel. Yveline, with the help of Jacques Servan and Tiburce, searched in vain for some trace of the bearded Russian.

They had, to be sure, one clew: the cloth-covered button that the ex-convict had found and that bore the stamp of a fashionable tailor.

But when the latter was questioned, he declared that there were no Russians among his customers, nor, in fact, any one corresponding to the description of Dimitri Avinoff; and that, besides, he used so many buttons like the one in question that it could have little value as a clew.

Jacques, who was present during this conversation, suspected the tailor of being purposely vague from fear of seeing his name connected with the murder; but at a hint to this effect, the tailor turned to Yveline with a smile.

"My dear young lady," he said, "the investigating magistrate, M. Legerbier, and your father, M. Raffinot, are both good customers of mine. If I had had the slightest knowledge of your bearded Russian, you may be sure I would have told them about it."

But in spite of this deadlock, Tiburce preserved the button conscientiously. "It may be useful before we get through," he remarked.

Yveline was still convinced that the key to the riddle would be found in the little sealed box, and regretted that she had not been able to make a thorough search of the house, as she had intended, the night of their adventure as burglars.

She lamented her father's ill-timed arrival, which had forced her to give up her plan, and remarked to her companions for perhaps the hundredth time:

"Dad and I simply get in each other's way in this absurd duel. We are continually interfering. What wouldn't we do if we were united!"

Her intimacy with Jacques grew closer from day to day. And it must be admitted, as one more responsibility to the charge of human nature, that the engineer seemed to grow less and less unhappy. In the presence of the Parisian with the honey-colored hair, he was inclined to forget the young Slav, whose exotic fascination had conquered him, and who had perished so tragically.

If his passion for discovering the truth of her death was still intense, this was due — though he would not have confessed it to himself—more to the contagion of Yveline's ardor than to the fact that Marguerite's murder cried out for vengeance.

He discovered now that Yveline's charm, though more subtle than Marguerite's beauty, was no less powerful. And he allowed himself to drift, without struggle, in the current of the new emotion that was rising in him.

They saw each other almost every day. Yveline was restless at having nothing for the paper but scraps of information, which often overlapped the stories turned in by Parquet.

Jacques encouraged her as well as he could. It seemed now as if it was she, and not himself, who was chiefly concerned in the affair. She was growing nervous, and easily irritated.

Public interest, meanwhile, had been weaned away from the Telephone Murders by other events. News is in its essence fugitive: Yveline was no longer in the limelight.

Her copy had passed from the first to the second page, and from the second to the third. Her newly acquired fame was already growing dim. There was talk in the office of dropping the Telephone Murders entirely for the time being and putting her on other work.

But she persisted and begged for permission to devote her full time to this investigation, promising that there would be sensational news to come. The thought of the little sealed box hypnotized her. She longed to discover it and despaired of ever doing so.

It was Tiburce who put her on the scent. Contrary to his usual taciturn manner, he told one day how the convicts used to hide their tools when they were planning to escape; and related the story of one lifer, who had concealed his file and chisel in the cartridge box of his guard!

"I have a notion," he concluded, "that our mysterious little box is hidden in some such way."

At these words Jacques trembled.

"I have also had an idea," he said, "which I have been afraid to propose, because it seemed fantastic. But our friend's story gives me courage to suggest it.

"From Gina's last words, which were, if I remember right, 'Tell Marguerite—in the cor—' you have assumed that the box must be hidden in some corner in the studio or other part of the building; and if we hadn't been interrupted that night, you were going to make a search of the house. Am I right?"

Yveline nodded her head.

"Well," continued the engineer, "I have always been doubtful of that theory. Of course, the beginning of the word that was cut off by Gina's brutal death, naturally suggests 'corner.'

"But every little girl thinks first of a corner when she wants to hide her

dolls, and Gina Liseron was a woman of the world, with experience and subtlety. It therefore seemed to me that she would have found something less naïve than a corner; and that the problem was to find some other word beginning with these same three letters."

"Not fantastic at all," murmured Tiburce. "Very reasonable."

"Furthermore," Jacques went on, "the rest of the phrase indicates clearly that the unfinished word was a noun. I studied over this for a week without thinking of anything satisfactory.

"But last night I got out a dictionary and went through the words beginning with 'cor—' to see if there were any that I could build a plausible hypothesis on. And one of them struck me as soon as I saw it: the word *coronet.*"

"Why 'coronet' rather than 'cord,' or 'cornet,' or 'corset,' or any other noun?" asked Yveline.

"Because of a detail I had forgotten, since it seemed insignificant at the time, but came back to me in a flash when I saw that word."

"There are no insignificant details," said Tiburce sagely.

"You know," resumed Jacques, "that the Queen of Queens received a great many presents. Her royal costume, in particular, was supplied either by the big department stores, or by individuals, or the committee.

"Well, the evening before the carnival, an unknown person sent her a coronet, which I caught a glimpse of. It was imitation, of course, but its gold leaf, with false diamonds, was beautifully made.

"And it was large enough so that it would not have been impossible to have a secret mechanism, opening a chamber in the interior where a small object could have been hidden."

"A very logical suggestion!" exclaimed Yveline. "We know from what we have learned that the two sisters were watched, hunted down, and guarded by implacable enemies.

"They had been waiting in suspense for this box, which contained something infinitely precious to them—perhaps their salvation. It was essential for them to receive it without the knowledge of their enemies. And it would have been a perfect solution of their difficulty for the sender to have hidden it in the coronet of the Queen of Queens."

"Yes," said Tiburce, "but there is one weak point."

"What is that?"

"That after the double murder, the sender did not appear. From my point of view, if we assume that the box was concealed in the coronet, this is what must have happened: Gina received the box the day before the carnival—how, we do not know, and perhaps through some one who did not realize the value of what he was sending.

"Knowing that she was being watched, she was unwilling to keep it in her possession and anxious to put it in her sister's hands; but she was not able to see Marguerite that day. So, after looking in vain for some safe place to hide it, she had the idea of buying a theatrical coronet with a false bottom—unless she already had one among her costumes, which is not unlikely—and secreting the box inside it.

"She then sent the coronet to Marguerite, planning to tell her in person what it contained. That would explain why she was so distressed the day of the murder, when she had no doubt received some sinister warning or foreboding of evil, and tried to get in touch with Marguerite through M. Servan.

"But apparently she was not given time to carry out her purpose, since her last words to Mlle. Yveline were a message to Marguerite, whose fate she was ignorant of."

Curly-Head, who was not in the habit of speaking at such length, was breathing heavily.

"Good for you, Tiburce!" said Yveline. "You haven't forgotten that you were once a professor of philoso-

phy; logic is your field, and your picture of what took place is a masterpiece."

"If we could only find as easy an explanation of Marguerite's murder," sighed Jacques.

Tiburce turned his gleaming eyes on the engineer.

"Patience, M. Servan," he said. "That will come in time."

"In the meanwhile," remarked Yveline, "this is a very ingenious theory, but it is still just a theory and nothing else, until we can prove it by—"

"—getting our hands on that gilded coronet that was sent to the Queen of Queens by an unknown benefactor," finished Jacques.

"Exactly."

"Well, this morning when I was turning this idea over in my head, I tried to remember what had been done with it. Probably, in the confusion following the discovery of the crime, all the accessories were taken with the Queen's float to the factory where it had been made.

"But what became of them there? Did they find their way into some second-hand shop or are they still piled up in a corner? Or did the police take possession of them? A little investigating will answer those questions without any trouble."

A faint smile on Yveline's lips revealed the budding of an idea in her mind. Opening the leather brief-case she always carried, and which sometimes made people mistake her for a law student, she took out a slim pamphlet.

"I have the program that was printed for the carnival," she said. "And I think there was an ad in it by the firm that made the float. Here it is, in capital letters: The Float for the Queen of Queens supplied by Massepain & Co., Quai de Javel. They even give the phone number. We can run this clew down at once."

The above conversation had taken place in an office of the Paris *Daily*, which had been put at Yveline's disposal to receive visitors in connection with her investigation.

She lifted the receiver of the phone on her desk and asked for Massepain & Co.

To overcome any reluctance in giving her the information she desired, Yveline resorted to a white lie: "I am calling for M. Legerbier, investigating magistrate—" she began.

Jacques and Tiburce waited silently while her question was being answered. When she had apparently learned all that the person at the other end of the wire could tell her, she said thank you, hung up, and turned to her companions.

"All the royal accessories," she said with a frown of disappointment, "were bought up by a rich and eccentric American, who contributed a large sum to the Public Welfare—"

"In that case," said Jacques, "I suppose the coronet is halfway across the Atlantic by now."

"Not necessarily," replied Yveline. "We still have some hope. The American, whose hobby is collecting souvenirs of crime, was still in Paris a few days ago.

"They don't know at Messepain & Co. whether he has gone back to the United States yet or not. In any case, I have his name and address: Mr. C. B. Williamson, Hotel Washington, on the Champs-Elysees."

"The telephone," said Jacques briefly.

"No, a taxi," corrected Tiburce.

"He is right," said Yveline. "It is better to go in person, without losing any time."

CHAPTER XII

Find the Man!

LESS than a quarter of an hour later a taxi deposited all three in the Champs-Elysees, before the imposing entrance of the Hotel Washington.

There a fresh disappointment await-

ed them. Mr. Williamson had left and was not expected back at the hotel. His baggage had been sent to the Saint Lazare station, where he was to take the six o'clock express for Le Havre. From Le Havre he was sailing early the next morning for New York.

"All right," said Yveline calmly. "It is only five o'clock. We are not lost yet."

She hailed another taxi.

In the cab Jacques stared at her questioningly.

"Surely you don't hope to—"

"One doesn't have to hope in order to act," replied Yveline.

The engineer submitted, and Tiburce studied the "Raffinot kid" with admiration.

The conductor of the Paris-Le Havre express was surprised and vaguely alarmed when a fashionable young lady with flushed cheeks and honey-colored hair stopped him on the platform.

"Will you please tell me which sleeping compartment has been reserved for Mr. C. B. Williamson?" she asked. "I have an important message to give him before he leaves."

The conductor hesitated. The intensity of Yveline's expression aroused his suspicions. He was a constant reader of the Sunday supplement and his imagination had been nourished on them. He scented in her question the anguish of an abandoned sweetheart, ready to draw a revolver against her seducer.

Yveline divined what was going on in his head and smiled.

"I am not going to do this gentleman any harm," she said. "I have never even seen him. I am a reporter on the Paris *Daily*, and I simply want to interview the American multimillionaire on his impressions of France."

At the same time she displayed her press card. She had made Mr. Williamson a multimillionaire in order to make her desire for an interview seem more likely.

The conductor was persuaded as much by the sight of her card as by her assurance.

"In that case it is all right," he said. "Here is the compartment your American reserved—and that is probably the man coming now."

With these words he hurried toward a man of about sixty with a kindly face, clean-shaved, who wore a gray tweed traveling suit and cap. He was smoking a pipe and carried a little bag in one hand, while he held out the ticket for his berth in the other.

The conductor verified the ticket and nodded to Yveline, as if to say: "That is your man."

She approached him in her turn. But as she drew near him, she was seized with a sudden panic: What if he didn't speak any French? She herself knew no English except the little they teach in school; that is to say, practically none at all.

But she was quickly reassured. As she came up to him, he spoke first, in excellent French and a tone of great courtesy:

"Did you wish to see me, mademoiselle?"

The conductor had evidently prepared him while looking at the ticket.

"Monsieur," she said, "my name is Yveline Raffinot, and I am a reporter for the Paris *Daily*."

"I know your name, mademoiselle. I have read your interesting and illuminating articles about a case that has interested me very much—the Telephone Murders."

Yveline blushed with pleasure. In addition to the satisfaction her vanity received, and which she was well entitled to, his compliment provided an easy transition to the object of her visit.

Deciding that the swiftest course would be to tell the truth, she unfolded to him what her investigation had brought to light, explained the rôle of the little box, and her reasons for suspecting that it was hidden in the coronet he had bought.

Mr. Williamson was delighted with her story.

"This is thrilling!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know I was getting into the affair myself!"

Encouraged by this interest, Yveline concluded:

"And that is why I determined when I learned that you had bought the coronet, along with the rest of the costume, to ask your permission to examine it, in order to see if our theory is correct."

"I shall be delighted," said Williamson.

He glanced at his watch and saw that there were still nearly ten minutes before the train left.

"I suppose the laws of this country give me the ownership not only of the object I bought, but of its contents, if there are any, as well?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Yveline, "and if the little box is really hidden in the coronet, it belongs to you. But I think I am quite safe in offering you, on the part of the *Daily*, and for the box alone, a sum equal to what you paid for the whole—"

Williamson blushed.

"That was not what I meant," he said. "I simply wanted to be sure that I had the right to offer it to you. For I ought to tell you that you are not the only person who is looking for it.

"An unprepossessing fellow, who was shadowing me awhile ago, when I checked my trunks, showed me a police badge and said there was some question of my not being allowed to keep what I had bought and paid for.

"He claimed he would have to search my trunks, and would perhaps return them to me after an examination or perhaps take them to headquarters. I gathered there had been a mix-up.

"It seems that somebody telephoned to the decorating firm which made the Queen's float, and claimed to be speaking for the inspector; that the decorators were suspicious and called the inspector back; and that this aroused his suspicions—"

"My lie has come back on me like a boomerang," said Yveline with embarrassment.

"Oh, was it you?" exclaimed Williamson with a laugh. "Well, I shan't mind playing a little trick on the police myself, especially if it will help you out.

"While that fool of a detective is going through my trunks with my valet, who is going to join me at Le Havre in the morning, I have what you are looking for right here in this bag. I picked it up at the last minute because it had been forgotten."

He snapped the bag open and took out a package. "Here you are: it is yours. Don't thank me. I have a double reward: I have fooled the police, and I shall take away, as my last memory of Paris, the charming smile of a lovely Parisian."

The conductor was blowing his whistle. Dropping the package, which was wrapped in brown paper, into Yveline's hands, Williamson swung onto the step as the train began to move.

And the young reporter was so delighted at this unforeseen good luck that she could not help throwing a kiss to the American, who leaned from the train to wave good-by.

CHAPTER XIII

The Little Sealed Box

WHEN Jacques and Tiburce, who were waiting anxiously for Yveline outside the gate, saw her reappear with a package in her hand, they were ready to shout with enthusiasm.

But she gave them no time to congratulate her.

"To the office, quick!" she said, dragging them out into the street. "We just got in ahead of the police by the skin of our teeth. I will tell you all about it in the taxi—"

She interrupted herself to break into a hearty laugh. She had just caught a glimpse of the lean Theophile, carry-

ing the dress and cloak of the murdered Queen of Queens carefully over his arm, and hailing another taxi.

But what she had not seen was that a man had followed her and, concealed in the next compartment, from which he had leaped after the train was in motion, had listened to her entire conversation with Williamson.

This man waited until her taxi had moved away; then, as Theophile was crawling into his, jumped in unceremoniously beside him and said:

"M. Theophile, you are an idiot. It was the American's hand bag that you should have taken. The only interesting thing in the whole royal costume is in the hands of that daughter of mine, who is taking it to the *Daily* now, and the public will know about it before you will."

"M. Raffinot, I cannot allow you to—"

"I shall take any liberties I please, M. Theophile. If I, who have always worked independently, have consented to take charge of this case, it is on condition that I have complete authority. Otherwise, I step out entirely."

"She's too clever, that girl," complained Theophile, without insisting further on the question of Raffinot's rights.

"Of course!" said Raffinot. "She is my daughter!"

Contrary to his custom, the great amateur had yielded to the appeal of the inspector, who despaired of catching the elusive "bearded Russian."

As the result of a conference with M. Legerbier, Raffinot had accepted the aid of several detectives from headquarters, among whom was his old rival Theophile. And, as we have seen, Raffinot took advantage of this fact to overwhelm his new subordinate with sarcasm at each fresh failure.

But the investigation did not proceed any the faster for this. Raffinot's star was setting, and his aids remarked—when he was not present—that "the famous detective had outlived his day."

The truth was that Cesar-Alexandre, who was usually so penetrating, so swift in his decisions, and so far-sighted in his deductions, was floundering in this matter of the Telephone Murders as badly as any of those he scorched with his sarcasm.

The little light that had been shed on the circumstances of the double crime—or, rather, on the murder of Gina Liseron, for that of Marguerite Robin was still unexplained—had been shed by the press, and especially the *Daily*.

And this paper was no doubt now preparing a new and sensational victory, if the coronet Yveline had obtained actually held the little box she was seeking.

In Yveline's office Tiburce and Jacques stood beside the table on which she had placed the precious coronet.

As they had expected, it was part of a theatrical equipment, but unusually solid and finished with great artistry. In front a stylized flower had been carved in relief, projecting into the interior in the form of an upright cylinder, big enough—if it were hollow—to hold a cube about an inch long in each direction.

"If the box is hidden in the coronet," said Jacques, touching the cylinder, "it must be there."

He picked the coronet up and shook it beside his ear, as if expecting to hear a faint rattle from within. There was no sound.

For a long time they searched for some secret spring, some mechanism that would open the supposed chamber. But their search was in vain. They pressed upon each leaf and projection of the coronet; nothing happened. It began to look as if the thing was as solid as though it had been made from pure gold.

At length Jacques grew discouraged:

"Well, we will have to admit that this time we have drawn a blank. There is no secret in that coronet; otherwise, we would have found it in the hour we have been monkeying with it."

"A chisel and a hammer," said Tiburce.

"You are right," said Yveline. "The quickest way will be to break it open, taking care not to damage its contents—"

"If any," added Jacques.

Yveline did not argue the point. She had an intuitive certainty that she was not on a false scent, in spite of the failure of their efforts.

"We must have tools," she said.

"All right," admitted Jacques. "Although I doubt whether it will do any good, I'll go get what you want."

The office that had been put at Yveline's disposal was on the ground floor and opened on a dark hallway, where few people passed except to come to this office.

The hallway itself ran to the Bulletin Room, which was open to the street and usually filled with little knots of people, studying the results of the races, reading the latest dispatches, or merely staring at the picture of current events.

It was down this hallway that Jacques disappeared.

Left alone with Tiburce, Yveline continued to turn the coronet over in her hands, tapping it and examining it on every side, but still without result.

A quarter of an hour passed. The young engineer did not return. Yveline was growing impatient.

"What has become of him? Does it take him all night to find a few tools?"

"It is after eight o'clock," Tiburce pointed out.

"That's so—the shops are closed. How stupid we were! We should have simply asked one of the office boys to get us a hammer and chisel. They must have tools here in the building."

She rang and waited. No one came. She rang again—without effect. Then she rose in annoyance, still holding the coronet in her hands, and started toward the door. But Tiburce was ahead of her.

"I'll go," he said.

And he left.

Exasperated by these delays, Yveline tossed the coronet on the desk. One of the artificial diamonds struck the wood and, before the amazed eyes of the young girl, the entire crown yawned open in half, revealing a small chamber in the vertical cylinder where the flower was soldered to the main ring.

She seized it with delight, drew out first a bit of cotton wadding, and then a hard object like a parallelopiped, which the cotton held in place.

It was a little wooden box, sealed with red wax, about an inch wide by an inch deep, and an inch and a half long.

She slit the seals with a paper cutter, her fingers trembling with joy, lifted the cover, and peered within.

The box contained a tightly-wound celluloid roll.

"A piece of film," she murmured in astonishment. And she unrolled it on the table.

The door opened.

"Is that you, Tib—"

She lifted her head and her voice strangled in her throat.

A man faced her from the other side of the table. His hair was long and black; a thick, black beard flowed down from his chin and cheeks; and he wore yellow spectacles.

She had pictured these details too often to herself to have any doubt: she was in the presence of Dimitri Avinoff, the sanguinary bearded Russian, the mysterious murderer of Gina Liseron.

In the next moment a thousand sinister thoughts flooded her brain.

Incapable of reacting, and terrified by this fantastic apparition, she sank back in the chair, her eyes closed and waited for the fatal blow of the dagger.

"Well, what's the matter? Are you sick?"

She opened her eyes and saw Ti-

burce leaning over her, a tender and anxious expression on his face. The chisel and hammer he had gone to seek were still in his hands.

Yveline burst into tears and, in a choked voice, told him of the visit of the bearded Russian.

"But at any rate," said Tiburce, "he didn't do you any harm. Thank God for that!"

"Just when I had found the— Oh, I can't stand it!"

She gave a cry of despair.

The coronet still gaped open on the table. Beside it lay the little box—empty. But the film, which had cost so much ingenuity to discover and which she had not been given time to examine, had vanished.

"We must find him, quick!" she cried in distraction. Then, more calmly: "He can't have gone far. He must be hiding somewhere in the building. Otherwise, you would have met him in the hall."

"But he has had plenty of time to get away, since I have been in here."

"Never mind. We must look!"

The building was searched in vain; the bearded man had made himself invisible. All that could be learned was that the wire to the electric buzzer in Yveline's office had been cut.

The doormen were upbraided harshly. How could they have been so blind as not to recognize the man with yellow spectacles, when the papers had been talking about him daily!

But one of the doormen, who had joined in the search, made a discovery that proved the injustice of these accusations. In the hall by which Avinoff had reached Yveline's office he found three objects, tossed in a corner, which he brandished triumphantly over his head: a wig of long, black hair; an impressive black beard; and a pair of yellow spectacles.

The legend of the bearded man crumbled. There was no longer any description of Dimitri Avinoff; for all one knew, he looked like anybody else. And this made him all the more redoubtable. He might be the man brushing your elbow in the bus or the gentleman sitting beside you in the café.

When Yveline lamented the loss of the film, which she had dreamed so ardently of finding, the night editor consoled her in a rough, friendly tone:

"Buck up, kid! Your hard luck tonight will give you a good story for to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER XIV

A Pair of Photographs

PUBLIC interest was once more raised to a pitch of intensity by the publication of Yveline's story. The sudden and unforeseen intervention of Dimitri Avinoff aroused less speculation, perhaps, than the discovery —and immediate disappearance—of the film itself.

Aside from the romantic way in which it had been concealed, and the remarkable intuition that had led the three companions to uncover its hiding place, its possible significance in the drama gave rise to many conjectures.

General opinion held that it was in order to seize this object, or at least to prevent its contents from being revealed, that the elusive Avinoff had slain Gina Liseron—and no doubt Marguerite Robin as well. Though it was with a shudder, one could not help admiring the audacity and skill of the mysterious murderer, who had again intervened at the precise moment when the film was about to be made public. What high stakes depended on this little roll of celluloid?

Thus formulated, the problem of the Telephone Murders once more became news. Yveline was reinstated in the honors of the front page.

And the fact that she herself now played an active rôle in the events, that she had been for a second face to face with the invincible Russian, gave her a new celebrity; reporters from other

papers interviewed her, questioned her concerning her momentary fright, and tried to extract further details from her.

The police also became interested. Yveline was now a witness; she had seen Avinoff. And in a few hours she received a courteous note from M. Legerbier, requesting her to report at his office.

She did so at once.

When she was admitted to his presence, the magistrate looked up from the papers on which he was working and, at the first glimpse of her face, could not restrain a gesture of surprise.

Yveline noted his movement and interpreted it to herself: no doubt M. Legerbier had expected to see a withered old maid, or a domineering, overdressed woman, and the sight of this dainty little blond astonished him.

On being requested politely to describe the theft of the film by Avinoff, she complied, though explaining that she could add nothing to what she had written in the Paris *Daily*, as her article had been an accurate and complete account of the scene.

M. Legerbier listened with attention and, when she had finished, asked brusquely:

"Are you sure of your supposed allies?"

"What do you mean?"

"Have you no suspicion," explained the magistrate, "concerning this young man, Servan, whose part in the whole matter seems somewhat ambiguous to me? Nor concerning this other person who is always with you and who, when you come right down to it, is an ex-convict?"

M. Legerbier pronounced these last words with an expression of disgust on his lips.

Yveline stiffened in her chair.

"Pardon me," she said, "an innocent convict. There is a distinction."

"Peuh!" said the magistrate skeptically. "Even if he were, there has been more than one man who has gone into prison innocent and come out corrupt. But in any case, innocent or otherwise, are you sure of him?"

"As of myself!" said Yveline.

"Still," persisted the examiner, "the theft of your film last night would be explained perfectly if Dimitri Avinoff and Tiburce, alias Curly-Head, were the same person—"

Yveline shrugged her shoulders disrespectfully.

"In the first place," she replied, "Avinoff was a man of solid build and Tiburce is as skinny as a nail. In the second place, M. Servan was sandbagged and tied while Tiburce was still in my office."

"Yes, but suppose they were working together, to defeat you?"

"I am as sure of them as I am of myself," repeated Yveline energetically.

M. Legerbier smiled ironically.

"As you are of yourself?" he said. "Well, well, and suppose even that were not enough?"

This time Yveline flushed with anger.

"What are you trying to insinuate?" she demanded.

The magistrate swung his chair toward her, studied her for a moment through his glasses, and said slowly:

"When you came into my office, mademoiselle, I wondered where it was I had already had the pleasure of seeing you—I realize now—"

"That doesn't take much cleverness! It was in the little café, at Grenelle, where Marguerite Robin was murdered, the day of the crime. We were both there, you as investigator and I as a reporter."

M. Legerbier shook his head.

"No," he said, "I was not referring to that. It was—this."

He crossed to a file against the wall, opened it and took out two photographs, which he held up before Yveline.

"Why, they are pictures of me!" she exclaimed, staring at the two kodaks,

which had been taken when she entered college.

"You admit that I did not force that admission from you?" continued M. Legerbier. "You recognized them yourself?"

"Why shouldn't I, when they are photographs of me? But what connection is there between my pictures and the case we are working on?"

"The interesting point, mademoiselle, is the place where these pictures were found. When you have heard that, I should like to have an explanation if you can give it.

"One of them was discovered when we searched Gina Liseron's house immediately after the murder; it was carefully hidden in a secret drawer in an old Louis XVI cabinet—for there are no secret drawers for the police."

Under any other circumstances, Yveline would have laughed in his face; the whole story was too fantastic. But indignation made her cold.

"Well?" she asked. "And the other?"

She was annoyed that she could not keep a slight note of apprehension out of her voice.

"The other was at the bottom of a pile of lingerie in Marguerite Robin's wardrobe."

Yveline was too astounded to speak for several moments.

"But I didn't know either of them," she finally stammered.

"No doubt you are telling the truth," said the magistrate. "But you see that there is a new mystery here that involves yourself. And please realize that you knew nothing about it.

"You will see that I was right when I said that one is never sure of one's self, much less of others. My conclusion is this: I intend to keep an eye on your innocent convict and on the ex-fiancé of Marguerite Robin. And I take the liberty of advising you to be less trustful. Good day, mademoiselle."

Yveline left M. Legerbier's office literally overwhelmed. It was not that his specious reasoning had shaken her confidence in her friends. But in a stupor she wondered why and how the two victims of the carnival murders had obtained her photographs—and why they had preserved them so carefully.

This fact, apparently insignificant in the face of the terrible fate that had afterward met the sisters, irritated her until it became an obsession in her mind: how had they got those pictures? What had they intended to do with them?

She returned to the house and asked the maid if her father was at home. Learning that he was, she knocked at the door of his study.

CHAPTER XV

An Unfaithful Maid

"HELLO, that you, Yveline?" said the detective, as she came in. "I am not reproaching you, but it has been a long time since you have come to have a chat with me. I'll bet you need something. Is it money?"

Although he was making an effort to appear gay and keep up the same dazzling front as ever, the brilliant Cesar-Alexandre seemed worried and aged.

The ends of his mustache, which usually curled up like a conquering general's, were now drooping like a weeping willow; his brow was lined; and his glance betrayed his depression.

Yveline felt a rush of tenderness for him and kissed him.

"You are right, dad. I have neglected you. But it is not money that I need now; it is your affection, your advice, and your protection. I am frightened, dad."

At this Raffinot sat up. The gleam came back in his eyes and he circled his strong arm about his daughter's shoulders.

"My fearless little Yveline is frightened?" he exclaimed. "Well, well,

this must be serious. Tell me about it. If there is any danger threatening you, your old father will protect you."

He laughed now, with the full, hearty laugh of a giant who is sure of his strength; he would have defied the universe to protect his daughter.

Somewhat reassured, Yveline explained:

"To tell you the truth, I am not in any definite danger and my fear is hardly reasonable. Here is what it's about."

She told him the story of the kodaks and concluded:

"As long as I was involved in this tragic business of my own will, simply investigating, I had no fear of anything, not even Avinoff—and after all, though he stole the film I had found, he didn't do me any harm.

"But when I realize now that, in spite of myself, I have been playing an unknown rôle in the drama, even before I entered it voluntarily, I am frightened."

With unaccustomed gentleness and gravity, Raffinot replied:

"Since you have asked my advice, my dear, listen to what my experience and my wisdom suggest. Give up this investigation. It brought you, at first, a legitimate satisfaction and glory. But now you find yourself confronted with an unforeseen and dangerous situation, which may turn into something worse. No, don't protest.

"You admitted just now that you were frightened. Look in that mirror and see how pale you are—I advise you to drop the whole thing."

"I was hoping you would say something else, dad—I thought that perhaps now you would be willing to let me work with you, and help you in your own investigation—"

"I have given it up myself."

"You?"

"Yes, I, Cesar-Alexandre Raffinot. I have given it up. This mystery has sources that are beyond my power to deal with. Do as I have done, Yveline. You have already put yourself in great danger, when that scoundrel broke into your office and stole the film you had discovered.

"I don't want you to be exposed like that again. The presence of your pictures in the file, aside from the worry it causes you, may indicate some graver menace. Give it up, my dear.

"What do you say we leave Paris for awhile and take a trip to the South, where the sun shines and we can enjoy ourselves in peace? Would you like to do that?"

Yveline was no longer listening. She repeated in astonishment:

"You, dad? You have given up?"

For any one who knew Raffinot, with his pretensions to infallibility, his boundless pride, such a decision was incredible. It implied, at the least, that the problem was insoluble. If Raffinot himself despaired of penetrating the mystery of the Telephone Murders, who else would dare attempt it?

But strangely enough, instead of discouraging Yveline, this consideration acted like a whip on her resolve. In the very field where her father had failed, she would not abandon hope of succeeding. And in addition to this professional ambition, there lurked another motive within her, which she hardly confessed to herself.

To give up the investigation would mean giving up her daily meetings with Jacques. And she had grown gradually dependent on these meetings. A sentiment, which was wholly pure, had begun to flower within her.

At first she had felt only a sincere sympathy for the bereaved engineer and had longed to assuage his grief.

Chance having brought them together, their common task had tightened the bonds of friendship that united them. Yveline could no longer conceive her life without a place in it for Jacques. She was not prepared as yet to say how large a place it was, but she knew that it was indispensable.

She therefore resisted the emotion

that swept over her at sight of her father defeated and weary, and with flashing eyes she announced:

"Well, if you have given up, that is one more reason for me to persevere."

Raffinot shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Do as you wish," he replied. "But when you have had enough of it—and I suspect that will be soon—my offer will still hold good: we will take a vacation together."

When she had withdrawn to her own room, Yveline sat down to reflect. Her father's change of attitude, surprising as it was, was not the subject of her thoughts.

She was still considering the two pictures and groping in her mind for some way in which they could have fallen into the hands of the tragic sisters. With that point cleared up, it would perhaps be easy to discover what they had intended to do with them.

"This can't be so difficult," she told herself. "Those were just little kodaks that a friend of mine took the day I entered college—I remember we developed them ourselves, and after we had made three prints, the negative caught fire while I was lighting a cigarette and burned up.

"Consequently there can only be those three prints in existence. I sent one to dad, who was still traveling at that time. He took a fancy to it and has kept it ever since. It was on his desk just now. But what did I do with the others? I know, I kept them myself. Yes, I am sure of it. I put them in my souvenir box. I saw them there a month or so ago."

What Yveline called her "souvenir box" was a small, exquisitely carved oak chest for handkerchiefs and gloves, which her father had brought her from Italy on her sixteenth birthday.

She had used it to hold trifles that reminded her of important dates in her life. And she had laid these kodaks away in it because they commemorated the day she had entered college.

She brought the chest from her wardrobe, opened it, fumbled in it, and lifted out a variety of things: bits of ribbon, faded flowers, a bundle of early letters, dance programs, and a broken brooch; but no kodaks. She took everything out and sorted them carefully, with the same result.

Then abandoning this search, she once more fell into reflection.

"One from three leaves two," she murmured. "The two pictures found among the effects of the murdered sisters *must* be the ones that were in this box and that I saw a month or so ago when I was looking over my things.

"Consequently they have been stolen within the past month. For whom? Gina and Marguerite. Why? I don't know. By whom? That I can perhaps find out."

She summoned her maid.

"Jenny! Come here a minute. I want to ask you something."

Jenny hurried into the room. She was a healthy Norman girl, with freckled face, shining teeth, and an opulent bosom. In spite of her stolid manner, she could not restrain a slight blush when she saw the chest lying open on a chair.

Yveline detected her confusion and mentally accused her of guilt. In clipped tones she said:

"I know who has been in my chest, Jenny. I know what was taken. But I don't know the details nor the reason for the theft. If you tell me the whole truth, I shall forgive you. If you refuse, I shall telephone for the police."

As a matter of fact, Yveline was bluffing. She knew nothing, and had only vague suspicions. Her attempt at intimidation struck at first against a determined obstinacy.

"I don't know what mademoiselle is talking about," said the maid.

"Very well," said Yveline coldly. "Perhaps you will be more explicit in court."

She started toward the alcove where her telephone stood on a little table.

"Mademoiselle!" beseeched Jenny.

Yveline turned.

"Will you tell me?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. But I swear to you I didn't take anything valuable."

"I told you I knew that. You took two photographs, didn't you?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Why and for whom?"

"I didn't think it would do any harm, mademoiselle. I'll tell you everything that happened if you want. There's a man from my village who lives in Paris now—he has a job as chauffeur for Prince Crasowski. He and I are engaged and are going to be married in June. He told me the prince was in love with mademoiselle."

Yveline trembled with indignation.

"And you swallowed that!" she exclaimed.

"Mademoiselle promised to forgive me if I told her everything," Jenny reminded her.

"All right! Go on."

"Well, according to Etienne—that's my fiancé's name—the prince's intentions were perfectly honorable. He saw mademoiselle about six weeks ago at a charity ball given to relieve the famine in Russia."

Yveline remembered that she had gone to that ball as a representative of the Paris *Daily*.

"The prince," continued Jenny, "learned mademoiselle's name and address, and wanted two of her pictures: one to send to his family, to get permission to ask for mademoiselle's hand, and the other for himself.

"I knew those two little kodaks were in the chest, and I thought there wouldn't be any harm in letting him have them. So I—"

She paused and looked down at the floor.

"So you stole them," Yveline finished.

"Yes, mademoiselle. I didn't think that—"

The maid was apparently sincere, and Yveline did not insist further.

"I promised to forgive you," she said, "and I shall keep my word. Just one more point, however: What is this gentleman's address?"

"Prince Crasowski 7 b Avenue de Messine."

"And the chauffeur's name?"

"Etienne Barberelle. But you won't make any trouble for him, will you?"

"I shall do what I think best. But if I find that you have told me the truth, and if your friend Etienne has also acted in good faith, I shall see that no harm comes to him on account of me. That will be all, Jenny. Thank you."

When she was alone once more, Yveline pondered over this strange story. Even admitting the good faith of the maid and the chauffeur, what was she to think of the nobleman who had inspired this theft?

For the reason he had given for getting possession of the pictures was obviously a pretext, since one of them had been discovered in Gina's room and the other in Marguerite's.

The curiosity that Yveline had felt from the beginning in the Telephone Murders was now increased by a personal interest. She was determined to find the explanation of this new riddle at any price.

She decided to discuss the matter with Jacques and Tiburce, whom she was to see that evening in her office at the *Daily*.

CHAPTER XVI

White Magic or Black?

WHEN Yveline had finished telling her two friends of the discovery that had aroused such wonderment in herself, she had found each of them affected in a characteristic way.

Jacques felt only a natural astonishment. The date at which the two pictures had been stolen indicated that, shortly before their deaths, Gina and Marguerite had become interested in Yveline.

But the latter had entered the case only by chance and then after the murders, when the duties of her profession had taken her to the police station at the moment the parade was starting.

Nothing at that time could have made the two sisters suspect that she was destined to play a part in their tragedy. She had not even known of their existence, much less their names. How was it then that they had known of her? Jacques could find no reply to that question. Certainly Marguerite had never spoken to him of Yveline.

It was true that the theft of the two pictures dated from the time when the "stenographer-princess" had begun to grow secretive toward her fiancé.

It was possible therefore that it was at the moment when she had discovered her sister, that Marguerite had conceived a sudden interest in the young reporter—so intense, that she had obtained her photograph and treasured it in secret.

Such were the vague reflections that passed through Jacques's mind after listening to Yveline's disclosures.

But Tiburce had knitted his brows and, absorbed in deep thought, paid no attention to the young engineer's words. He seemed to awake with a start when Yveline asked him:

"Well, Tiburce, what do you think about all this?"

He hesitated a moment and then, with his usual preference for brevity, replied with a single—and cryptic—phrase:

"Black magic."

"What the devil do you mean by that?" asked Jacques impatiently.

But the ex-convict was once more deep in reflection. All the muscles of his lean face grew tense as he searched through the secret chambers of his vast knowledge.

"By chance," he said, "I happen to know this Prince Crasowski—not personally, but by reputation. When I first began to study the Telephone Murders case for Mlle. Yveline, I made a little investigation, at the same time as the police, into Gina Liseron's acquaintances.

"In spite of her extraordinary ability, it seemed hardly possible that her talents alone could support her in the magnificent style in which she lived: private mansion, Rolls-Royce limousine, picture galleries—all that takes millions. The collection of Old Masters alone is worth several fortunes."

"That is what Marguerite felt," observed Jacques, "and I think that is why she would not live with her sister."

"So," continued Tiburce, paying no attention to the interruption, "it was obvious that Gina had a friend—to say the least—and a multimillionaire at that. And I soon discovered that the friend was a very attractive young man, who might well have inspired love, even if he had been penniless. It was the Prince Crasowski."

Yveline gave an exclamation of surprise.

"What a novice I am!" she murmured, somewhat confused. "That is a point I overlooked in my investigation."

"You wouldn't have learned anything enlightening. The prince was cross-examined at great length by the inspector and simply expressed his sincere grief at the death of Gina. He knew nothing, he said, of the circumstances connected with the double murder. He had understood vaguely that Gina and Marguerite were sisters, but knew little about their past.

"Your father also made an investigation of the prince's relations with Gina, but got no result. The whole thing seemed to be such a blank wall that, when I learned about it, it didn't seem worth telling you.

"However, Prince Crasowski's character had one peculiarity, which at the time seemed to have nothing to do with the case, but which recurred to my memory when you told us the story of the photographs.

"He was a fanatic in the occult sci-

ences: spiritualism, ectoplasm, turning tables, levitation, reincarnation—all of that business fascinated him. Perhaps Gina had been infected with his passion for occult phenomena and his belief in the manifestations of the supernatural—I don't know.

"But at any rate, the theft of those two pictures, which had belonged to you, which you had handled many times, and which had been kept with trinkets that were dear to you, smells to me like black magic.

"You no doubt know that there are certain cults, which make a practice of performing incantations over pictures, wax figures, or any other representation of a person to whom they wish some evil to happen. Certain magicians thrust a knife in the heart of the figure."

"But even supposing that this theory was true," exclaimed Yveline impetuously, "what reason would the prince and those women have for hating me to the point of wanting to cast a spell over me?"

She had uttered the words "those women" in a tone of contempt which brought a gesture of reproach from Jacques.

Yveline blushed.

"I am sorry," she said.

Jacques made no reply. And in his heart he accused himself of cowardice. He should have defended Marguerite's memory, he told himself, against all insinuations.

But the charm Yveline exercised over him was already too strong for him to protest at her words. The subtle and tender grace of the little Parisian had already taken possession of him more deeply than the troubling memory of the fascinating but disturbing Slav.

It was Tiburce who answered her last question.

"I have an idea," he said in a hesitating voice, "which might explain many things—including the mystery of the telephone booth."

"Then tell it to us!" urged Yveline.

"I dare not," said the ex-convict firmly. "What I suspect is too monstrous, too horrible. Let me study the case further, have a talk with the prince, and see some one else. Then, if I find I am right, and if I consider—after mature reflection—that I can speak, perhaps I shall tell you."

He paused. A deadly pallor, which had spread over his cheeks, revealed the deep emotion that was choking him. His eyes dilated as if he were gazing upon some terrifying hallucination.

Yveline and Jacques had grown accustomed to seeing him as impassive as an Egyptian statue. They knew that his own life had been too full of strange and terrible experiences for him to be easily moved. And so they watched him now with bewilderment, not daring to insist further.

The young girl was the first to regain her composure. Her sense of logic had already whispered in her ear an objection, which she now voiced:

"We shan't try to force you, Tiburce. Keep your suspicions; study the matter at leisure; reflect as much as you wish. But this theory of black magic seems a little far-fetched to me.

"As you have just told us, this little ceremony used to consist in stabbing a wax figure to the heart. With modern progress, black magicians—for I suppose there still are some—have replaced the wax figures with photographs.

"So far, so good. I shan't insist on the fact that I'm still in the best of health, for I am as skeptical about this whole thing as the prince is convinced. Instead, I much prefer to attack your argument on common-sense grounds.

"Let us suppose that Gina Liseron, her sister, and the prince really wanted to cast a spell over me.

"Admitting that for some reason they had conceived an implacable hatred for me, although I was a total stranger to them; admitting even that they were so eager for my death that they were ready to resort to these mediæval and ridiculous practices.

"Well! In that case; will you explain to me why, in her last moments, when I leaned over her, Gina received me with a glance of gentle sadness that I shall never forget?

"Why did she have such a trust in me—and she must have recognized my face from the photograph—that she wanted to confide her secret in me?

"You have not forgotten what her last words were: 'Tell Marguerite—' I could swear that my face seemed to her the face of a friend. At the time I attributed her tenderness to her approaching death; I thought that she looked on me as a possible savior.

"But in any case, how can that sadness, that trust, and that gentleness be explained by your theory that she had resorted to black magic to bring about my death?"

Tiburce had followed Yveline's argument with growing interest. A little color returned to his cheeks.

"That is very true!" he said. "I much prefer your theory. But then, I no longer understand at all."

And he retreated once more into reverie. After a long silence, he spoke:

"Anyway, I am going to look into it. I shall have an interview with the prince this very evening, and to-morrow, if I have any news, I shall see what I can say and what I must not say."

It was impossible to drag another word from him.

And soon after, either to avoid Yveline's questions or because he was really pressed for time, he withdrew, pretending that he must hurry if he was to see the prince that night.

CHAPTER XVII

Comrades in Love

JACQUES and Yveline remained alone together. Certainly Tiburce's enigmatic words obsessed their minds, and it would have been natural for them to revert at once to that subject, to the exclusion of any other.

But Yveline's regret for the words she had spoken earlier, which had apparently wounded Jacques, lay heavily on her heart. Moreover, she was twenty, and he was not yet thirty.

"I am afraid I hurt you awhile ago," she said, "when I spoke slightingly of some one who was dear to you, and whom cruel fate would entitle to respect, even if she had been unworthy of it—which was not the case, for I know that she was as good as she was beautiful. Will you forgive me!"

"My dear Yveline," said Jacques, "how could I resent anything you might say?"

He had spoken with such a grave tenderness that she was stirred with a delightful apprehension. But she gave no sign of it, and, changing the subject abruptly, said gayly:

"Think of it, Jacques, we were almost separated. My brief tête-à-tête with the bearded man and the discovery of my pictures in the files of the case, made such an impression on dad that he wants me to give up my job on the paper and go on a vacation with him."

The young engineer's hands tightened until the knuckles showed white.

"Did you refuse?" he asked.

She smiled and replied, not without a mischievous smile:

"Yes—for the present at least. In a few days, perhaps—"

But he interrupted her:

"And me? Are you going to leave me?"

Then he bit his lips and stammered:

"I mean, are you going to leave the task we have undertaken together?"

But she had understood: henceforth, for Jacques as for herself, there was something even more important than the work they were carrying out—he to avenge Marguerite, and she from professional interest—and that that precious, indestructible thing was their intimate comradeship; for she dared not give it another name.

And she replied:

"Don't worry, I was only teasing

you. I absolutely refused to go with dad, and I have no intention of giving up either my investigation or—my friend Jacques."

"Thank you," he said with emotion.

There followed an embarrassing silence, which he broke to say sadly:

"When our work is finished and we have found the solution of this baffling mystery, it will be, to be sure, a great satisfaction for me, and an intoxicating triumph for you. But when I think that it will also mark the end of our daily meetings, I find myself hoping sometimes that we shall never finish."

She lifted her gentle, clear eyes, shining with intelligence and frankness, toward his.

"I am not far from hoping the same thing," she said. "But why should the end of our investigation be also the end of our friendship?"

"It won't be so easy," he stammered, "for me to go on seeing you every day for no reason at all, or at least no reason except the joy of seeing you. I am sure that people are talking already. And what will they say if there is not even a pretext?"

"Are you afraid of compromising yourself?" she asked mockingly.

"That's not fair! I was simply thinking of your reputation."

"What do I care about my reputation, if my conscience does not reproach me?"

"You are right. For you I am just a good comrade—nothing more—and you do not dream that already—"

He paused, as if terrified by what he was about to say, and then continued bravely:

"I love you differently and more deeply than any comrade could ever love!"

The memory of the tragic little Queen of Queens was far in the past now. It seemed to Jacques that he loved for the first time. His whole heart swept him toward Yveline, and he expressed this feeling, which had hardly been revealed to himself before, with such heat that she lowered her eyes in confusion, while her cheeks flushed.

"I have not offended you, Yveline?"

"No, my friend."

"You must not hold this against me. I promise you that I shall not talk any more about—my love—"

In an imperceptible voice, in which emotion mingled with mischievousness, Yveline murmured:

"I haven't asked for that promise."

Jacques stared at her with dawning comprehension.

"What am I to understand from that? You give me permission to tell you again that I love you with all my soul? Do you mean, Yveline, that?"

He did not dare finish his question. She surrendered her hand to him and he carried it to his lips. Then he made a movement to slip his arm about her waist; but she freed herself quickly and, laughing, once more, said:

"The 'good comrade' seems to be making speedy progress! Patience, my friend, patience."

But Jacques was in no mood to be patient.

"May I at least go see your father," he said, "and ask him—"

She shook her head:

"Not yet. Dad does not look on you very favorably. Without knowing exactly what it is he thinks, I believe he considers that your part in the Telephone Murders has not been cleared up yet."

The young engineer frowned. Her words had thrown a cold shower over his enthusiasm.

Evoking the unfortunate memory of Marguerite, they also confronted him with an unforeseen obstacle, which threatened to block his new romance and perhaps postpone its consummation for long.

But Yveline continued quietly:

"It would be better, I think, for us to wait until our investigation is finished—and completely finished by discovering the truth concerning this terrible tragedy.

"Then you will be cleared of any suspicion and dad will have no excuse for refusing—what you may ask."

The tenderness with which she spoke these last words brought the radiance back into Jacques's eyes, and his ardor revived.

"In that case," he said, "the end of our collaboration, instead of also ending our friendship, will begin our engagement—which will be short, won't it?"

"My dear," she said, blushing again, "do you think I am any more patient than you are?"

CHAPTER XVIII

A Scared Chauffeur

ETIENNE BARBERELLE, chauffeur to the Prince Crasowski, was in the habit of spending many hours, when he was off duty, in a little bar in the Avenue Wagram, kept by M. and Mme. Blandard, under the sign of "The Good Pals."

M. Blandard treated him with the respect due an old customer, and *madame,* it was said, was more than a little fond of him.

A handsome fellow and a good talker, who discussed world politics and the housing problem with equal authority, and was deeply informed concerning the improvements in horse-breeding, he enjoyed leaning one elbow familiarly on the wet zinc of the bar and orating, while M. Blandard, who seldom contradicted anybody, murmured his agreement from time to time, and Mme. Blandard, formerly Angele Perissoire, enveloped him in a glance of admiration.

Mme. Blandard, who ruled at the cash register, was a buxom matron, overflowing with health, whose coal-black eyelashes were like mustaches. Her hair was black, her eyes soft, her chin firm, and her common sense invincible.

She managed her house and her husband with the decision of a Napoleon. Her only weakness was for "M. Etienne." The prince's chauffeur had dazzled her as much by his good looks as by his assurance and eloquence.

This evening M. Etienne had launched upon a critique of French diplomacy, and was putting all those who represented France abroad in their places. He was about to conclude with a summary of the policy that he himself would have followed, when he felt some one nudge his elbow.

"May I have a word with you, M. Etienne?" murmured a soft voice.

Thinking that he was about to be contradicted, the chauffeur whirled about on his heel and stared at the person who had had the insolence to interrupt his peroration.

He found a thin and shabby little man, who smiled at him in a friendly way, disclosing long and yellow teeth.

"I have an important message to give you," said the stranger. "Will you have a drink with me in the next room, where we can be quiet?"

"I only drink with people I know," said Etienne scornfully.

"In that case, let me introduce myself: my name is Tiburce and I am a philosopher by profession."

Etienne had never heard of this strange profession before and was somewhat impressed, though he could not help noticing that it did not supply a good living for those who followed it. He was about to make some comment when Tiburce, lifting his voice a little, added:

"I am speaking for Mlle. Jenny."

"Sh!" said the chauffeur in terror, glancing toward Angele, who—as he had already learned—was of a jealous temperament. "I'll be right with you."

Abandoning his speech, he followed Tiburce into the little room, accepted a glass of brandy, and waited for the philosopher to speak.

The latter, breaking his old habits of brevity, went straight to the attack.

"The charming Mlle. Jenny," he

said, "has been caught in a theft from her mistress. She stole two photographs which, it is true, seemed to have no particular value. But the old proverb that 'He who will steal a calf will steal a cow,' is strictly applied in our modern courts."

He paused, to observe the effect of his words, and smiled.

Etienne Barberelle, puzzled and disappointed, thinking that he had to do with the police, reflected: "So that's what philosophy is?" His only reply, however, was a vague gesture, and Tiburce continued:

"Mlle. Jenny has admitted that she committed this theft at the instigation of one Etienne Barberelle."

At these words the chauffeur received an inspiration. He had read the newspapers enough to know what to say in such a case.

"You needn't go any further," he said with dignity. "I shall not answer except in the presence of my lawyer."

"Quite right!" approved Tiburce. "But wouldn't it be better not to let this matter get into court?"

"But, aren't you from the police?" asked Etienne naïvely.

"What a notion, M. Barbelle! Didn't I tell you I was a philosopher?"

"He's a blackmailer," thought the chauffeur. And, reflecting that the prince, who was the real instigator of the theft, was not stingy, he asked simply:

"How much?"

"Alas, *monsieur,*" replied the philosopher, pretending a saddened indignation. "You are quite mistaken as to my character. I do not want money. Money is a chimera."

"Well then, what do you want?"

"I want you to tell me how and why Prince Crasowski asked you to get the photographs of Jenny's mistress."

"So you know that too, eh? Well, what of it! After all, it isn't a hanging offense, and love excuses many things, doesn't it?"

And he told the same story, point by point, that Jenny had told Yveline. It was obvious that he believed it. Like the maid, he accepted the prince's sudden infatuation with Raffinot's daughter at its face value.

"Very good, very good," said Tiburce when he had finished. "I am obliged to you. Now, one thing more. I must see the prince himself."

"I am not keeping you from going to see him."

"No, but I must see him this evening."

"Quit kidding me! It's almost midnight now."

"I know it. And that's exactly why I need you, to help me see the prince. The janitor and his valet know you. All you need say is that you are acting under orders."

"And get fired to-morrow! No thanks."

"Well," said Tiburce, getting up with a sigh, "I see that you are not going to be reasonable, and that I shall have to call in the police."

Etienne grew pale, but did not stir. This threat only half frightened him. If there was any trouble, the prince would pay the costs.

"Not to mention," added the philosopher, watching him from the corner of his eyes, "that this good Mme. Blandard is burning with envy to know more about that Jenny that I made the mistake of mentioning in her presence. Since you don't seem willing to help me, I have no reason for refusing her the information."

This time Etienne reacted. He dreaded Angele's jealousy far more than the police.

"You needn't try to get away with that," he said hoarsely. "Or I'll—"

He raised his fist menacingly.

"A public row and a scandal," said Tiburce. "That'll be fine! You'll lose your job sure then. Whereas, if you will take me to the prince, instead of being angry, he will be grateful to you."

Then, lowering his tone, he added:

"It has to do with that poor Gina Liseron."

The chauffeur trembled. He had known of the relations between his master and the actress, and he knew—though he had not tried to reconcile the fact with the prince's pretended love for Yveline—that Crasowski, who had been deeply affected by the murder of Gina, spent most of his time over a ouija board in the hope of calling up her spirit.

"You swear you are telling me the truth?" he asked with a remnant of suspicion.

"On my honor as a philosopher."

"All right. Come with me."

CHAPTER XIX

The Prince and the Philosopher

A QUARTER of an hour later, Tiburce followed Etienne into the sumptuous apartment of the Prince Crasowski. Apparently such nocturnal visits were not rare—as the philosopher had already found out—for the valet, who opened the door, showed no surprise. He merely grumbled to Etienne:

"You might have let me know."

Then, turning to the visitor, he asked:

"Who shall I say wants to see the prince?"

Tiburce tore a page from his notebook and, scribbling a few words on it, handed it to the man.

Prince Crasowski had not yet gone to bed. In a dressing gown of plum-colored silk, he was lying on the divan in his study, apparently plunged in deep meditation, when the servant handed him Tiburce's message. He glanced at it, and then trembled.

"Let him come in!" he exclaimed.

The pencil lines he had just read on the wrinkled scrap of paper were as follows:

> Professor Tiburce, of the Copenhagen Academy of Spiritualism, wishes to see Prince Crasowski concerning a communication from the Beyond.

When the servant came back into the hallway to notify Tiburce that he could enter at once, the "professor" glanced ironically at Etienne.

"What did I tell you?" he murmured.

This immediate reception left the chauffeur more puzzled than ever as to the rank in the world of a philosopher.

The prince received Tiburce with the greatest courtesy. He met him at the door of his study, offered his hand, and invited the ex-convict to be seated before resuming his own place on the divan.

Sigismond Crasowski was about forty years of age, a man of fine build and proud carriage. The firm line of his mouth and the bold arch of his nose were eloquent of the long line of rude, noble horsemen and reckless warriors from which he was descended.

But his reflective eyes and massive brow indicated that in him the dreamer had triumphed over the man of action. On meeting him, one felt that behind that brow slumbered conceptions of glorious utopias and unrealizable ideals. When he had been a student at the Sorbonne, in the past, he had been named the "hunter of dreams."

He was one of those that never give up hope of discovering perpetual motion or learning to square the circle. The philosopher's stone and the modern scientific theories of the electrical constitution of matter had at one time absorbed his interest.

Then suddenly, he had plunged into the occult sciences with all the enthusiasm of his Slavic temperament and all the credulity of his God-intoxicated mind. He became the Mecca of sages, initiates, and mediums.

At night he often held séances in spiritualism, attended by convinced disciples of the cult, and the inevitable parasites that always hover about the rich and the noble.

His doors and his pocketbook were

always open, at least until the tragic death of Gina Liseron, whose house had become the meeting place of the little world that revolved about Sigismond Crasowski. But, since the death of the actress, the prince seldom left his apartment and had weeded out from among his guests all but a few people of distinction.

Although he had never heard of "Professor Tiburce," the note which the philosopher had added to his name had been enough to win him an immediate audience. The lateness of the hour was no obstacle: it was at midnight that Crasowski peered most willingly into the mysteries of the Beyond.

After the customary greetings, Tiburce began the story he had prepared, and by which he hoped to trap his host into admitting the truth concerning the theft of Yveline's pictures.

"Your highness," he said, adopting the tone of an inspired seer, "I have come to you not as the messenger of the learned Academy in Copenhagen, to which I have the honor to belong, but at the urge of an irresistible compulsion.

"I am the inventor of a strange apparatus which, in its structure, is much like the one suggested by a famous wizard for telephoning to those who have passed the great barrier; but mine has the advantage over that of the famous American that it has been conceived by a believer.

"This apparatus, which is at present in Copenhagen, and which you are the first—after myself—to know the existence of, enables me to harness the psychic waves scattered through the world, as a wireless apparatus enables one to harness the Herzian waves.

"By this means I can surprise the unconscious waves of mental telepathy, or those consciously emitted for the purpose of casting spells, as a wireless operator receives radio messages."

Sigismond Crasowski had been at once intrigued by this unexpected declaration. His vast but deranged mind, which was in love with the supernatural, became intoxicated with the words Tiburce pronounced with solemnity.

At the reference to casting spells, the prince trembled slightly. But he made no comment by word or gesture, and listened attentively to the rest of his visitor's strange explanations.

"So," continued the philosopher, "finding myself recently in psychic communication—though without her knowledge—with a young woman who lived in Paris and who was dear to you, I saw hanging over her the threat of death that, alas, was immediately carried out; for I had the power only to warn her of her danger by a telepathic wave, not to protect her."

The prince was breathing heavily with anguish. Tiburce felt some remorse at playing this gruesome farce, but his devotion to Mlle. Yveline overcame his scruples.

He continued slowly, his eyes fixed on Sigismond's:

"At the same time, I became aware of an effort to cast a spell, whose nature I could not exactly determine, but which emanated from two sisters, now dead, and was directed at a young girl also living in this city."

Tiburce was now playing his ace. Either his theory was false and he would be thrown out as an impostor, or it was true and he would hold the prince in his power.

He had the satisfaction of hearing Sigismond murmur with a deep sigh:

"They meant no harm to the girl"

This sentence was equivalent to an admission, and from then on Tiburce bluffed recklessly.

"I know it," he said. "And I also know that the last face that looked on Gina alive was that of the young girl over whom she had tried to cast the spell."

"Yes," said the prince in a tone of exaltation. "Gina had called her, and she came."

"But you must also know," said Tiburce gravely, "that the victim of her spell suffers still, without knowing why, from the rites performed over the two pictures which you had stolen.

"Furthermore, the souls of Gina and Marguerite suffer also because they cannot undo the harm they have done. I alone have the power to accomplish that—on condition that you will aid me."

"I am entirely at your disposal," said Crasowski, "what can I do?"

"First, you can tell me the whole truth."

The prince consented with a gesture and thought for a moment. He had been definitely won over by this man of ascetic appearance, who possessed such a formidable science. Tiburce waited with anxious curiosity.

At length, Sigismond Crasowski spoke:

"What I am going to tell you," he began, "is still far from complete, for there are many points that are still obscure, even to myself. But in any case, you will be the first person to hear it.

"I have not felt that I had the right until now, to divulge the secret of my beloved Gina. But in face of the proof you have given me of your supernatural vision, I can do no better than have recourse to your wisdom and trust myself entirely to you.

"I first met Gina in America, and from the day of our meeting, we loved each other with all the devotion of our hearts. We agreed to unite our lives forever, and I married Gina Liseron.

"But she was unwilling to give up her art, which she loved passionately, and I felt that I should not oppose her desire. On the other hand, as the Princess Crasowska could not appear on the public screen, we decided that our marriage should remain a secret and that she should keep the name she had chosen when she had become an actress.

"Gina and Marguerite were the daughters of a Russian nobleman, whose name you will permit me to leave untold, and who was killed by the revolutionists, after being denounced by a certain Dimitri Avinoff, a base and astute henchman of the Czars, who had betrayed his former masters to attach himself to the fortunes of the new dictators of our unhappy Russia.

"This Dimitri Avinoff, or at least the man who went by that name, for I have never learned his real name nor even his real nationality, became by his satanic genius the instigator of many massacres. And he was present in person at the execution of the royal family.

"Gina had sworn to avenge her father and all those of his caste whom Avinoff had brought to death. She persuaded Marguerite to share this aim and I, too, took an oath to aid them.

"She had learned, from friends who are now dead, that the scoundrel was living in Paris, under another name, that he was rich and respected, perhaps high in rank. And she was awaiting the arrival of a document which would enable her to confront him and expose him to public shame.

"As he had brought about the deaths —and in some cases, inflicted them— of a number of French people living in Russia at the time of the revolution, she hoped to turn him over to the French courts.

"The document was sent from Riga, and the investigation, which you have perhaps followed, has revealed the fact that it reached Gina on the eve of her murder.

"It was later rediscovered in a sensational fashion and immediately seized by Dimitri Avinoff, who no doubt destroyed it.

"What did it consist of? That, perhaps, will never be known. For the man who sent it was already on his deathbed. He was an honorable, but timid man, an ex-servant, whom chance had made the possessor of this dangerous secret.

"He feared the vengeance of Dimitri Avinoff, and it was only within a few hours of his own death that he dared send Gina the proofs of that fiend's wickedness and reveal the name under which he was known in Paris.

"I imagine myself that the documents consisted of photographs of papers establishing the name and the cowardly denunciations I have told you of. With the photographs, said Gina, there was a single, and terrible, film of the criminal scene in which the royal family perished.

"On that film, the Princess Crasowska told me, appeared the true Dimitri Avinoff, stripped of the disguise he used in Paris—without make-up, without beard, and without spectacles. All this is lost now.

"And my communications, unhappily very confused with the Beyond, have already given me a presentiment of what you have just inadvertently told me concerning the serene domain of the spirits: Gina and Marguerite no longer wish for vengeance. Terrestrial events now seem insignificant and remote to them.

"It is partly for that reason that I have been so willing to listen to you and to comply with your request. For I now come to the part played in this story by the young girl over whom you are concerned without knowing her. She is a young and charming Parisian, whose name, I suppose, has no importance for you."

"Don't fool yourself!" thought Tiburce, while he gave a solemn nod of approval.

"The Princess Crasowska had not waited for the documents before beginning her researches. Certain coincidences of dates and a striking resemblance had given her a suspicion concerning a person, whom she did not name to me—whom she was unwilling to name to any one until she was sure.

"All that I know is that she needed the help of this young girl to complete her vengeance, if her suspicions were verified. But they were so well founded that Gina determined to begin her work.

"She wanted to make an ally of this young Parisian; inspire in her a friendship for herself and a hatred for the unknown scoundrel. There seemed to be some refinement of vengeance in that which she did not explain to me.

"Such was the work of magic she undertook with the aid of the pictures I obtained—how, it is needless to tell you, since that does not matter. And now, professor, you know as much as myself."

In truth, Tiburce knew enough. He had risen from his chair, shaken with profound emotion. A cold sweat beaded his brow.

To the same extent that he had received the first part of the prince's tale with philosophic calm, amused by this adventure told by a half madman, was he now perturbed by his reflections on hearing the disclosures concerning Yveline.

"It is just as I feared," he murmured. "The poor little kid!"

"I beg your pardon?" said the prince.

"Nothing. I was just talking to myself. I must leave now, thanking you profoundly for—"

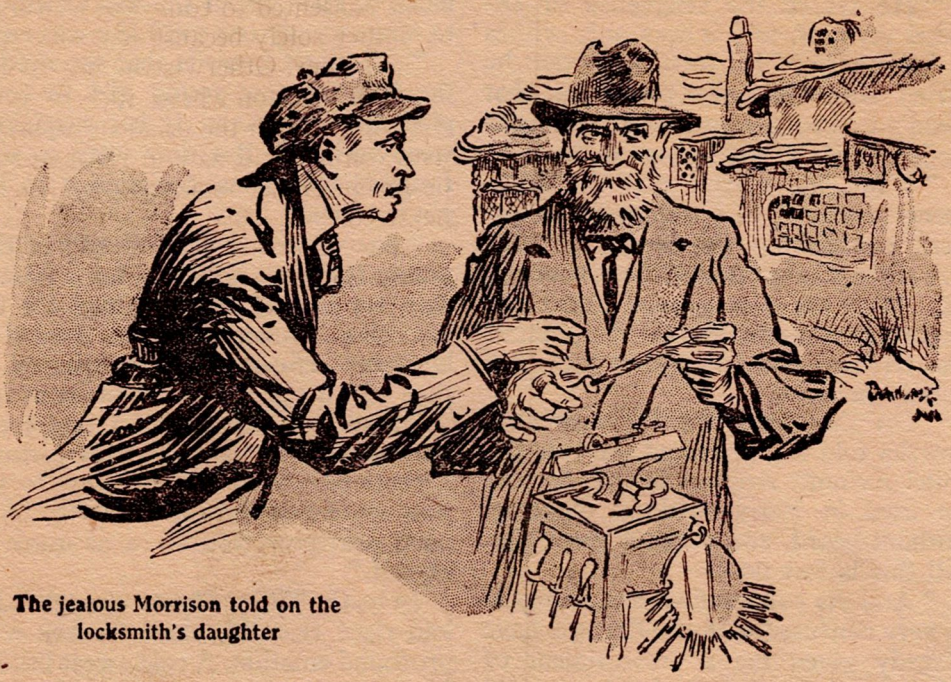
But the prince beseeched him to stay.

"Will you not help me, professor, to evoke the spirit of my—"

"I cannot now, your highness," said Tiburce firmly. "But when you come to Copenhagen, I will show you my apparatus and we will work together."

And with this deceptive promise, he took leave of Sigismond Crasowski.

TO BE CONCLUDED



The jealous Morrison told on the locksmith's daughter

The Amazing Murder

A True Story

From an Edinburgh Slum Comes This Tragedy of Blood, in Which Mad Passion and Warped Hearts Came to a Regrettable End

By Joseph Gollomb

I WILL call this simply the report of an amazing murder, though I am tempted to put it forward as perhaps the most amazing murder in the annals of crime. And what makes its brilliant uniqueness stand out all the more is its shabby setting and actors, some of them sordid, all of them commonplace in the main.

In Shakespeare's time, even in the pages of the great playwright himself, a story was not considered worth presenting unless it had royalty or at least nobility participating in it.

Here is a true tale of an Edinburgh slum; but I venture to believe that even to an Elizabethan audience it would have something to say with its tragedy of blood, its white-hot passions, and the warping of the human heart that gives it its outstanding place in the records of extraordinary crime.

William Shaw had been a soldier most of his adult years, a private and finally a noncommissioned officer in the British army, hardened by many years of campaigning in India and Africa.

He was a six-footer, and the fact that he survived the wars, the fevers, the savagery and the jungles, the deserts and the pest holes of his many

military campaigns, tells something of his vitality and strength.

When he finally retired on a pension and came to Edinburgh to live with his daughter he was not content to idle, but worked up a trade as a free-lance locksmith.

By nature and from his military life he derived a simple way of looking at human relations; the world was divided into two classes of people: those whom you had to obey implicitly, and those who had to obey you.

Showing Her Dad

The first part of his creed had to be knocked into him with musket butts, fists, and courts-martial. For when Shaw first joined the army he had a temper that needed a lot of curbing. It took years before he learned to keep it in check when a military superior got him angry.

He never did learn to swallow resentment when it was a fellow private who roused it. And now that he was back in his native Edinburgh the years had only added the character of a military tyrant to the temper which all his army years had not subdued.

His daughter Catherine, now a young woman of nineteen, was the fruit of a hasty marriage into which Shaw had plunged when he was on leave and full of liquor.

When he sobered up he found himself legally tied to a woman he had met in a debauch. Awhile later, after he had gone back to his barracks, his wife sent word that he had also contracted parenthood. There was a daughter. Then his wife died, and, somehow or other, the daughter grew up in Edinburgh slums.

On his return to Edinburgh, Shaw searched for and found the offspring of his debauch. She was a slim and pretty thing, with her mother's wanton eyes and hair, her father's temper eloquent in her ripe, sensual lips, and her nature was a fairly even mixture of the worst traits of her parents.

She consented to come and live with her father solely because it would cost her no money. Otherwise he was to her only a stranger on whom she had a sort of claim through the accident of birth. Shaw, on his side, saw in his daughter the image of her mother, a woman of the streets who had trapped him into marriage.

Now, however, that he was a father, he meant to do his duty. He would support her. She did not need to work if she did not want to—and she did not want to work. But she would have to obey him, and his orders were to be carried out with as little argument as orders were obeyed in the army.

Shaw, as I have said, had to have obedience knocked into him; now it was his daughter who had to learn. All her life she had enjoyed a fairly free time of it. The men she met had to pay if they wanted her complaisance. Now came a man, her father, who meant little or nothing to her—and from the moment of their meeting she encountered a tyrant.

Black and Blue

It was not long before a pitched battle ensued between father and daughter. They had taken a small four-room flat on the top floor of a wooden tenement in a huge block of other similar tenements. It was an old house, with cracks in ceiling, walls and floors, wherever plaster or boards could no longer withstand the drying and warping of age.

In such a house privacy in quarreling was hard to achieve, but apparently neither Shaw nor his daughter cared how much their neighbors heard of what went on when they clashed. The one who was most acquainted with these quarrels was their next-door neighbor, Andrew Morrison.

One day he heard the usual sounds of bitter recrimination from the Shaw flat. This time, however, the argument ended with a cry from Catherine, followed by bitter sobs.

Shaw had won the argument by giving his daughter the beating of her life. Then he went out on his daily search for locks to mend and keys to make.

Morrison went into the Shaw flat, and found Catherine on the floor shaking with sobs and rage. One of her pretty blue eyes was almost invisible, so hard had her father hit her. Her face was splotched from blows and weeping, and altogether she was not the pretty sight of which Morrison was so fond. For he was among the men who shared Catherine's rather easily bought favors.

Dazed by Love

"I'll tell your father what I think of him for this!" Morrison said indignantly.

"Tell it to him with a chair leg, or he'll do all the talking!" raged the daughter.

Feeling it up to his manhood to remonstrate with Shaw, Morrison waited for the ex-soldier to come home that night. When the two men met before Shaw's door Morrison read him an indignant lecture.

He should have taken Catherine's advice more seriously. For Shaw did not like to be lectured on his duty as a father by a man he suspected was one of his daughter's lovers.

The whole tenement resounded with the roar of resentment Shaw let out. Then he simply knocked Morrison down. Catherine heard it from inside their flat and came out to see how Morrison had championed her.

The sight did not arouse her admiration, and as Morrison crawled back to his own flat Catherine's derisive laughter told him that he could no longer count on being her favorite.

To Catherine love was something that troubled men, not her. She had liked scores of men and had given them everything but her heart. She was too fond of herself to give any one that.

She saw from the way men—and other women—behaved, that if you loved any one, you lost your self-possession; you were at the mercy of another. Life lost its ease; you made sacrifices at the altar of love, and Catherine did not like to make sacrifices.

But one Sunday in a dance hall she met a young man by the name of Lawson. His speech was smooth, his hair was sleek, his clothes professionally attractive, and the young man himself was good-looking and persuasive. He danced ingratiatingly and wooed swiftly.

He told Catherine she was the one woman in his life; and whether she believed it or not it set her heart pounding. For the first time in her life Catherine felt she loved some one more than herself. The realization of it left her breathless and robbed her of her sense of self.

He asked her about her home life, and she told him, hoping he would offer to take her out of it. He did not. He promised to visit her when her father was away. He came the following day, and it was then that the jealous Morrison next door saw who was his successor.

A Cold-blooded Admirer

Lawson made the most of his first visit. Along with his love-making he showed a strong interest in the economic side of Catherine's home life. What did they live on? he asked.

"Father's pension and what he makes as a locksmith," she told him.

"Does he spend all he makes?"

"No; he's too stingy. He keeps putting money away for a rainy day."

"So? Where does he keep it?"

"In that oak chest."

The neighbor, Morrison, worked as a night watchman, and had plenty of leisure during the day to spy on Catherine. When he saw her come home toward noon with the handsome young Lawson the sight did not make him happy.

He went into his living room and

pressed his ear to the flimsy wall that separated it from the living room of the Shaw flat. Near the fireplace of the latter the wall was flimsier than elsewhere.

Morrison had long before discovered this, and whenever he wanted to know in detail what was going on in the neighboring room he put his ear to that part of the wall.

It was in this way that he heard Lawson's easy wooing and later his less sentimental interest in what was being kept in the oak chest. He even heard Lawson try to open that chest. But Shaw was too good a locksmith, and the chest resisted.

Her Cruel Threat

Then Morrison heard Lawson persuading Catherine to steal the key from her father, bring the contents away and take up life with him.

"I know horse racing. With a little money to start us," Lawson was saying, "you and I will soon be in clover. In a week I can make a pound for every shilling we start with. Then it will be Monte Carlo and all sorts of nice places for you and me, sweetheart!"

Catherine seemed more than willing to try to make the vision real.

"But the old miser has taken good care to hide the keys," she said. "I don't know where they are, but they must be in the house."

While the two lovers were searching for the keys to the chest, Morrison went looking for Shaw. He knew the neighborhood in which the locksmith was plying his trade, and found him.

"I've no love for you, Shaw," Morrison said. "But I'm not so heartless as to want to see you robbed both of your daughter and your savings.

"You're being robbed at this moment. A young thief your Catherine has picked up is in your home. They are looking for the keys to your oak chest. If they find them, it 'll be the last you'll see of your money and your daughter."

Shaw hurried home. He entered it so suddenly that the couple he startled showed every sign of guilt he had expected. Striding over to young Lawson, he put one big hand about the scruff of his neck, the other on his rear, and, rushing him to the hall door, threw him across the landing and down a flight of stairs.

Then he slammed the door shut and addressed himself to the daughter. He had not much to say, but the interview ended with the young woman prone on the floor of the living room too battered even to sit up.

Meanwhile the father opened up his locksmith kit and began working on the door to his flat. When he got through with it that door was as well secured with locks as the oak chest.

His daughter raised her bruised and tear-stained face and, gathering herself together, collected some clothes and made for the door.

"Where are you going?" her father demanded.

"Where I'll never have to look at your hateful old face again!" she cried passionately. "If I come back it 'll be only for the pleasure of seeing it in a coffin!"

At the Window

Her father preceded her to the door. "If you leave this house it will have to be by way of the window," he said. "I've put two of my best locks on that door. The keys will never leave my pocket.

"As for that thief you've picked for a lover, he'll have to prove himself a better burglar than I'm a locksmith if he wants to see you again."

Slinging his working kit over his shoulder, Shaw left the house and his daughter stayed in it. She spent a hysterical time trying to break open the door; then she ran to the window.

But she was too fond of life to try escape in that direction.

Nevertheless, it was through the window that there came to her hope

of escape. Lawson could do nothing against the locksmith physically; he too was too fond of himself to expose his body to violence.

In stealth and strategy, however, Shaw was no match for Lawson, and in a few days love again laughed at a locksmith—if what brought Lawson back could be called love.

Concealed in a neighboring doorway Lawson watched the Shaw tenement, and saw the locksmith go out on his day's work. In the window of the Shaw flat he saw Catherine. She saw him. It was not the first time they had communicated by signs.

Behind Iron Bars

Lawson had with him two bulky hand bags. With these he crossed the street and entered the tenement next to the one where Catherine was imprisoned. Mounting to the roof, he climbed across until he was directly over the window in which Catherine sat keeping watch on the street.

From one bag Lawson took out a stout rope end and tied it about an iron stanchion on the roof. The end of the rope he dropped over, and Catherine caught hold of it. Down the rope, which was knotted, Lawson climbed, and the two lovers were together again.

Lawson's immediate program was a practical one. He had brought a burglar's jimmy and meant to break open the veteran's oak chest.

But Catherine had been a weeping and hysterical prisoner for several days and nights, deprived of something more than liberty, the only man in her life from whom separation had been unbearable.

Now that her lover was before her, it was love and not her father's money that interested her.

When Lawson tried to make his program prevail she became hysterical, and he had no choice but to let her have her emotional way.

The couple had flattered themselves when they thought they had outwitted not only the locksmith but the rest of the world.

Morrison, the watchman, had been doing some watching on behalf of his own jealousy. While Lawson was on the roof circumventing the locksmith Morrison went again in search of him.

Again he found him, and again Shaw hurried home. His own locks frustrated his catching Lawson in the flat. When the couple heard Shaw's key, Catherine screamed. Lawson made for the window, and by the time Shaw got in, Lawson had climbed to the roof.

On the floor of the living room lay Lawson's burglar jimmy.

"This," said the locksmith, holding it up before Catherine's face, "will put your lover behind the bars. And as for you—I'll do that for you myself!"

As yet he did not lay his hands on her; he was reserving that pleasure to the last. He locked her in again and went to a neighboring blacksmith. When he came back to the house it was with a dozen stout iron bars.

Entitled to Sympathy

Some of these he fastened vertically into the windows of his flat, the rest horizontally. When he got through with his workmanlike job the windows were as secure against escape or invasion as those of a substantial prison. Then he gave his daughter the beating he had promised himself.

By this time the neighborhood was interested in the proceedings. Thanks to the sounds that came out of the flat, and still more through the detailed reports which Morrison was glad to share with the others, the situation in the Shaw home was no novelty to the neighborhood.

At first Morrison had been Catherine's champion, and the neighborhood, taking their clew from him, was tempted to call in the law against the locksmith.

Now Morrison declared that it was the locksmith who was entitled to sym-

pathy. Here was a man, Morrison pointed out, who had served England many years as a soldier. He had come home to do his duty by a wastrel of a daughter, who was repaying him by taking up with a thief who had tried to rob the old veteran of his hard-earned savings.

If the soldier kept his daughter behind lock and key, it was only to keep her from a life as a wanton. It was too bad that occasionally the veteran lost his temper and had to beat the girl, but with the kind of mother she had had, how, demanded Morrison, could a father otherwise keep his daughter in the path of virtue?

Feeble Groans

And the neighbors, who themselves tried to settle human complexities by the simple method of laying violent hands on their problems, were not too outraged at Shaw.

However, on the following morning, Morrison, who had just lain down to sleep on his return from night duty, was awakened by sounds coming from the Shaw flat, this time more violent than ever before. He did not have to put his ear to the wall to know that matters had reached a climax on the other side.

Catherine was not crying, but screaming; and her words came clearly.

"You are the cause of my death!"

Morrison took these words at first for hysteria. But there was such a commotion of blows, struggling, the crashing of furniture and such a sudden cessation of it all, that he became alarmed.

Undecided what to do he went out on the landing. He was just in time to see Shaw bolt out of his apartment, slamming the door behind him. Morrison heard the spring locks snap into place. By the light of the hall kerosene lamp he saw that Shaw was ghastly pale.

Down the stairs, three steps at a time rushed Shaw.

And the man's right hand was bloody.

Catherine's groans grew feebler, but not more reassuring. Morrison decided to rouse the house. The neighbors could do nothing against the excellent locks Shaw had put on his door; and Catherine seemed unable to help them.

A policeman was called. He sent for a crowbar and a doctor. Shaw's locks yielded finally and the policeman and the neighbors saw at once how justified was their alarm.

On the floor, half on the stone of the fireplace, half on the crudely boarded floor, lay Catherine. Protruding from her left bosom was the handle of a kitchen knife. Her face was bleeding from savage blows. Her eyes were dim with the last ebbing of life.

The policeman knelt by her and raised her to a sitting posture. If he wanted information from her he would have to get it soon.

"Did your father kill you?" he asked.

Breathlessly the roomful of onlookers watched and listened. Catherine was past speech. But her head drooped forward—then hung limp forevermore.

A Daughter's Accusation

Was that droop of the head an answer to the policeman's question?

Or was it only the last of life?

There was no doubt in the minds of any one in that room that Catherine in her last moment had accused her father of murder. For she had screamed out her accusation in her last words, "You are the cause of my death!"

The police of Edinburgh did not have much trouble in catching Shaw. He had tried to escape, but lacked experience and preparation.

Once more public sentiment changed in regard to Shaw. It was true that his daughter had been "a bad sort." But this brutal murder shocked the community.

Shaw was put on trial for the mur-

der of his daughter. The neighbors testified to the many beatings he had given her. Morrison in particular gave the court a clear picture of life on the other side of his living room wall.

He told how he was awakened on the morning of the murder by Catherine's screams; of the sounds of blows and struggling; Catherine had cried out, "You are the cause of my death!"

Shaw had rushed out of his flat white-faced and had taken the stairs three steps at a time. Morrison had seen blood on his right hand.

The Sentence Pronounced

The policeman who arrested Shaw found blood on his vest. At the station house Shaw explained that he had "been in an accident." At the trial he changed his story to a more plausible one.

It was true, he admitted, that the blood on his vest was his daughter's. But he had not used the knife on her. He had beat her badly. In his rage at her conduct he had drawn blood with his fist.

When she cried out that he was the cause of her death he became frightened and ran out for a doctor. The reason he did not get one, he said, was that he became convinced she was not as badly hurt as she pretended to be.

Thinking so he had turned back to the house. By the time he got there he saw police hurrying in. He realized then that matters were worse than he had thought, and there was nothing left him but flight.

Now that he knew it was a knife that had caused her death, he protested his innocence. He had used no knife on his daughter, he repeated.

His lawyer tried to make the most of Shaw's long service as a soldier for his country. The prosecution countered this by showing how often in the army Shaw had been disciplined for an ungovernable temper.

With this feeble defense overthrown, Shaw's fate was inevitable. It seemed to the judge and the jury a simple case with no complications. The ring of circumstantial evidence was welded without a flaw discernible.

The jury found him guilty of murder.

The judge pronounced upon him the sentence of death.

And the sentence was carried out.

Because the case was so simple it aroused comparatively little speculation on the part of any one; and when Shaw's body was laid away in its grave of dishonor whatever memory was associated with the man soon died, too.

But about the flat in which the tragedy was enacted the story clung. The house was pointed out, a morbid monument. Several of the tenants moved out. Silence in the flat from which formerly there had come so often the sounds of anger seemed to affect the others like the hush in a haunted house.

The Amazing Murder

The landlord was in despair. If he could only rent the accursed flat—at any price—perhaps the curse on the house would eventually lift. He offered the Shaw flat at any rental. Finally he was reduced to offering it rent free to any one who would move in and live there.

A carpenter by the name of Davitt heard of the offer. He had a wife and two small children to support and rent was a serious item in his budget. He went to the landlord of the Shaw tenement and asked to see the flat.

On the floor of the living room the gaping boards showed a large dark stain. It was too gruesome a sight to live with.

"I'll take the place," said the carpenter, "if you let me tear up these boards and put down new ones."

"And I'll pay you for the job!" the landlord assented eagerly.

Davitt came down next day with his tools to tear up the floor. He began with the boards nearest the fireplace where the widest gap showed. As he

pried up the first board a musty odor of the past arose.

But directly under it lay an envelope, itself covered with dust more recent than old.

Davitt wondered how it could have got there.

He stooped, picked up the envelope and found there was a letter inside.

It read:

> Father, you have kept me from the only man I have ever loved; kept me from him with blows, locks and bars. Since I cannot have him, life is not worth living and I have decided to put an end to an existence which is a burden to me. My death I lay to you. When you read this consider yourself the inhuman wretch who plunged the knife into the bosom of unhappy
>
> CATHERINE SHAW

Davitt took the letter to the police and thereby revealed to the world the amazing "murder" that had been concealed up to now.

It was easy now to piece together what had transpired on the morning of the tragedy. With more than enough hatred to inspire an ordinary murder Catherine had planned long how to kill her father. Shaw must have had more than a suspicion and was on guard against her.

But with his simple psychology he could not begin to imagine the grim and devious plot she was hatching single-handed.

Once her mind and desperate will were made up not only Shaw was fooled; Morrison the neighbor, the police, the courts of justice and the machinery of execution were all obedient tools to her machinations.

It was clear now that she had forced the quarrel on the morning of the tragedy. With all the means at her command she maddened the man until he beat her to the point of bringing blood.

Then when she cried out that he was the cause of her death she meant the words to be heard. She knew her cries would wake Morrison. She knew he would report what he heard.

The very blood her father drew when he struck her was part of her plan. Clinging to him in her pretended struggle she saw to it that her blood should stain him.

Then in the midst of her struggle she fell to the floor as if lifeless.

She knew that he would rush out in alarm to get a doctor.

Her letter was undoubtedly written and dropped between the boards even before the last act of her violent scene with her father.

The moment he left the house she began to groan, further to alarm those who would be listening on the staircase.

Then with what must have been an amazing passion of will, compounded of despair of life and hatred of her father, she plunged the knife into her breast.

The letter, when its full implications became realized, created consternation. Justice found itself an accomplice to the murder of her father planned by Catherine Shaw. An innocent accomplice, perhaps; but what might have been excusable in an individual was unpardonable in the law.

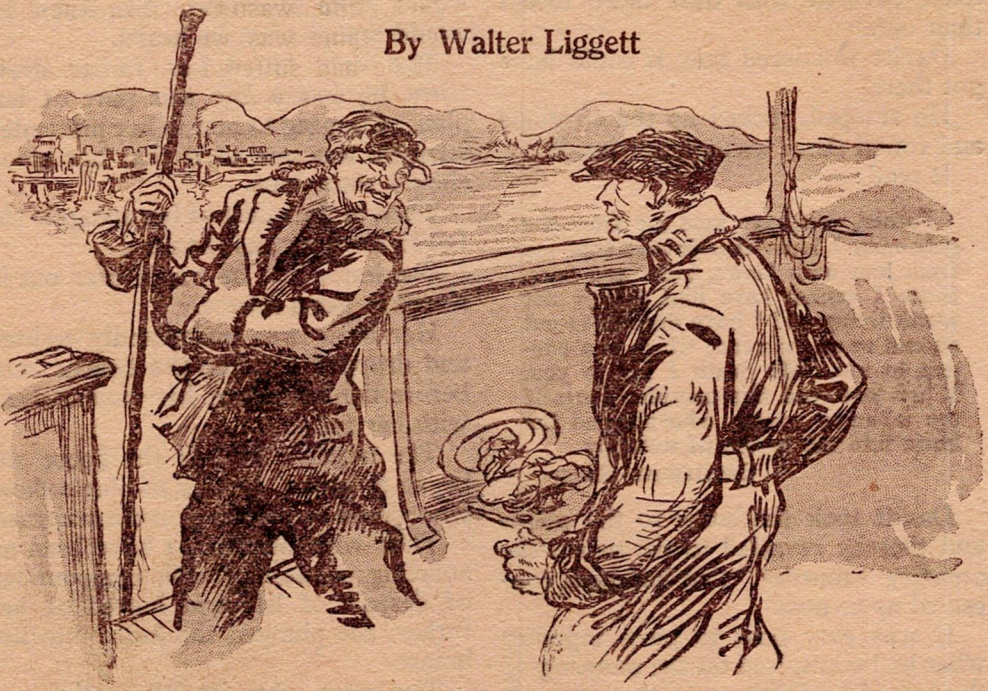
William Shaw's body was exhumed from its grave of dishonor. The government took charge of the second funeral. A great crowd attended, as if the public, too, felt involved in guilt toward the dead.

His old regiment sent a squad of honor and gave their former comrade a military funeral. Three volleys were fired over his grave and the flag of his country and the regimental colors were seven times waved in solemn tribute to him.

THE END

The End of the Rainbow

By Walter Liggett



The man grinned at him strangely. "The whole channel's filled in," he said

A Thief Follows the Yukon Trail to His Pot of Gold—the Treasure for Which He Had Bartered Two Long Years in Prison

HE had stolen the gold dust deliberately—accurately estimated the exact amount he could carry away. Gold dust was heavy. No one knew that better than he. But it was valuable, too. And thirty thousand dollars was ample recompense for his two years in prison. Bobby Gleason chuckled.

How well he remembered the landmarks as the river steamboat swung around each successive bend. It was his old run. He knew each hill; each tree along the bank; each ripple almost.

Yes, he had had plenty of time to study the landscape when he was purser on the Yukoner—and plenty of time to recall those scenes when he was serving his time. Involuntarily he shuddered—an almost imperceptible shrug. And now he was back—on the same boat. But not as purser. No, he was paying his way this time. He laughed to himself—a trifle louder than a man standing alone ordinarily laughs—and there was a slight suggestion of bravado in his voice.

Well, it *had* been different in the old days—when he was purser. He had had the run of the boat *then*. The captain's cabin; even the pilot house; and his own little office, half filled by the safe, had been the most popular place on the steamship. He smiled. It had almost seemed like a bank at times. Those old sourdoughs would leave their gold dust with him, but they

couldn't resist cards—not on their way "Outside"—and the losers were always coming to him, sheepishly asking for some more gold from their plethoric pokes.

They always told him of their hard luck—half apologetically—and he had been accustomed to kid them as he weighed out a few ounces of their dust so they could continue gambling. Then—only two years ago, but how long it seemed—he had been the most important man on the boat; yes, better known and better liked than the captain.

He shivered slightly. These northland winds were chill—and two years in a sunless prison cell made one susceptible to cold. Standing alone, on the forward boiler deck, he could hear the jangle of the mechanical piano and the song and laughter from the saloon. Once he would have been in the midst of the merriment, the chief promoter of this light-hearted gayety. Not now. Even the deck hands shunned him—yet followed his every move with suspicious eyes. He shivered again.

What the hell! It didn't buy you anything to be a good fellow. Most of these old Yukon sourdoughs had plenty of money—and who asked how they got it? Sure, they were good fellows—anybody who had the coin was a good fellow. Well, he had it himself now—or would soon. He would be a good fellow, too—and be accepted as one when he took himself to a place where he wasn't known—and where no questions would be asked.

Oh, it was hard now. Many of those aboard had known him—some he even had counted as his friends. Now they looked past him as though he didn't exist. It was their money he had stolen. Of course the express company had insured their damned dust and made up the loss; but still they looked at him as if he had done them a personal wrong. He had known how it would be; steeled himself in advance; but it hurt—more than he expected.

Prison had been hard, too. Only two years, but he had never believed that two years could be so long. Time—well, time wasn't just the passing days. Time was what you suffered. And he had suffered for an eternity. Why, he was young when he entered—felt himself almost a kid. And now—now—well, he was almost middle-aged. Again he shrugged, almost angrily.

Well, damn it! He had known all the time that it wouldn't exactly be a picnic. He always had realized that he must pay a price. Now he had paid it—and it was his turn to collect.

Suppose these damned old sourdoughs had given him the go by? What of it? Who the hell were they, anyhow? A lot of balmy old prospectors. They didn't know how to spend the money after they dug it out of the ground. Well, he did. And the money soon would be his—the money he had earned by two years of prison. He smiled. He'd show them how to spend it—and how to make more in the process.

He wondered if the present purser spent his idle hours speculating how he could spend the vast sums of gold dust temporarily intrusted to his charge—and planning how best to get away with a sizable amount. How could he—how could any purser—help doing this very thing? The almost incredible carelessness with which gold was handled in the northland must tempt any one. Why, it was almost a challenge to theft. Boxes of bullion were carted about almost as casually as cordwood and steerage passengers and roustabouts actually slept on piles of mail sacks each containing thousands of dollars of virgin gold dust.

Oh, he knew! They said that gold was easy to steal in the northland, but hard to get away with. His own investigation had proved that true. That explained the absence of armed guards. Gold was heavy. One could carry only a comparatively small sum. The coun-

try was wild and vast, but there were only a few passable routes by which one could enter or leave, and these were carefully watched by the Canadian Mounted Police and the American customs officials. Every person leaving the country was searched—an indignity to which they submitted almost in self-protection.

Besides, these damned Mounties actually could identify gold—tell which creek it came from. More than one man had been arrested and convicted because he couldn't account for the gold dust he carried; or he lied in saying he had washed it out of a certain creek.

Yes, he had speedily ascertained that there was a reason for the apparent carelessness with which the gold was handled—a sound reason—but that was no argument for not trying to beat the game.

He chuckled at the thought of his own cleverness. He *had* beat the game. Beat it in a manner that made all their boasted precautions look foolish. Beat it so openly that he laughed at them and told them exactly what he intended the very moment they placed him under arrest. And they hadn't been able to do anything about it—nor could they now. He chuckled again.

He had been arrested at St. Michaels, the moment the purser of the ocean going liner had checked over the amount of gold dust he was supposed to deliver. He had expected that. He hadn't even bothered filling the rifled boxes with lead. It would have been all the same in the end. He preferred to have a show down as speedily as possible—to begin serving his time. The sooner he was sentenced the sooner he would be free. No; he hadn't even denied the theft.

"There's some gold missing," the purser of the Victoria had told him as he checked over the bulky, iron-bound boxes as the grunting stevedores lifted them one by one.

"Sure there is—sixty thousand dollars' worth," Gleason had smiled. He still remembered how the other purser had straightened, fairly petrified with astonishment, and two stevedores, gaping with open mouths, still continued to hold a heavy box in midair.

"Go get a detective," he had added; "sure, I stole it. Yes, honestly I did. I'm not trying to kid you, Peterson. Tell the officials and tell them to call the cops."

Finally Peterson had believed him—he was incredulous for a few minutes—and first the officials had rushed in and later the police. He smiled at the memory of their bewilderment. Apparently they couldn't understand plain English.

"Yes, I took the gold," he had confessed. "Two boxes containing thirty thousand dollars each. Sure; I know exactly where they are. Tell you? No; hardly. Not where both of them are. One—well, maybe." He had grinned at them—then laughed aloud as their faces registered puzzled dismay.

II

HE had planned every move. He even had waited until the old Yukoner was far enough from Dawson to be in Alaska. He didn't fancy playing with the Mounted Police in Yukon territory. Nor bargaining with the Canadian officials. He knew them well enough to know that they would give him the limit—never compromise, never listen to a suggestion that they compound a crime for a consideration.

But he also knew the express company officials at St. Michaels. They were concerned about insurance rates. They had no such tradition behind them as sustained the Mounted. He had shrewdly figured that they would listen to reason and he had not been disappointed.

They had tried to bluff him at first. Taken his freely given confession and then threatened to send him over the road for twenty years unless he told

them where he had cached the gold. He had only laughed at their bluster. Naturally he had looked up the law. Larceny under bailie—that was what the statutes called his offense—could only be punished with a maximum sentence of five years.

Well, if worst came to worst he was willing to serve the longest term they could give him. After all, he would have a bigger stake when he got out. He even had bragged that he could do the five years "standing on his head." He shuddered involuntarily. It hadn't been as easy as he thought. He was glad that they finally had compromised on the shorter sentence. How well he remembered. They alternately tried to frighten and to cajole. He returned a set formula to every appeal.

"Give me a two years' sentence," he had said—two years was the minimum—"and I'll tell where thirty thousand dollars of the gold dust is hid. If you give me the limit I'll keep it all. Suit yourself."

The express company officials, the lawyers and the police had stormed. They blustered, bulldozed—gave him the third degree. He grinned reminiscently. That had been pretty hard, but he hadn't weakened. A dozen times he had pretended to confess and they stopped their torture until they could cable to the northland to have the express company agents go out to see if the gold was cached where he had said it was. That took time. And when the answer came back that they could find no gold, and the police third degreed him again—well, he only had to give another false confession to win another respite.

He had made suckers out of all of them: express company officials, police, and even the judge.

He grinned again. The judge had hemmed and hawed and finally said that he was sentencing him for only two years because he had been told that he was a young man who had been grievously tempted, a young man of previously fine reputation, and then went on with a lot of blah about his giving him a light sentence in the hope he would reform.

Gleason had grinned in his face. He knew the judge was talking for public consumption—that the express company attorneys had told him what sentence to give in his chambers just before he took the bench. And Gleason also knew that the judge privately was aching to give him the limit—in fact, almost bucked over the traces at the very last moment. Well, much he would have cared—or so he thought then. Two years and thirty thousand dollars or five years and sixty thousand. That had been Gleason's ultimatum and it finally had won him the lesser term.

But the real fun was with the lawyers after the police had got through with him—given up in disgust. He shivered involuntarily. The police had given him a tough time. Still, he had stuck it out.

It was all part of the price he had made up his mind to pay. And he really had enjoyed himself with the express company lawyers.

"Young man," one of them had thundered, a big fellow with bushy whiskers, "do you mean to say that you deliberately stole this money and put it in two separate places, fully intending all the while to tell us where half of it is located only if we will agree to give you a two-year sentence?"

"Sure," Gleason had cheerfully agreed. "But you can give me the limit if you want to. I'll have that much more jack when I get out. Twelve thousand a year for five years isn't so bad."

"You are the most dangerous criminal I ever have met," the lawyer had pronounced solemnly.

"Me dangerous?" Gleason had laughed. "No, I'm not so dangerous. You get a lot more than me for telling other people how to break the law. I just broke it."

"I will advise my clients to see that you get the limit—the extreme limit of the law," the attorney flared, red with rage. "We would be compounding a crime if we bargained with you."

"Go ahead then," Gleason had taunted, "but don't forget that your revenge will be costing you money. Twelve thousand a year, old boy. About half what you get. But this time it 'll be coming to me."

The lawyer had stamped out of the room and the police had locked him up for another week. But he had not worried.

There had been innumerable conferences—endless jockeying—but Gleason knew that either thirty or sixty thousand dollars awaited him, that five years was the longest possible sentence he could get—and he computed it into weekly wages and grinned. It was the easiest money he ever had earned and the only way he saw of accumulating a real stake.

Finally they had weakened—just as he figured they would. Took their oaths to see that he would be sentenced for only two years, provided he tell where half the gold was hidden. He had been foxy even then. Hell! He did not trust them—not for a second.

And they wouldn't trust him. He grinned. They had been wise. He would have double crossed them if he could. Even after the express company lawyers had agreed to the minimum sentence there had been a week's delay while they wrangled about his telling where half the gold was cached before he was sentenced.

Finally, deadlocked, they had tossed a coin. He had lost. Then, and then only, had he told them where to find half the gold—then waited for another two weeks while the express company agents searched the whole surrounding country. Hell! He hadn't been such a fool as to cache the two boxes close together—not when he had the whole thousand mile stretch of the Yukon River from Dawson to St. Michaels to chose from.

But they had kept their word. Even though they were enraged by not finding the remaining thirty thousand dollars' worth of dust, they had persuaded the judge to give him the minimum sentence.

Two years! They were longer inside than out—he had learned *that* all right. But fifteen thousand a year wasn't so bad. Why, it was nearly three hundred dollars a week—more than seven times what he had earned as purser. And all clear—no living expenses. He grinned again. The Federal government had furnished him both room and board. The money waiting for him was "velvet"—although he felt he had earned it twice over.

They were still watching him. As if he didn't know. Those clumsy, splay-footed detectives couldn't fool any one—certainly no one who had done two years "in stir." Well, let them watch. He grinned confidently. He always had known that he would be watched when he came back to get the gold and he had made his plans accordingly.

Did they think he was fool enough to dig up the cache in broad daylight and try to get out of the country with it? Hardly. No, he had suffered too much to fall down at the last moment, and he had had ample time to lay his plans. He knew a trick that would make these detectives look foolish. The express company officials themselves would have to laugh if they ever heard about it. Maybe he would tell them some time. It would be too good a joke to keep.

Gleason pulled his collar around his throat and deftly rolled a cigarette with one hand. He coughed, a dry, hacking cough as he drew the smoke into his lungs. The low October sun shone through a clump of bare poplar trees and cast long barlike shadows on the river.

Brr! It made him think of the

grilled door of his prison cell. He shivered again.

III

THE steamer had been keeping almost in the middle of the river, but now a jangle of bells in the engine room was followed by the slower "chug-chug" of the paddle wheel and the boat altered its course in a long slant toward shore.

Gleason peered ahead, shading his eyes from the almost horizontal rays of the sun. Just around the bend could be discerned the little cluster of frame shacks close to the river. Yes, it was Unaluk, all right. He drew his lungs full of smoke and smiled. No chance of his mistaking *that* village. He must have dreamed of it every night for two years. There was where he had hidden the gold.

Probably the detectives were watching him now. He had noticed them snooping about as the boat approached each landing place. Well, let them snoop. He wasn't going to get off here. Oh, no. He intended to go clear down to St. Michaels. He would lead these damned sleuths a merry chase. He wasn't in any hurry. That thirty thousand dollars worth of gold dust was as safe as if it were in a bank. In a way it *was* in a bank—in a sand bank—in Bobby Gleason's bank. He snickered at the thought of how close to the gold these detectives would come without ever guessing it was there.

He had dropped that iron-bound box overboard within ten feet of the shore. The old Yukoner would be almost over it when she tied up at the Unaluk landing.

Some one *was* watching him. He could feel it—tell by the involuntary twitching of his shoulders. Funny how prison made you that way. Casually throwing his cigarette over the bow, Bobby Gleason turned. Sure enough. That damned detective, too. And he was coming forward. In a way Gleason welcomed the intrusion. Damn it all! He was lonely—and what did he have to fear?

"Got a match, old man?"

"Sure." Gleason grinned affably.

"What town we coming to?" the detective continued, lighting his pipe.

"Used to be called Unaluk—when I was purser," Gleason answered deliberately.

"Were you ever purser?" the detective simulated surprise.

"Yes, on this very boat." He knew that the detective knew, but it helped in his loneliness to pretend.

"Handled lots of gold, I suppose?"

"Sure." He was surprised that the man broached the subject so directly.

"Should think it would be easy to get away with some up here, the careless way they handle it."

"It was—for me," Gleason laughed dryly and looked the man straight in the eye. "You're not kidding me any," he added. "I know who you are, and I guess you know me."

"Yeh, I figured you was wise that you were being shadowed," the detective replied evenly, with just the hint of a resigned sigh. "It's kinda hard," he went on almost apologetically, "to shadow a fella on a dinky boat like this. Yeh, I figured you was wise to me when I got on at Dawson."

"To both of you," laughed Gleason, and after a moment's hesitation the detective also laughed uncertainly.

"To both of us?" he repeated, clumsily pretending surprise.

"Sure. You and your pal—unless he's sent out to watch *you*." Gleason laughed again, and this time the detective joined heartily.

"Say, that's an idea," he said. "Maybe he is—watching me, I mean. Like I been watching you."

"A hell of a lot of good it'll do you to watch me," Gleason boasted.

"Got another match?" the detective asked.

"Sure—take a handful."

"Thanks. You don't smoke much, do you?"

"No; my lungs," Gleason began—then broke off abruptly. What did this fellow mean by asking him that? He seemed stupid—almost a fool—and yet one had an uneasy feeling that he was playing a deep game.

"Makes you kinda nervous, don't it?" the detective went on. "Noticed your hand was shaking when you gave me them matches."

"Nervous? Hell! What have I got to be nervous about?" Bobby flared. "It's cold—that's why I shiver."

"It *is* kinda cold," the detective said reflectively. "Well, I guess I'll be going in. Glad to have met you. See you again, I guess."

"Not if I see you first, you won't," Gleason jeered. Damn! Something about that big, lumbering boob *did* make you nervous. He watched his back disappear through the door of the boiler deck companionway. Had he been gifted with ability to see through wall he might have been disturbed to note that the detective, once out of sight, mounted rapidly to the captain's cabin and, after a brief conversation with the head officer, went with him to the pilot house.

A few minutes afterward two deck hands casually appeared on the fore deck; then the course of the boat altered. Instead of its prow pointing toward Unaluk, it swung back toward midstream. Vaguely Gleason wondered why they weren't stopping. This was the first time he ever remembered the Yukoner going by Unaluk. He peered toward shore. Yes, the landing looked the same as ever. But why in hell weren't they stopping. He had been looking forward with a curious pleasure to being so close to the gold dust that he might have touched it with a ten foot pole.

"When did the channel fill?" one of the deck hands was asking the other.

"This spring when the river was high. Just after the ice went out. Hell! The whole bar shifted. You can't git within a hundred yards of the landing now. That's why we don't stop unless they signal."

What was that? Gleason's heart suddenly seemed to miss a beat. The bar had shifted! The Unaluk bar! Why, the man must be crazy. It couldn't! That was where his gold dust was buried. On the bar. And they said it had shifted—filled up. An awful fear seemed to palsy him. He could hear his heart as it pounded painfully.

"Don't we stop at Unaluk any more?" vaguely, as from a distance, Gleason heard himself questioning the deck hand. Some inner sense told him to stop, but that awful fear—a necessity of knowing the worst at once—drove him on.

"Don't we stop here any more?" he repeated.

"Nope." The man grinned at him strangely. "Nope; the hull channel's filled in. Has been since last spring." Again the man flashed that strange, disquieting grin.

Gleason turned away—and clutched the rail to keep from falling. For a moment he fumbled in his pockets, then pulled out the makings and rolled a cigarette, spilling tobacco with his trembling hands. He needed some stimulus. God! He had come close to fainting.

"Got another match?" It was the detective back again.

"No, damn you! And keep away from me."

"No more matches? Sure you ain't got one?"

"If I had I wouldn't give you one."

"Then I guess we'll have to put in at Unaluk and get some. Oh, captain!" The detective raised his voice and, to Gleason's astonishment, the master leaned out of the pilot house window.

"Would you mind putting in at Unaluk?" the detective asked. "I want to get some matches—and some other things."

"Glad to oblige you, Mr. Morton," the captain called cheerily, and the next

instant Gleason, literally open-mouthed with astonishment, heard him jangle the engine-room bells and saw him slowly spin the big steering wheel. Eyes almost starting from his head, Gleason watched the prow of the Yukoner point directly toward the Unaluk landing.

"But—but—I thought—" Gleason started to stammer.

"You thought the channel was filled in, and that the bar had shifted, didn't you, bub?" the detective interrupted, not unkindly. "No; that was just a fairy story that the captain and me and these deck hands made up. I figured a couple of miles up the river, awhile back, that you was kinda interested in this place.

"Leastwise, this is the first time you smoked on the whole trip. And your hand was kinda shaking, bub, when you handed me them matches."

"I was cold! I tell you, I was cold," Gleason almost screamed.

"Well, I felt real warm," the detective laughed. "Warm on the scent of that gold you planted. It's on the bar, isn't it?"

"I'd be apt to tell you, wouldn't I?" Gleason sneered, desperately trying to recover equanimity.

"You've told me already," the detective replied evenly. "We figured all the time that you must have dropped that gold overboard. That missing box weighed close to a hundred and seventy pounds. You couldn't have carried it far. The other two bags were lighter. That's why you planted them in the woodpile, intending all the while to tell where they was—if they'd bargain with you. But the other you dropped overboard. That was plain enough. The only question was *where*—and now I know."

"Like hell you do!" Gleason laughed. "I'd hate to wait until you find it."

"Well, that's just what you're going to do, bub," the detective grinned. "You and me are going ashore at Unaluk—together—and we're going to stay together till I find the gold." He laughed. "And then I reckon we'll be together some more—till after the trial anyhow."

"The trial!" Gleason cried, startled out of control.

"Sure. The trial for stealing the second box. I got the warrant with me, and I'll serve it just as soon as I find the gold."

"How long will I have to wait?" Gleason demanded, feigning an indifference he was far from feeling.

"Not long, bub, not long!"

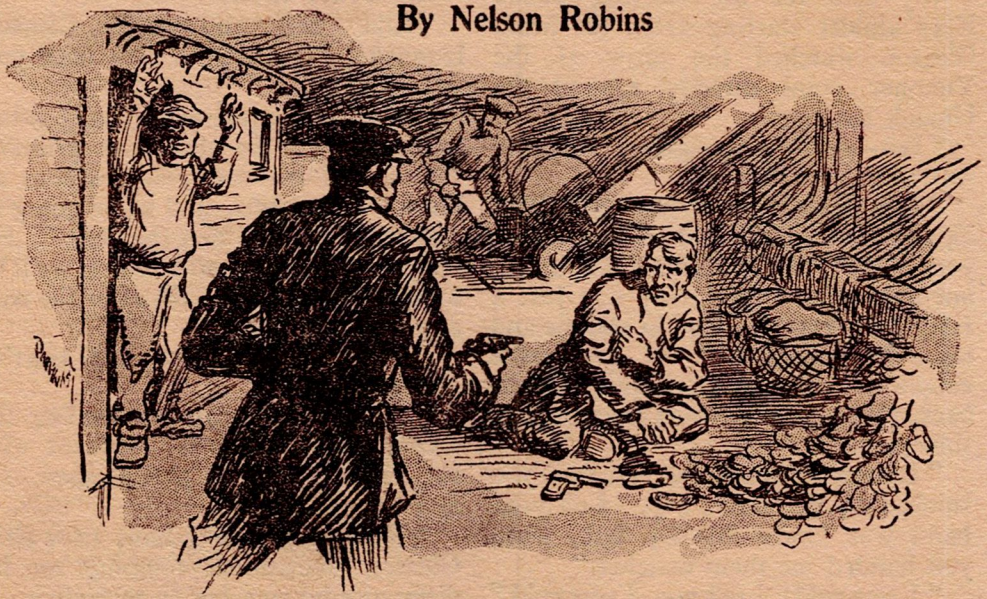
"Hell!" Gleason cried. "You're crazy."

"Maybe I am, bub, but I'm goin' to start dredging that bar to-morrow—right beside where the boat is tying up now, and I reckon that we'll find what's buried at the end of the rainbow." He laughed jovially.

Bobby Gleason shivered—and it was not from the cold. The detective was right. It wouldn't be long—not the waiting. He shivered again as he thought of returning to that familiar cell—probably for five years this time, and years utterly bereft of hope. Yes, the detective was right. He had finally reached the end of the rainbow

Personally Identified

By Nelson Robins



A moment later the lights showed Hinks feeling around the deck for his revolver

When a Searchlight Cut the Chesapeake's Blackness and Picked Up the Dredge of the Oyster Pirates, Deal, of the Pearl Patrol, Knew He Had His Man

STARK tragedy hovered about the derelict little oyster skiff, grounded in the sedge of the Chesapeake shore and gently rising and falling with the miniature surf of that water. Although it was nothing but an empty, unguided boat, Beverley Deal, ace of the Pearl Patrol, which represents the law on the bay, experienced that sense of impending disaster which presaged tragedy.

After bringing the Sea Gull alongside and ascertaining that the skiff was empty, he stood upright in the cockpit of his motor boat and looked around him. A growl and then a short, sharp bark from Mobjack made him wheel and he saw the huge brown retriever go overboard with a splash and half wade, half swim toward a dark, water-soaked mass more than half hidden in the sedge.

Mobjack stopped just short of the object and, looking back toward his master, barked again—a bark this time that was almost a howl. Deal's heart sank. Mobjack did not howl like that for nothing. He jumped overboard into knee-deep water and splashed over to where the dog stood.

There, gently rocking in the little surf, was the body of a man, an oysterman apparently, clothed in overalls and boots. A great gash across the side of his head where a club of some kind had crushed in the skull, showed that he had not been drowned.

Taking the body as gently as he could by the shoulders, Deal dragged it ashore. It was Tom Bailey, one of a group of oystermen who, having tonged oysters for wages all their lives, pooled their savings and worked the Piney Creek beds.

Theirs had been a new move on the part of tongers and had been watched with deepest interest by other oystermen who chafed under the authority of the great packing corporation who held thousands of acres of oyster grounds and paid such wages as they saw fit.

With luck Bailey and his partners would have doubled the wages ordinarily paid oystermen. With bad luck they would lose what they had put into their venture. That would mean lean times for their families. Oysters in themselves mean little to the average man and the amount of money involved in their venture was inconsiderable to ordinary business men, but to the oystermen who battled icy seas during the winter, wrestling with sixteen-foot tongs for the oysters far below their tossing, swamping boats, their little business venture meant the difference between comfort and privation, between plenty and gnawing hunger.

Deal thought of this as he gently drew Bailey's body ashore. They had reported to him that oyster pirates, no less pirates than those black-bearded captains who ranged the Spanish Main, had dredged their beds, and he had promised to keep watch. But his long, lonely patrol made it impossible to watch closely—and now this had happened.

His eyes clouded with feeling; and then, as a plan formulated in his mind, the line of his jaw became straight and hard.

Several hours later, when the futile business of caring for the murdered body had been performed, Deal swung the Sea Gull under the stern of an oyster dredge anchored off Dingre's Wharf, ten miles below where he had found Bailey's body.

Standing slim and erect in the cockpit of his boat he observed the malevolence of the scowl on the face of the man aboard the dredge, but made no sign except for a curt nod, and a curt greeting:

"Evening, Cal."

Cal Hinks, skipper of the dredge, was not so nonchalant under the unswerving gaze of the cool gray eyes of the Pearl Patrolman. He gnawed savagely into a greasy plug of chewing tobacco and when the Sea Gull had passed, spat viciously into her wake.

He followed the boat with glowering eyes until she came to smartly some distance beyond alongside a gleaming little yacht. He watched the uniformed figure go up on deck and salute the owner stretched in a steamer chair. That gesture seemed to galvanize Hinks, and almost stumbling in his haste, he went to the pilot house, fumbled around in a locker, and brought up a bottle of cloudy white liquor. He took a hearty swig.

Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, Hinks saw through the pilot house window three men now on the deck of the yacht. Deal, he observed, stood before the older, larger man who lounged in the deck chair. The third man leaned against the rail, the width of the deck away.

Aboard the yacht Senator Jonas K. Briggs, whose oyster beds extended from one end of the bay to the other and whose political influence extended even farther, lifted his distinguished eyebrows at Deal in a facial gesture of annoyance.

"But why tell me?" he complained. "The sheriff is the person who is interested in such things."

"I have telephoned the sheriff," Deal answered. "I thought, though, that you would be interested."

"Why in the name of Heaven—unless as a matter of news."

Deal's mouth hardened.

"Because," he said shortly, "I have suspected for nearly a week that men employed by your company are responsible for the pirating of the Piney Creek beds."

The Senator shook his head slowly.

"But you know," he said impatiently, "I can't attend to such things. I

rarely see an oyster except on the half shell. Milton Hopper is the man you ought to report these things to. He's general manager of the Bay Products Corporation and has charge of all the dredges and tongers."

"I did report it to Hopper," Deal said, flushing at the reproof, "and nothing ever came of it. Now, knowing your interest in the protection of oyster beds from poachers how much responsible for the organization of the Pearl Patrol you were, I thought you should know. Especially after murder has been committed."

"You reported to Hopper?" the Senator frowned.

"Certainly, sir. Last week, when it happened."

Briggs pursed his lips, then, looking toward the third man on deck, called:

"Oh, Milton—here's a matter for you to hear."

Milton Hopper, his lank tow hair and scrawny figure giving him a tousled appearance in spite of smart yachting flannels, joined them.

The Senator looked at him gravely.

"Deal, here," he said, "tells me he reported a rather unusual case of oyster pirating to you last week—and that you failed to coöperate."

Hopper's lips curled in a smile that was half a sneer.

"Oyster pirates," he said, "have been poaching in the bay ever since oystering became a business. I imagine they will continue to do so. I understand that stopping them was the chief consideration behind the organization of the commission which employs Mr. Deal to patrol a certain section of the bay. So I told him it was his concern—not mine."

Deal straightened under the sarcasm in his voice.

"I have made it my concern," he said crisply. "But I patrol a good many miles of bay and when circumstances are as they appear in this case, it looks like your concern, too."

"How do you get the idea," Briggs broke in, "that my men have a hand in it?"

"The circumstances point directly to it," Deal answered, his eyes boring into Hopper's. "Three weeks ago your tongers had pretty well cleaned those Deep Creek beds just beyond the Piney Creek grounds. It was reported that they would be immediately stocked with shells. Last week pirates cleaned out the Piney Creek beds over half their area. Last night they made another raid on Piney Creek. To-day I found the Deep Creek beds planted with oysters—not shells."

The older man stared at Deal.

"Wait a moment," he said. "Do you mean that I—"

Deal interrupted.

"No, sir. Not you by any means. But some one in your employ. And the man who pirated those beds murdered Tom Bailey."

Hopper laughed incredulously.

"Senator," he snickered, "we'll probably both go to jail for this. Get your handcuffs, Deal. I'm ready to stand trial right now for any such idiocy as you suggest. Just don't start to shoot it out with us. We're not going to resist."

Deal's level gaze straight into his eyes cut Hopper's laughter short.

"We won't shoot it out," he said steadily. "I'm a peace officer, you know—and trying hard to remember it right now."

They glared at each other for a moment, Deal exerting all his self-control to keep from smashing his fist into the sneering face he saw. Senator Briggs's voice recalled him to his business.

"I'll look into it, Deal," he said thoughtfully. "But this is a pretty serious thing. I am going to insist that you show grounds for your suspicions against us."

"I say again, sir," Deal answered quickly, "I know you have no knowledge of this, even if my suspicions are correct. But I thought you ought to know—"

He started with surprise as a fresh, warm voice broke in.

"Why, Beverley Deal! When did you come aboard?"

Turning, he faced a pair of sparkling brown eyes with upcurved lashes framed in soft brown hair fluffed around a face that was intended to make men's hearts beat faster.

"Just came aboard, Betty," he answered hesitantly. "It—ah—it isn't a social call. Came to see your father—on business."

He took her outstretched hand and wondered if there was really the sly pressure he thought he felt in answer to his grasp.

"I think you came in answer to my prayer," she said. "I want to get over to the Houston's party and the steward has taken the gig. So here you are."

Hopper looked uneasily toward the shore.

"No use to go out of your way," he said. "The steward will be back in a little while. He had just a few things to get."

"But I don't want to wait." Betty looked at him gravely. "And if you don't mind I'll ask Beverley to take me."

She wrinkled her nose at Hopper in a mischievous gesture.

"You don't mind my taking Beverley away, do you, dad?" she asked Briggs.

The Senator looked at her quizzically and then at Deal.

"Pray that he won't take your old daddy away," he answered. "Certainly, go ahead. Deal's about finished, aren't you?" he asked Deal.

"That's about all, sir."

Hopper chewed his lips as they walked over to the rail to the ladder. Briggs, from his seat, watched the trio with a smile. As Betty and Deal went down to the Sea Gull, Hopper, leaning over the rail, said with sneering lips:

"When you catch one of those pirates bring him to me, and if he is one of our men I'll identify him. But I won't plead guilty before that is done."

Deal looked up at the sneering face.

"I may do just that," he answered.

Hopper, still contemptuous, waited until Betty was about to make herself comfortable on the broad seat.

"Look out, Betty," he said. "You'll soil your dress."

Betty started to speak, thought better of it and sat down.

With the engine started and the girl at ease Deal looked back at the yacht to see Hopper talking earnestly with Senator Briggs. Hopper was apparently explaining something and Briggs was letting him do all the talking. Deal smiled.

When his gaze came back to Betty she was pulling Mobjack's ears and the big brown retriever was wiggling with pleasure. She looked up as Deal came forward.

"What was it you were talking with father about?" she asked.

"Just a matter of oyster pirating," he answered.

"But Milton seemed real peeved. What did you do to him?"

"Nothing much. Just suggested that some of his dredgers wouldn't qualify as plaster saints. He doesn't like such talk."

Betty laughed.

"Poor Milton," she said. "He's so serious."

She continued to pull Mobjack's ears, deep in thought. Presently, as if her thoughts were not pleasant, she changed the subject.

"When you get tired of Mobjack," she said, smiling at Deal, "I'll take him. He's a nice dog."

"He's the nicest dog you know," Deal answered. "I'm afraid, though, I'll never get tired of him. He's too good a pal."

"Keeps you from getting lonely at night when you're cruising around the bay?"

"Better than that. He's got more

sense than most men and can smell out the bad ones."

Just then Mobjack growled deep in his throat and pulled away from Betty, looking toward the oyster dredge where a man in a rowboat was superintending a negro painting under the bow of the dredge. Deal, glancing forward to where Hinks steadied his boat with the oars, grinned at the aptness of the dog's interruption. Drawing closer he saw that while the boat had been newly painted the negro was covering freshly scored streaks in the bilious green of the counter with fresh paint. Betty, smiling at Hinks, greeted him graciously.

"Hello, Captain Hinks. Getting all dressed up?"

Hinks doffed his cap.

"Yes'm," he replied. "Just as soon as I can git it all done right."

"Looks like she'd just been painted," Betty said critically.

"She was," Hinks answered. "Just finished yesterday and then rubbed against the wharf before she was dry and scored a lot off. Just touching her up."

The Sea Gull was pulling past the dredge before he finished and Betty merely waved her hand in reply as distance between the boats widened. Deal had stiffened like a dog scenting a partridge as Hinks explained his painting and now he saw with cold gray eyes looking into the distance.

He was roused from his contemplation by Betty's voice.

"I don't think you were very cordial to Captain Hinks," she said.

Deal looked at her gravely.

"Cal and I haven't always played on the same side," he answered. "I don't think he believes I am a very lovable character."

"Can you blame the poor fellow? He is afraid of you—and I don't wonder."

"He's got nothing to be afraid of unless his foot slips."

"But he's trying awfully hard."

"I hope so. But I have to keep an eye on him."

"I think the things he did were paid for when he went to jail," Betty kept on. "They ought to be forgotten now. He promised dad he would go straight and I think he has."

Deal looked into her eyes smiling.

"If he's straight I'll never bother him," he said, "but it's hard to think of Cal Hinks going straight. You see I know a whole lot more about him than you do."

"Don't you think you ought to give him a chance?" Betty asked.

"It isn't with me," Deal said, "to give him a chance. If he goes straight I can't hurt him, possibly."

"It's rather unpleasant, though, to be watched all the time."

"I can't even do that. Too much territory to cover. I wish I could."

"Your suspicions might hurt him with dad. He might get the same idea and put Captain Hinks out of his job. It would be harder for him then. You know Mr. Hopper insisted that dad let him be employed. Dad didn't want him."

Deal laughed shortly.

"Don't bother about that. Remember Hopper telling me just a minute or two ago that before either he or Senator Briggs would believe any wrong of their employees I'd have to bring them to be personally identified? I'm afraid I don't carry much weight there. I don't want to convict Hinks or anybody else unjustly, but I would like to get hands on the men who pirated the Piney Bar beds and murdered Tom Bailey."

Deal looked seaward as he spoke. He would have to have luck to get hold of those pirates. They might not return for months and there was so much of the bay to operate in. It was a damned shame. The half dozen men who operated the beds had staked everything they had in the venture. Plain, uneducated oystermen they knew nothing else to do but tong oysters. Theirs

was not a dredge operated bed, but with the long scissors-like oyster tongs they did their muscle-racking work in rain and cold, sleet and snow, digging their livings from the bottom of the bay.

Now they would have short commons of it. The oysters they had banked on to carry them through the year were gone, or a large part of them were and they would have to hire out. It was a damned shame and, if the pirates were really who Deal thought they were, worse than that.

He recalled his thoughts with a jerk. They were close in to the Houston's pier. Betty was speaking.

"Wonder what's happening on the wharf?"

Deal looked at the public wharf which they were passing on their way to the other pier, and saw a group of men, some twenty or thirty, talking earnestly together. One of them, cupping his hands, hailed Deal.

"We're waiting for you," he called. "Come over here."

"Wait a minute or two and I will," Deal called back.

"Well, hurry. Can't lose any time."

Deal made short work of landing Betty at the Houston pier and hurried back to the wharf. Joe Howard, hotel proprietor and gossip in general, called to him some distance away.

"You got a hell of a job laid out for you now, boy, but we're all right back of you."

"What's the crowd gathered here for?" Deal questioned.

Howard became important at once.

"Sheriff phoned us to meet him here to be deputized. We're going to run those damned piratical skunks off the bay. Tom's partners told him that they'd been watching the beds, one of 'em each night. While Tom was watching last night other people heard a dredge at work. I reckon Tom went after 'em and they murdered him."

Deal drifted up to the wharf and steadied his boat but showed no intention to land.

"Tell the sheriff," he said, "to go ahead, if he gets here before I get back. I'll be back in time for supper and I think maybe I'll have something to tell him by then."

Starting his engine again he turned the Sea Gull's nose to the north and sped in the direction of the Piney Creek beds.

In less than an hour the Sea Gull was approaching the line of stakes which marked the boundary between the Piney Creek and the Deep Creek oyster beds. Thosce stakes appeared to have assumed high importance in his mind and he stared eagerly at each as he approached. The first was barren of his quest, and the second held as little interest—and the third.

At the fourth, however, he stopped the engine and brought the Sea Gull close. Then he tugged and hauled at the swaying elusive pole until he got what he wanted. Carefully wrapping his trophy in a bit of sacking, he turned his boat around and returned to the course he had just traveled.

The group of men was still on the wharf waiting for the sheriff when he returned. Cal Hinks, too, had come ashore and had joined in the talk about Bailey's murder. He stared furtively at Deal when he came ashore, but Deal ignored him completely.

Joe Howard was the first to greet him.

"Find anything?" he asked.

Deal shook his head.

"Looks like a right tough case," he answered.

In the silence that followed he heard Hinks say to the oysterman to whom he was talking:

"All set to go now. I'll get a load of shells from the barge to-night and be ready to shovel 'em overboard on the Deep Creek beds by sunup."

Deal smiled as he walked ashore with Mobjack at his heels. So they were planting the Deep Creek beds—with shells. The shell-laden barge from the oyster packing houses would meet

the dredge somewhere in the bay and load her and the dredge in turn would scatter the shells over the beds where oyster spats, hatched by millions from each female oyster, would hang on to them and grow, in three years, to commercial size. Hinks says he would leave at sundown. There was plenty of time.

The sun was low on the horizon when he came back to the end of the wharf, but the knot of men, dwindled now, was still there, talking of Bailey's murder.

Hinks was still there, too, lounging against a pile. He looked at Deal as he came up and said something to the man he was talking to. The man laughed and they both stared at the Pearl Patrolman. Deal returned the stare with a feeling of irritation.

As he slowly prepared the Sea Gull to start, he glanced ashore. The long wharf was deserted except for the men at its end. Then he heard a hail and saw a small boy running toward him waving his hand and calling:

"Hey, Mr. Deal! Mr. Deal!"

Breathlessly he poured out his message before he got to the end of the wharf.

"Mr. Howard got a telephone message from your boss saying to tell you to meet him at Lone Point to-night. He'll git there about midnight. Coming from Norfolk."

Hinks laughed viciously.

"Now they'll git him," he sneered. "Got the commodore of the Pearl Patrol on the job now. Somebody must have telegraphed him that Bailey'd been killed and he's coming to find the murderer himself."

Deal ignored Hinks.

"Thanks, buddy," he said giving the boy a coin. "I'll be there to meet him."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Hinks climbing down the wharf edge where his dinghy was tied. He smiled grimly as he saw the skipper of the dredge pulling out to his boat. Apparently he was leaving right away.

Night was falling as the Sea Gull left the wharf for the long beat southward to Lone Point. It would take her almost until midnight to make it. The dredge was hoisting anchor as she passed and through the gloom Deal thought he could see a malevolent light in Hinks's eyes as he watched the motor boat slip past. Once past the bar he swung the wheel over and the Sea Gull pointed south.

Looking back, Deal saw the lights of the dredge move slowly out into the channel. Then the red and green lights disappeared as she turned north, her sailing lights gleaming like stars in the night. He cut the engine down to half speed, lazily bucking the choppy seas raised by a quartering wind.

He continued on his course for an hour until the lights of the dredge disappeared behind what he knew to be a long point fringed with pine trees. Then he cut off his lights and, swinging in a wide circle, started back toward the Piney Creek beds.

When he rounded the point behind which the lights had disappeared, Deal could see nothing. He grinned. Taking no chances of being seen, either of them. Two blind boats, cruising around in the dark.

At the boundary of the Piney Creek beds he shut off his engine and listened. Mobjack, alert now that something was in the wind, stood with forefeet on the gunwale and growled. Deal strained his ears for the sound he sought. A minute or two later there came to his ears a faint rumbling, like summer thunder, far off to shoreward. Unshipping the big oar which he always carried for emergencies, he began to scull quietly toward the sound.

The pirates were back getting what was left of the Piney Creek oysters.

The sound became louder as the Sea Gull, slowly under the steady sweep of the big oar, moved toward the dredge. The rumble of the oysters being dumped on the deck became louder and louder, and finally, against the sky, he

saw the bulk of the dredge pass slowly across his bow, a hundred yards away. There was not a glimmer of light, and, except for the clatter of oysters and creaking of chains, no sign of life.

Deal waited until the scoop had been emptied of oysters and dropped back into the water before he made his move. Starting the engine, he switched on his searchlight and swept the dredge from stem to stern. He saw the two men who handled the scoop frantically trying to pull it back aboard, but it was deep in mud and could not be jerked up even with the windlass operated by the engine.

As Deal came closer he heard a shout:

"Get t'hell out of that light."

The dredge crew leaped for the shadow of the companionway, leaving the boat without a man in sight. The dredge strained and shivered against the drag of the scoop, and finally, as that dug deep into the mud and filled, slowed down to a complete stop, her engine clattering and propeller skirling water astern. Still no sign from the four men he knew composed her crew.

Deal threw his light on the bow, seeking name and registry number, but a tarpaulin had been thrown overside so that both were concealed. He hailed, but there was no answer. Remembering he was a fair mark behind a searchlight, he cut off all lights again and slipped up to the side of the pirate craft as dark as itself.

As the boats ground together Deal's hand felt along the rail until he found a cleat and made fast. Then he turned on the searchlight again and crawled over the side, automatic in hand.

"Come on out, Hinks," he cried. "No use hiding. I've got you."

There was no response, except the clang of a bell in the engine-room and the larger boat jolted as the engines reversed. The bell had been rung from the pilot house and meant full speed astern. Deal leaped for the little door that led to it and the Sea Gull, caught against the big boat as she reversed, swung around, throwing the full beam of the searchlight upon him as he leaped.

His hand was almost upon the knob and his gun ready when there was a crashing impact. Deal halted in mid leap, then slowly sank upon the deck, falling against the door.

When consciousness returned, Deal was still upon the deck, but the brilliant light was gone. He saw he was lying flat upon his back and that his hands were tied, stretched straight out from his shoulders and secured to cleats in the deck with ropes. He shook himself and through the dull aching which throbbed through his whole frame knew he had been captured.

Squirming as far as he could to one side, he saw that the rope to which one wrist was tied led to a cleat about two feet from his hand and was stretched taut. He threw his whole strength upon it, but there was no give. It was tied, he saw, with a sailor knot which would not give, but which, with one jerk of the loose end, lying tantalizingly near, would come apart. Squirm and strain as he would he could not reach that end.

As he writhed the dredge started to work again. He heard Hinks's voice:

"Hustle now and get 'em aboard. That's your job. I'll take care of my business. Get a hustle on you."

Deal lay quiet for a minute. No use to fight that rope—but, as the roar of shells falling on the deck covered all other sound, he gave a low whistle. There was no answer, and he lay limp upon the deck until another load descended, and whistled again. Again no response. He tried again.

Halfway down the deck he heard a low whine. Mobjack was scrambling aboard. A moment later the dog's tongue licked his face.

"Steady, boy," Deal whispered. Then jerking his hand until the rope end flapped slightly on the deck, he ordered:

"Fetch it, Mobjack. Bring it here."

The dog looked at his face and then at his hand, then leaned over and licked the hand. Deal's voice was strained but gentle:

"Fetch it, boy!"

Mobjack's tail waved, but he made no move.

Deal's voice became hoarse with anxiety, but the gentleness remained. Was Mobjack going to fail him? Couldn't he understand?

"Fetch it, boy," he pleaded.

Mobjack looked again from hand to eyes and back at the hand. Deal, with tremendous effort, managed to make the rope dance on the deck. Suddenly the dog seemed to understand. He stepped forward gingerly to the moving rope and placed one paw tentatively on it.

"Fetch it."

Mobjack's head went down to the deck and his teeth closed on the rope end. It held for a moment and he put his whole weight to it. The knot slowly untied. One hand was free.

Working feverishly, Deal freed his other hand and staggered to his feet. His head throbbed. He staggered to the pilot house. Hinks was aft now, using the stern tiller for steering.

Inside the cabin, Deal's practiced hand felt around the locker and shelf and seat until he found what he thought would have been thrown in there as soon as he was securely fastened. Mobjack stood at the door on guard. From the stern still came the rumble of falling oysters.

Deal's hand restrained the dog as he picked his way carefully along the dark deck to the stern.

He was almost upon Hinks before the latter saw him. The pirate's hand swung to his side and came up, gleaming in the starlight.

The gleam was almost level with Deal's breast when Deal's gun cracked and Hinks, screaming with pain, doubled over, grasping his right wrist with his left hand, his gun clattering to the deck. The negroes at the dredge stood paralyzed with fear.

"Please, suh, don't shoot," one cried.

"Put on the lights," Deal ordered. "Quick."

A moment later the lights showed Hinks cursing over his shattered wrist, but feeling around the deck with his other hand for the revolver. Deal kicked it down the deck toward Mobjack.

"Watch it, boy," he said, and the big dog dropped beside it.

"Now get that scoop up," he called.

He turned back to Hinks, who snarled at him like a beaten cur.

"I ain't done nothin' to be shot for," he said.

"Better hold what you've got to say till you get a lawyer," answered Deal. "I'm taking you in."

The engine began to clatter as the scoop came slowly to its place at the stern, where it was made fast. When that was done Deal called for the engineer below to come on deck. A third man poked his head up the companionway and, at the sight of the automatic, instantly ducked back again.

"I'm not going to hurt you if you go right," Deal reassured them all. "But you've got to go right. Will you?"

"Yes, suh," they chorused.

"Well, listen to me closely, and if you do as I tell you you may get off free. If you don't you'll go to the electric chair. I know who killed Tom Bailey, and if you make any break you'll be named as accomplices. Get that?"

The negroes nodded fearfully.

"Now get this dredge started and take her to where she came from," Deal kept on. "I'll be right behind you with a rifle and I'll shoot as sure as death if you try to get away. Hinks is going with me. Understand?"

"Yes, suh."

Ten minutes later, with Mobjack guarding Hinks, who lay moaning with pain and cursing with rage in the Sea

Gull's cockpit, the dredge swung back on her former course with running lights gleaming like stars, while behind her Deal, rifle in hand, watched her progress.

Hinks was still cursing with rage when the Sea Gull, in the bright light of the early morning, drew up alongside Senator Briggs's yacht. His hail brought the steward to the side.

"Ain't nobody wake yet," he answered with that superiority always assumed by colored yacht stewards. "I can't wake Senator Briggs yet."

"I reckon you can," Deal, weary-eyed and white from the strain of the night, was coming up the ladder forcing the handcuffed Hinks before him. "Tell him I've got the man who killed Tom Bailey. Get Mr. Hopper, too. I want him to identify him."

The steward stared in amazement at Hinks and went below. A few minutes later Briggs, followed by Hopper, both in bath robes and with hair tousled, came on deck.

"What's all this about?" Briggs demanded. "You say you have the murderer? Why bring him here?"

Deal pointed to Hinks, who was crouched against the rail, holding the handcuff from his wounded wrist.

"Hopper told me yesterday that he wouldn't believe wrong of his men until he personally identified them as wrongdoers," he answered, looking straight into Hopper's eyes. "Here he is. Know him?"

Hopper, looking more gawky than ever before, gaped at Hinks, who cringed before his gaze.

"I just got a few oysters, Mr. Hopper," he whined. "And this man comes along and shoots me for it."

Briggs stared at Hopper. That individual dropped his eyes.

"But what about the murderer?" Briggs asked.

Deal pointed to Hinks.

"I brought him along."

Hinks leaped to life. "I didn't—nothin' of the kind," he shrieked.

"How will you prove it?" Hopper sneered. "Eye witness?"

Deal unwrapped a small package he held, revealing two pieces of pine bark.

"This will do it."

"How in the world—" Briggs began, but was checked by Deal's voice which kept on:

"See those smears of paint?"

They nodded.

"That came from Hinks's dredge. He was repainting her yesterday and told Miss Briggs that she had just been painted, but had scored her side rubbing against a wharf. She couldn't have rubbed her counter against a wharf, it sheers off too quickly. So I went out to find what had scored her. I found it. It was a stake on the boundary of the Piney Creek beds."

Hopper's voice was tense as he demanded: "What does that prove?"

"It proves," Deal answered quietly, "that your boat was on those grounds night before last."

Senator Briggs nodded.

"Also," Deal kept on, "I found it there again last night and brought it in. There it is. Filled with oysters and not shells."

He looked into Hopper's eyes.

"I don't know who sent Hinks out to pirate oysters, but I believe a jury will believe the pirate who raked the Piney Bar beds and left green paint on a stake killed Tom Bailey."

Deal stopped at the sight of Betty Briggs, clothed in something with lots of ribbons and laces. "So you brought him here," she said.

There was no laughter in her eyes as she gazed straight into his. She came up close to him.

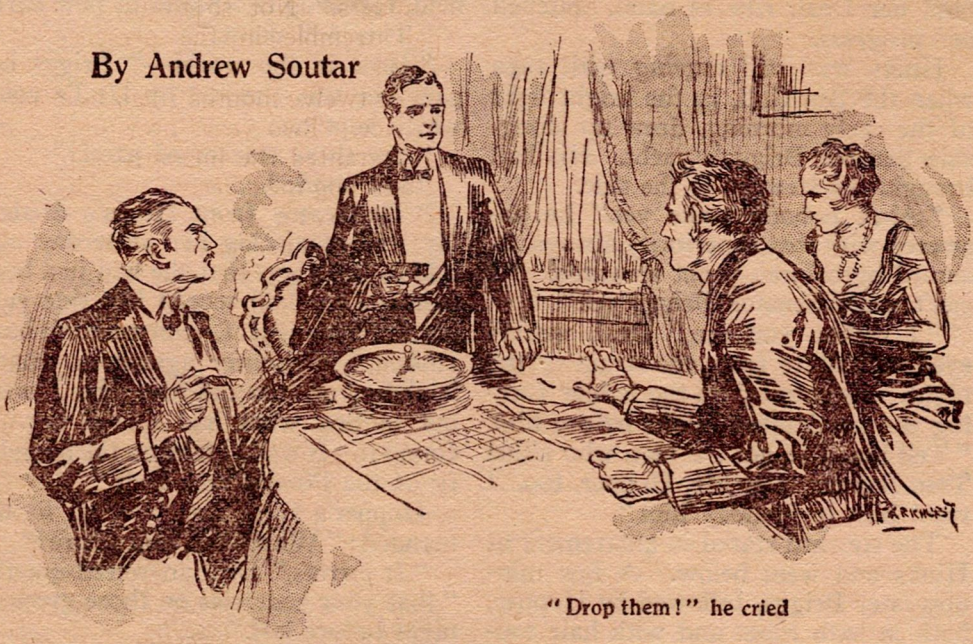
His heart sank. She thought it bravado that had made him bring the murderer melodramatically back to the man who had sneered at him.

He turned his head away, miserable, tired of it all, baffled, shamed.

And then her hand slipped into his and he felt the distinct pressure of her soft fingers upon his.

The Teeth of the Cub

By Andrew Soutar



"Drop them!" he cried

These Three Wise Gamblers Had to Laugh Up Their Sleeves When They Found a Victim So Easy to Pluck

PEDRO GOMEZ, the suavest and most delightful rogue I had chanced upon during a long and varied career, told me the story of the whole affair in a long letter that reached me on my return from the States.

If you had known the man as I knew him you might sense a pathetic note of protest in his epistle. He had been worsted in a battle of brains and yet beneath the lament he contrived to convey appreciation of the victor. A good loser has always compelled my sympathy; for the whiner only contempt.

Pedro was no ordinary rogue, I assure you. He had been polished in the best of schools, had traveled far and assimilated all the niceties of etiquette. With the skill of a protean *artiste* he could change his nationality, as it were, in a second.

Now, he was a German professor with memories and anecdotes of Heidelberg; now he was an art collector with captivating reminiscences of the Latin Quarter; he could affect the drawl of the Middle West American and at his flat in Kensington he could play the rôle of a London society man without arousing suspicion.

Pedro lived by his wits. A fascinating, well-groomed rascal. Never vulgar in his operations. How he contemned the crooks of his generation who were caught with firearms or gave way to violence of any description!

Indeed, Pedro generally managed to leave the impression that it was an honor to be fleeced by him—he fooled me into parting with a perfectly good hundred pounds as we whiled away an hour or two in a Lisbon hotel. But that's not the story.

My friend (he wrote in his letter), while you have been away from England my pride has been deeply wounded. The hurt is severe, as you, with your breadth of mind and sense of humor will agree. Always, I have held you in high esteem because you lost like a sportsman when first we met in the city that lies on the banks of the Tagus instead of at the bottom of it. (How he detested Lisbon!)

In my distress of mind I could think of no more reassuring well of sympathy than your good self, although you seldom condescend to reply to my letters. (I didn't, but he knew that I received them and sort to regain my hundred pounds by writing stories from the material his adventures supplied).

I, too, can take defeat like a man (he went on), but this affair has unnerved me and there are tears in my eyes as I write. I must be getting old. You will say that a gentleman of my attainments should not have encouraged the acquaintanceship with Carlos —a most impossible person without the slightest evidence of good breeding; some of his forgeries were the crudest things imaginable.

But Carlos had a charm that is not easily described: he had but to glance at a woman and lo! she was his slave. He brought to my notice the fair Inez, and I have to make the confession that if ever I looked into the eyes of an angel it was when I met her at dinner in his rooms in the Rue Caumartin.

With that beautiful creature as my sole companion I could have drained the banking account of every "sucker" on the Mediterranean coast. (Sometimes, when his temper controlled his pen, Pedro dropped into slang.)

Carlos (he wrote) is only partially to blame. These accursed cinemas have quickened the imagination of modern youth so that it is difficult for a gentleman of my refinement to prey upon their credulity. And your London detective force—they are not of the caliber they used to be; in the old days we recognized them by the size of their feet and the breadth of their shoulders. Not so to-day. Soon, I shall tremble in the presence of a bishop.

For twelve months I had been idling in Nice. Two years previously I had been granted the inestimable privilege of teaching the elderly Lord Dumer the art of playing cards.

He paid a matter of twenty thousand for the lessons and then—rather foolishly, I thought—returned to London and committed suicide because he couldn't face a writ! Dear, unsophisticated soul!

I should have been more careful with my winnings, but there were some attractive people in Nice and within a year my bankers were showing signs of restiveness.

It was then that Carlos came into my life. He and Inez, the beautiful—would that I could convey to your mind an adequate impression of her raven hair, her magnetic eyes, her white, warm arms, her harplike voice—crossed my path, as the village maid would say.

We journeyed from Nice to Paris, where Carlos had a suite that was much too elaborate for the dog. There, he installed the "tables," and introduced quite a large number of ladies and gentlemen who loved the music of the croupier's voice and the rolling of the magic ball.

We did quite well for a time; then the fool Carlos became jealous. He loved Inez—of that there is no doubt. I urged him to remember his profession, but there were days together when he would absent himself from home and follow her movements through Paris. He could not bring himself to believe that she was working for the common good of the three of us.

One night Carlos traced her to a little restaurant in the Champs Elysees. She was dining with a young Englishman— one of those healthy, good-look-

ing, public schoolboys of whom you and your nation should be profoundly proud.

Carlos allowed his Latin temperament to deprive him of his rationalism. He seized poor Inez by the wrist and very nearly broke it. Of course, the Englishman had no alternative to knocking him down. But for the presence of mind of Inez the police would have been called and—what then, my friend?

She returned with Carlos to the suite in the Rue Caumartin. The young Englishman had accepted, very generously, the explanation given him by Inez that her "uncle" (laugh not, my friend) was subject to these fits of mental aberration.

He even shook hands with Carlos and said that he would take pleasure in calling upon him on the following night.

But I had trouble with Carlos, the fool, an hour after they returned, to disturb my peace of mind. A bottle of wine, and his brain was inflamed anew.

He swore that she had deceived him, that he had seen the youngster, Paul Esmond, hold her hand in his beneath the cover of the table at the restaurant; he had seen the love light in his blue eyes and all that sort of rubbish. Up sprang Inez, and her eyes were shooting forth rays of hatred.

"Fool," she said. "I know my profession from beginning to end. You are a novice and should eat of the husks. That man is wealthy—so wealthy that he could buy the opera house and turn it into a cinema."

"I don't believe you," said Carlos, and now he was on his feet. He faced her, his teeth showing. (And, oh, my friend, what teeth! A respectable shark would have been ashamed of them.)

"You love him," he said, appearing to forget my presence. "I will kill you rather than lose you."

Now, a man who has to live from the proceeds of his profession shouldn't indulge in these heroics. He shouldn't cultivate these foolish passions; they should be a means to an end.

He leaped at Inez before I could interfere, and quick as lightning she drew a dagger from her garter—a silly little thing, but distinctly useful. Carlos took about two inches of it in his left arm. And she sat up all night nursing the knave and sobbing her little heart out! Oh, these women!

II

THE boy came to the apartment on the following night, and we introduced him to a few guests so that he might not feel lonely.

Carlos smiled upon him. Inez caressed him. Ah! How perfectly charming he was! I said to myself that if I had taken easily to matrimony that was the boy I should have liked for a son. Innocent as a maiden at her first dance!

His hair shone like sunlight as he sat at the table and gambled his four or five hundred francs on the old wheel. He laughed if he won, he laughed if he lost. He took it all with the good nature of your ideal sportsman.

"You are unlucky," said I as I raked in his "paper."

He glanced over his shoulder at Inez and smiled as he said:

"Do you really think so?"

He would have counted it gain if he had lost a million in earning her smile.

Carlos bit a piece out of his lower lip. I would have liked to bite a large piece out of his heart. The boy was worth a fortune to us.

"I'm going back to London to-morrow," he said, when he was taking his leave. "Must. Absolutely. I hate the idea, but the lawyers will not leave me in peace."

We gathered from him that he owned an estate in England which was being bought by a corporation, and he talked so lightly of money that I caught the infection and lit a cigar with a

fifty-franc note—it was one I had taken from him.

He left the suite about one in the morning to return to his hotel and Inez suggested that she would like to accompany him—the drive would do her good after the smoke-laden atmosphere of the room; she would leave him at the hotel and drive back alone.

Again, that fool Carlos showed his teeth, and I very nearly lost my temper and kicked him. Instead, I contented myself with sharing the winnings from the nice boy and forgetting my arithmetic when it came to dividing fairly with the jealous one. I *knew* what was in the mind of Inez. There was more information to be gleaned.

I had a dreadfully irritating time of it when she was gone. Carlos became maudlin. He would have cheerfully gone out after the pair and run a knife over the dear lad's neck.

When Inez returned he rushed toward her in most idiotic fashion.

"You still love me?" he cried, utterly indifferent to the fact that I was standing there.

"Yes," she said wearily, "but I don't know why."

And then it was that I saw the magnificent diamond and pearl ring on her finger. Carlos hadn't bought that; I guessed that the nice English boy had been carrying it about in his pocket for days until he could summon up courage to present it to her.

Suddenly Inez flung off the moroseness that had settled on her when Carlos made an idiot of himself. Dear little woman! Her heart was in her profession!

"He is worth a hundred thousand pounds," she said, "and, with a little skill, a little tact, we shall be able to winter in Egypt. Ah! Give me the sun. And yet—"

I didn't like that broken sentence. Her lips quivered slightly. "Heaven help me," said I to myself, "if she has fallen in love with the boy." For a woman with a past is never so dangerous a partner in our profession as when she really loses her heart.

"He goes to London to-morrow," I reminded her, and shook my head reproachfully.

"True," said she, "and we must follow."

"All of us?" said Carlos suspiciously.

"Certainly," she replied. "You are invited to meet him again. He is very forgiving."

"Plans? Plans?" he prompted, for avarice was taking hold of him now.

"We must take a house in town," said Inez, "for he will bring his friends. He has the fever so badly."

I spun the roulette wheel absently.

"He hasn't lost much," I said ruefully. "Indeed, I was crestfallen to-night when he said he was going away without giving us the chance to—"

"He will gamble in thousands when next we meet, and I feel so—so guilty." She sighed. "He is so sweet, so different from all the others." Then came a flood of tears and a passionate outburst: "I want to be good—good," she cried.

I signaled to Carlos to remain quiet.

"You are good, Inez," said I; "but in this life one has to ride the waves or be sucked down into the maw. Does our young friend suspect?"

Her smile returned. "He suspects nothing," she said. "In the cab he held my hand—so!—and told me of an island in the Pacific to which he would love to take me—"

"Sit down!" I called to the irate Carlos.

I would have brained him if he had interfered with her at that moment.

"He has never been in love before," she went on. "He talked to me of his school, his 'rugger' days, his ambitions."

"He has money?" I reminded her.

She sighed again.

"He was ashamed because he played so lightly to-night," she replied. "He said he did not care to win from

friends. He believes you, dear Pedro, to be a gentleman—"

I emptied my wineglass full in Carlos's face for laughing at that remark.

III

EARLY next morning the three of us were making preparations to leave for London. Our plans had been discussed. We would take an imposing place in Kensington and cultivate the acquaintance of young Esmond and his wealthy friends.

It was Carlos who brushed away the golden visions. That man had a most deplorable record. It was the height of folly for a gentleman of my distinction to associate with him.

While we were embarking at Calais I marked the near presence of an old friend who advised me that Scotland Yard would be very interested in the visit of Carlos, who had bungled a childish affair two years before.

I laughed. They might hang dear Carlos from the highest lamp-post in London and I shouldn't shed a tear. I wasn't anxious about myself, for I was familiar with most of the faces at your famous Yard.

There was only one man there I had reason to avoid—Bistick. Ah! An excellent man, Bistick!

All the same, I warned Carlos and insisted on the minor precaution of removing his mustache and imperial.

We were fortunate in obtaining a three months' tenancy of a well appointed house in Kensington. In reply to a telegram from Inez, the dear boy, Esmond, paid us a visit as soon as we had settled down.

That boy captured my heart with his fresh English manners: to listen to his musical voice was to listen to the singing of the wind across a field of ripening corn. How simple a task it was to gain from him the knowledge essential to a gentleman in my profession.

He was under the spell of a woman's eyes. We played a friendly game of cards on several nights, but he couldn't play worth a cent because his thoughts kept wandering to her.

Naturally, we allowed him to win a trifle during these preliminaries, and it was good to a hungry soul to listen to his apologies. I reassured him. This wasn't gambling, said I, and recounted tales of how I had sat like a block of ice with fifty thousand of the best at stake.

The boy's eyes sought those of the fair Inez, and with the glance of a Cleopatra she spurred him to the fray. I talked of my vineyards, and he blushingly spoke of his acres. We fixed the night on which we should fling ourselves, heart and soul, into the mill of chance.

On the evening before the appointed date I received a telephone call from Paris. Doudet, close friend of mine, gave me a casual greeting which, decoded, startled me. "Watch Bistick," it said. "He's alive."

Inez and Carlos were out at the time, and I decided not to say a word to them about the message. I made it my business to inquire the whereabouts of Bistick, and was relieved to learn from a professional friend of mine that he was engaged on a murder mystery in the North.

"Splendid," said I to myself. "One night will be sufficient to relieve the lad Esmond of his money; then back to Paris and so to Madrid."

In the circumstances I telephoned to Esmond, and said that, as I might be called away from London on the day following our gamble, it was my intention to pay in cash if I should lose.

Of course, I would accept his check if he should have the misfortune to be on the losing side. His reply to that was what I expected it to be. You can't, in sporting phraseology, give a stroke a hole to a healthy English public schoolboy. He starts from scratch or nowhere.

I knew that he would bring cash

with him even if he had to mortgage the ancestral home. He did. Piles of it. Bank notes that rustled like dead leaves in autumn.

And Carlos, Inez and I met him with Bank of England notes of our own making! We had calculated every move. We knew when the hired car would be at the door to rush us to Newhaven so that we might catch the first boat to Dieppe.

François the Ape, an old tool, would meet us there and motor us down. From Le Bourget we should take an airplane to Biarritz, where a conference would decide the next move toward Madrid.

The dear boy, Esmond, "blew in" with the fragrance of a wind that has passed over a field of clover. He kissed the tips of Inez's fingers with gallantry that increased my admiration of the English as a race.

He wasn't distressed to learn that our other guests had failed us. He thought it "jolly considerate of us" not to "drag in the wide, wide world."

As I have already said, he could not gamble worth a cent. Fancy any one sitting down to a one-man bank! The young Trojan was ready to back himself against me!

Down went a pile of notes and silver on the table.

Inez sat back, protesting that she did not like the game. She murmured—the little rogue!—that she hoped he would be careful.

"Half my winnings are yours," he said with a laugh.

Carlos sat by his side, saying he would gamble lightly against the bank, just to keep the game going until more guests arrived.

The boy with the corn-colored hair and the blue eyes gave me a challenging glance.

I placed a pile of perfectly good spurious notes on the table, arching my brows as if to say: "I will cover any amount you like to wager."

Somehow, I didn't like the expression on the boy's face at that moment. I fancied he had become old and bitter. And—explain this, if you can—Doudet's telephone message kept on repeating itself in my ears: "Watch Bistick! Watch Bistick!"

Then, I fancied I heard a step on the stairs outside the apartment. All manner of fears surged through me in that instant, and the first and natural instinct was to grab the spurious notes I had placed on the table near the "wheel."

"Drop them!" said Esmond.

And, oh, my friend, he was on his feet; and a revolver was thrust toward me.

Carlos—splendid fellow, Carlos!—leaped at the revolver arm. That sweet English boy with the corn-colored hair and the blue, innocent eyes struck him a blow that made my own teeth rattle. He went down on the floor.

There came the sound of footsteps just outside the hall door.

"Who's out there?" I asked of the boy as I stared into the barrel of his revolver.

"My superior," said he.

"Bistick?" said I.

"Correct," said he.

Inez had fainted, but neither of us appeared to care. Carlos was groaning on the floor.

"You're from the Yard?" said I.

"Correct," said he.

"Name?" said I.

And he answered very slowly:

"Detective Sergeant *Dumer,* son of the late Lord Dumer, whom you drove to suicide by robbing him of all he possessed!"

I reached again for the fake notes, intending to tear them to pieces before Bistick and his entourage could enter. For to be found in possession of false notes is a serious offense, my friend. The sweet boy with the corn-colored hair dropped his revolver in order to circumvent me. I grabbed the revolver just as he grabbed the notes.

"Put up your hands!" said I.

He stamped twice on the floor, and Bistick and two constables entered.

"Shoot," said the nice boy with the corn-colored hair.

The trigger doubled under the pressure of my finger. The whole thing was made of rubber! Perfectly ridiculous, of course, but the outcome of these wretched film plays. They suggest so much to the mind of imaginative youth.

Personally, I think that these stupid crook plays should be banned by the censor.

In conclusion, dear friend, may I say I'm certain that Carlos and Inez join me in an expression of the hope that you are well.

The address on the letter was a well-known prison. The letter had been smuggled out. I didn't reply to it.

Law Goes in For Comedy

HUNDREDS of laughable jokers find their way into State statute books. Sometimes the meaning of the joker does not dawn on legislators and citizens until it has taken its place in the laws of the community.

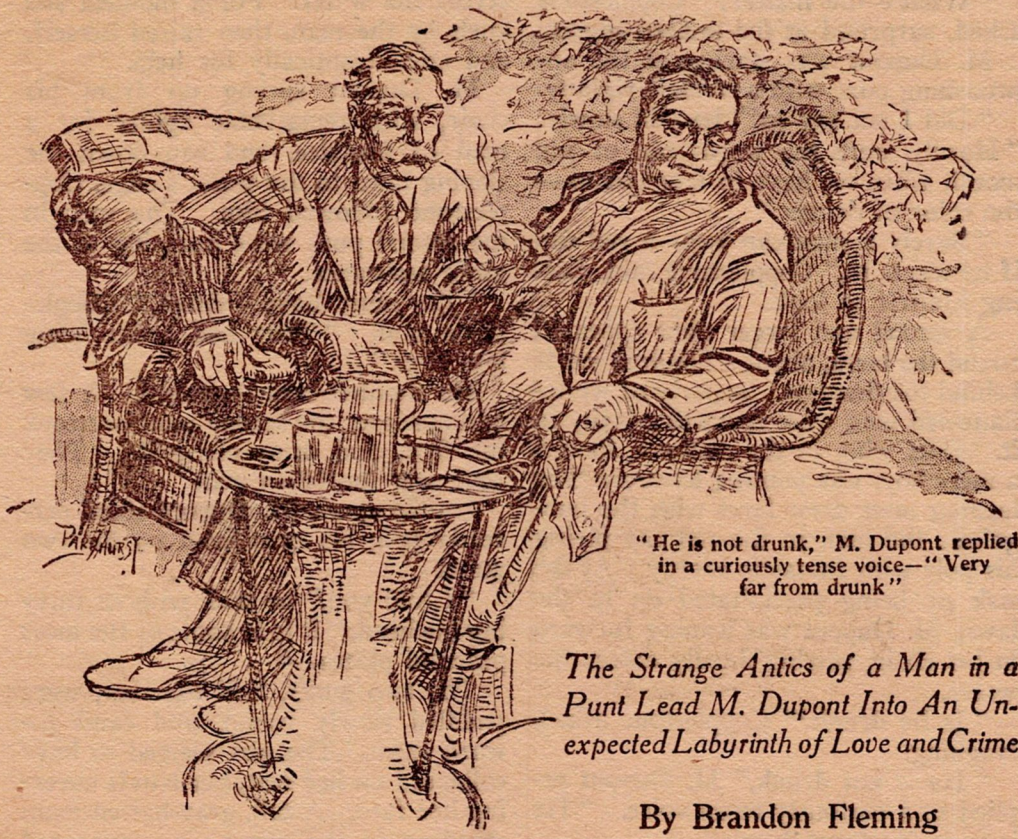
Los Angeles perhaps takes the lead among cities for "joker" legislation. An alderman once proposed to ban the eating of meat until past eleven o'clock in the morning. It was his opinion that the eating of meat early in the morning made mean husbands.

The same city forbade by ordinance—15,022, New Series—the "wearing of false whiskers, whether complete or partial."

Again, Los Angeles proved its rapid growth by injunctions to conductors of street cars which strictly prohibited the shooting of wild animals from street car platforms. Before the ordinance was passed conductors might work and hunt at the same time, taking pot-shots at jack rabbits between stations.

The Pacific Coast city arraigned itself on the side of sanitation with another ordinance—No. 17,666, New Series—which prohibited "more than one person bathing in or occupying a bathtub at the same time."

The Man in the Red Cap



"He is not drunk," M. Dupont replied in a curiously tense voice—"Very far from drunk"

The Strange Antics of a Man in a Punt Lead M. Dupont Into An Unexpected Labyrinth of Love and Crime

By Brandon Fleming

M VICTORIEN DUPONT, late of the French Secret Service, was one of the six fattest men in France. On a certain sweltering afternoon in August he was also one of the six fattest men in England. He was gradually breaking down the endurance of a chair on the lawns of George Copplestone's riverside bungalow, placidly contemplating one of the prettiest and most secluded reaches of the Thames.

"Here, at least," Copplestone remarked, from the depths of another chair, "you can get your mind away from crimes and criminals. The very thought of such things is profane in these surroundings."

M. Dupont imperilled his safety by a wide gesture.

"My friend," he returned, "the same remark has been made to me in some of the most peaceful spots in the world, by people who have professed to be observers of human nature. Do you not know that it is in the most beautiful, the most tranquil places that many of the most terrible crimes are committed? It is in scenes like this—"

A small white punt glided into view round a bend in the river. There was nothing unusual in the appearance of the punt itself, nor of the girl who was leaning back in it under a sunshade. They were, however, being propelled with extraordinary flourish and exag-

geration by an individual in flannels, who was wearing a startling, vivid scarlet cap.

"What's the matter?" Copplestone asked, surprised at the sudden silence.

M. Dupont was staring at the approaching punt with a strange rigidity.

"Did I not say so?" he said slowly. "Hardly were the words out of my mouth when we have in front of us—the color of danger."

"Surely a man can wear a red cap if he wants to," Copplestone said, raising himself to look.

A second and larger punt appeared round the bend, about a hundred yards behind the first one. A party of white-flanneled men were sprawling lazily in it. One, who, in the distance, looked a mere boy, was punting leisurely. The leading punt drew level with the bungalow, the man in the red cap plying his pole with fantastic energy. At the risk of being precipitated on to the lawn, M. Dupont was leaning forward in his chair, staring fixedly across the water.

"Is he drunk?" Copplestone asked, laughing.

"He is not drunk," M. Dupont replied in a curiously tense voice. "He is very far from drunk."

The antics of the man in the red cap increased in violence as they passed the bungalow. He waved his pole in the air as if it were a walking stick, and assumed a series of the most extraordinary attitudes, not without considerable risk to himself and his companion.

"He'll be in the water in a minute if he goes on like that," Copplestone said. "He must be off his head."

M. Dupont was gripping the arms of his chair tightly.

"You are too ready, my friend," he returned, "to think the best of people, as you do of places. That man is neither drunk, nor, as you call it, off his head. If only he were it would not matter. If only—"

The man in the red cap suddenly released his hold of the pole, put his hands to his head, and toppled forward into the punt.

The scream of the girl came shrilly across the water. For a moment she knelt by the man, then raised herself, and cried frantically for help.

M. Dupont sprang up from his chair, with remarkable agility for a man of his size, and ran down the sloping lawn to the water's edge. Copplestone followed him. The men in the second punt were hurrying to the girl's assistance.

"He must have fainted," Copplestone said. "They had better bring him over."

He shouted, and beckoned. A few minutes later the second punt overtook the first, and drew alongside. They bent over the fallen man.

On the shore, M. Dupont stood perfectly still, his eyes fixed on the two punts.

"I told you," he said, without turning his head, "it is in some of the most peaceful places—"

The two punts, held together, were paddled slowly round, and came toward them. The girl seemed to have collapsed on her seat, her hands covering her face. A tall, gray-haired man, standing in the other punt, appeared to have assumed control. Three of the young men who had been with him held the punts together, while the other two paddled strongly. A few minutes later they came alongside the edge of the lawn.

"A terrible thing has happened," the gray-haired man exclaimed. "The poor fellow must have died of heart failure. He was dead when we reached him."

The girl lifted her head, and her eyes passed from Copplestone to M. Dupont. She was deathly pale, but her face was wonderfully beautiful. In spite of the horror that was stamped on it, the nobility, the strength of character, were unmistakable. They helped her out of the punt on to the lawn. She was trembling violently, and

clutched at the back of a chair for support.

M. Dupont moved a few steps forward, and stood looking down into the white punt. The man lay apparently as he had fallen, the red cap a few inches from his head.

He was of medium size strongly built, and appeared to be about thirty-five years of age. From the bruise on his forehead it appeared that he had struck the edge of a board at the bottom of the punt in falling.

His face was an extraordinary one. M. Dupont drew a deep breath as he looked down at it. In all his experience he could not recollect a more remarkable face. The whole cast of it, every feature, showed strength, bitter, pitiless strength. There was cruelty, remorselessness, in every line. Even in death it seemed to be an iron mask. M. Dupont stooped down and picked up the red cap.

"We are all the same party," the gray-haired man explained. "My name is Penton—Harcourt Penton. These are my sons." He indicated the five young men. "And this is my daughter." He put an arm round the trembling girl. "The poor fellow was her *fiancé*. They were to have been married this month."

The girl sank into a seat, and again covered her face with her hands. Mr. Penton moved away from her. He looked at the young men, and passed a hand across his forehead in a dazed way.

"We were all out for a day on the river," he said slowly. "It is dreadful." He broke off, and his glance fell on M. Dupont, standing with the red cap in his hand. "He used to complain a little of his heart," he said. "But we never thought it was anything serious. He ought not to have exerted himself in the heat after a meal."

"He had better be carried into the house," Copplestone said. "I'll telephone for a doctor."

M. Dupont replaced the red cap in the punt, and moved away from it. Two of the young men lifted the body on to the lawn, and, covering it with a rug, carried it into the house. Mr. Penton raised his daughter gently from the seat, and followed with her.

They all stood together in a room overlooking the lovely reach of the river. The girl's face had grown whiter, and there was something of a new fear in her eyes. Mr. Penton seemed to watch her with growing anxiety. He drew her to a chair, and whispered a soothing word. His own face was paler and more drawn as he turned from her to his sons.

A curious tension was dawning in them all. M. Dupont stood by the open windows, staring out across the lawn. No one spoke until Copplestone returned from the telephone.

"The doctor will come on as soon as he has finished with a patient," he told them. "In the meantime you had better all have a drink." He went to the sideboard, and dispensed whisky freely.

Under the stimulant they recovered themselves a little. A touch of color returned to the girl's face. She looked up more firmly. Mr. Penton, still watching her closely, saw the change with obvious relief. He straightened himself, and glanced round with more confidence. The young men seemed to gather firmness under his look.

"He was in such particularly good spirits," he said, setting his empty glass on the table. "He never complained of the heat as he sometimes did."

"He seemed," Copplestone remarked, "to be behaving in a peculiar way in the punt."

Mr. Penton smiled faintly.

"Poor fellow," he said. "His sense of humor was rather eccentric. He liked to think himself something of a comedian. When he let himself go he was inclined to carry things a little too far."

For a moment there was silence in

the room, as though some monstrous thing had been said or done. The girl's head bent lower. The young men avoided looking at each other. M. Dupont still stood motionless at the windows.

"To judge by his appearance," Copplestone said quietly, "one would hardly imagine that he had been the sort of man either to let himself go, or to die of heart failure."

"He did *not* die from heart failure," M. Dupont answered, from the windows. "He was murdered."

They wheeled round on him with startled exclamations.

"Murdered?" Mr. Penton exclaimed incredulously. "My dear sir, what on earth do you mean?"

Their faces showed complete amazement. They looked from one to another, and at M. Dupont, as if dumfounded.

"Murdered!"

"How on earth could he have been murdered?"

They spoke together, staring blankly. Only the girl remained silent. Her face was ashen.

"This is a most extraordinary thing," said Mr. Penton. "What ground have you for such a suggestion?"

"We saw him fall," one of the young men added. "He was standing up alone. There was no one near him."

"You saw him fall yourselves," Mr. Penton said. "There was only my daughter at the other end of the punt. Such a thing seems quite impossible."

M. Dupont glanced round at them for an instant; then looked back to the river.

"It was all wrong," he said slowly, "from beginning to end. I could see it, because I have a mind trained to detect such things. The man in the red cap was wrong. He did not answer to any of the laws that govern the conduct of human beings.

"When a man is merry he behaves merrily. When he is drunk he is ruled by the conformities of drunkenness. When he is mad his behavior is that of one confined in the prison of unreason.

"But the man in the red cap was none of those things. He was not honestly merry, honestly drunk, nor honestly mad. He was false. The truth was not in him."

"I am afraid I do not understand what you are talking about," Mr. Penton returned. "So far you have said nothing to justify the suggestion of murder. I think you could hardly have realized the seriousness of what you were saying."

M. Dupont shrugged his shoulders slightly, still gazing out straight in front of him through the windows.

"All my life," he replied quietly, "I have been saying things that were serious. It is seldom that I say any other kind."

Mr. Penton turned to Copplestone.

"I am afraid," he said significantly, "that your friend is not quite himself."

A rather grim smile passed over Copplestone's face.

"It may interest you to know," he returned, "that M. Dupont was once the first string of the French secret police. I have never yet known him to make such a statement without good foundation."

A quick movement went round the circle. An instant change came over them all.

They were strained with a sudden tension. Hands were clenched; faces hardened. The girl gripped the arms of her chair convulsively. There was fear in all of them. They could not disguise it. Copplestone watched them carefully; but M. Dupont did not turn his head.

Mr. Penton controlled himself with an effort. The eldest of the young men took a quick step toward M. Dupont.

"It's absurd," he declared. "The man fell down in front of us all. It

couldn't have been anything but heart failure. Who in the world could have murdered him?"

"Perhaps M. Dupont will tell us?" one of his brothers remarked, with something of a sneer.

Mr. Penton restrained them with a quick gesture.

"There can be no foundation for such a suggestion," he said sternly. "You saw what happened yourselves. There was no one but my daughter in the punt with him when he fell, and she was several yards away from him. There is no wound of any sort on the body, except the bruise on the forehead caused by the fall. Are you suggesting that he was drugged or poisoned?"

M. Dupont shook his head.

"No," he returned evenly. "I do not suggest that he was drugged or poisoned. I am quite sure that he was not."

"Murdered in an invisible manner, by an invisible hand, while he was punting?" Mr. Penton retorted. "I think the doctor will be able to disillusion you when he arrives."

In the silence that followed, M. Dupont withdrew his gaze from the river, and looked round at them mildly.

"It was the red cap," he said gently. "the red cap was a mistake. Red is the color of danger."

A new stiffness seemed to possess them. The girl drew a shuddering breath.

"The red cap," M. Dupont continued, "was intended to prove that the man was *not* murdered. Instead, it proved that he *was* murdered."

No one spoke. All their eyes were fixed on him with a painful tenseness. He went on, with the same soft deliberation:

"It so often happens that the very special precautions taken by criminals to safeguard themselves turn to their own undoing. I have found it so in hundreds of cases—far more difficult than this. The red cap was to prove innocence—but it proved guilt."

"This is really past bearing!" Mr. Penton exclaimed. "We are all too much upset to—"

The girl put out a hand to him. She was looking fixedly into M. Dupont's face.

"Sit down, father," she said gently.

Mr. Penton hesitated for a moment, then sat down without a word. M. Dupont paused a moment before continuing in the same even tone.

"When the first punt came in sight, my friend here thought that the man in the red cap must be mad or drunk. But he was not. No man who was drunk could have behaved as he was behaving and kept his balance. He was not mad, because no woman would have intrusted herself without alarm or protest to the guidance of a madman. Why, then, should a sane and sober man behave in so extraordinary a manner? And why did not the lady in the punt make an effort to restrain him from doing so?"

The circle of faces round him grew whiter and more strained. M. Dupont went on with careful deliberation:

"His object was quite plain to me. It was to attract attention. I looked up and down the river. This house was the only house to be seen. My friend and I were the only people to be seen. It was, then, to attract *our* attention. And as the lady did not restrain him, she was in agreement with his object. They wished to keep our eyes upon them.

"I knew that when they came opposite to us something would happen. When the man in the red cap fell into the punt, I knew that he had *intended* to fall into the punt, and that he had intended us to see him fall."

He looked round at them steadily. In the silence that followed, the girl rose slowly from her chair. Her whole appearance had changed. She held herself erect. Her eyes were wide and challenging. She no longer trembled. Mr. Penton rose, too, and went to her.

"Edith," he said, "my dear—"

She did not seem to hear him. She moved a few steps forward, then stopped.

"He was a fiend," she said, slowly and distinctly. "Every instinct, every thought, every desire of his mind was utterly wicked and cruel. He had no mercy—there was not a spark of humanity in him. He boasted to me openly what he would make my life when we were married."

She stood facing them defiantly. "I'm glad he's dead!" she cried passionately. "Glad! Glad! Glad!"

Mr. Penton seized her arm.

"For God's sake," he cried, "don't say any more!"

She was silent. M. Dupont nodded his head slowly, without betraying the least surprise.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I could see that you were glad."

He turned again to the windows, and spoke as if he were telling a story in which no one present had any part.

"It was a good idea," he admitted. "These people are in a difficulty. They have a dead body to dispose of. Upon the forehead there is the mark of the blow that killed him. What can they do?

"The man was the fiancé of this young lady. He had come out with them. Probably it was known to some that he had come out with them. If they return without him, and he has disappeared, what are they to say that will make suspicion impossible?

"If they hide the body in the woods by the side of the river, it may be found at any moment, and they are as good as convicted. If they return to the place from which they hired the punts, show the body openly, and state that he died from heart failure, and struck his forehead in falling, there is only their own word without proof, and if an investigation is made there are facts which might come to light and be exceedingly dangerous.

"It is investigation which they want, at all costs, to avoid. If the man could be seen to fall by independent witnesses on the shore, who could give their testimony also to the doctor and to all concerned, there would be no further question. So they stage a new tragedy, and the man is seen to fall—by my friend and myself."

From their silence and rigidity his audience might have been spellbound. Yet their fear had disappeared. There was bravery in their attitude and nothing of shame.

"When he fell," M. Dupont continued, "he lay at the bottom of the punt—beside the body of the man who was already dead. He placed the red cap in position to appear as if it had slipped from the dead man's head. It seemed a sure mark of identification. Both were about the same height and build, and were dressed in white flannel. A difference in features did not matter. We were too far away."

Mr. Penton made a movement to interrupt, but again the girl restrained him.

"Having got so far as this," M. Dupont proceeded, "the next thing was to escape from the punt unseen. That was comparatively simple. The second punt was following, waiting for the signal of the fall. From the shore it was impossible to see how many people were in that second punt. They were careful that it should be impossible. There might have been four, five, or six.

"When they drew alongside—*between the first punt and us*—all that we could see was a confusion of white figures. In that confusion it was easy for the man who had fallen to get up and mingle with the others undetected.

"When the two punts reached the shore, we saw what we were intended to believe to be the body of the man in the red cap. There was the bruise on his forehead where he had struck it in falling, and there was the red cap a few inches from his head. What more could have been required? Yet the red cap was a terrible mistake. It

was one of those great indiscretions which the criminal commits."

He turned back to them with an expansive gesture. "Perhaps you observed that the first thing I examined was the red cap. To me it was the one thing that mattered. From it I looked at the face of the dead man. The face was dry, and comparatively cool—the cap was hot, and the edges and lining were wet with perspiration, as naturally they would be a few minutes after they had been worn by one who had been exerting himself so violently in the heat. It was perspiration that the criminal forgot."

He stopped, and looked at them inquiringly. For a moment there was no movement; then one of the young men stepped forward. He paused for a moment, and, crossing to his sister, put him arm round her.

"Yes," he said steadily, "I killed him. And I'm afraid I can't say I'm sorry."

"Jack!" Mr. Penton cried.

The young man laughed.

"What's the use?" he retorted. "M. Dupont saw through us before we had been here two minutes."

He turned to M. Dupont unflinchingly. "If ever a man deserved to die," he declared, "that man did. He lured me into a position in which, to save myself from what I believed was disaster, I did—well, something wrong. Unknown to me, he used his knowledge of what I had done to force my sister, against her will, to marry him—only to break her pride, because she had refused him before.

"And she never told me," he took the girl in his arms, and kissed her, "like the brick that she is, but was ready to sacrifice herself to save me. It was only by chance I overheard something he said to her in the woods this afternoon, when he thought no one was near. I lost control of myself, and hit him—as hard as I could."

He moved away from the girl, and stood in front of M. Dupont.

"Well," he said, "you had better telephone for the police. I won't attempt to escape."

M. Dupont remained perfectly still. He did not speak. He was looking into the girl's face with an intent, searching gaze.

They heard the front doorbell ring. Still no one moved. The doctor's name was announced. M. Dupont withdrew his eyes from the girl's face, and turned to the door.

"Doctor," he said quietly, "there has been an unfortunate tragedy on the river. A man died in a punt, from failure of the heart."

CHARACTER REVEALED IN YOUR HANDWRITING

EDITOR'S NOTE — *After making character analysis, through handwriting, his hobby for more than a score of years, John Fraser has recently won wide renown in New York City as a popular lecturer on this subject.*

He conducts a thriving business of analyzing character from handwriting; and many notables in this country and abroad have complimented him on the accuracy of his findings.

JOHN FRASER

By special arrangement his personal analysis is given to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY *readers for ten cents, or free with a one-dollar subscription for thirteen issues. Please fill out the special coupon.*

EDITOR'S NOTE.—*Mr. Fraser is at present devoting his pages to a survey of the forceful handwriting he finds typical of American police executives. Readers' handwriting analyses will be sent by mail.*

Dear Sir:—
In reply to your
1928, I hope that the fe

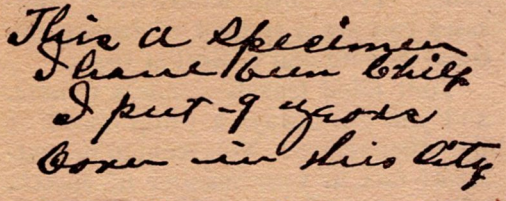
Donald L. Marshall, Chief of Police, Oakland, Cal.—No man in the State of California has a greater capacity for work than you have. You are continually at it, morning, noon and night. You have also got one of those dispassionate natures where the mind takes charge of the thinking, and sentiment is at a discount. Self-dependence is written all over you. You never require any one to think for you. Self-faith is one of your chief characteristics. You have learned to stand square-toed and flat-footed for your ideals and principles. You have understood for a long time that a man in your position has a personality to be projected, and an individuality to be protected. Hence the reason for all this backbone of yours.

You are well-read and keep up-to-date with the best in literature. Though your name has got a flavor of "the land o' the heather," I see no "Scotch" about you. Your wide-open writing connotes a liberality in you, even to the point of being imposed upon.

I notice you have a habit of losing your temper. On such occasions by the time you reach your climax you have left the king's English far behind.

You have a burning ambition to turn every ounce of your ability into capa-

bility, and to make the city of Oakland a better place to live in.

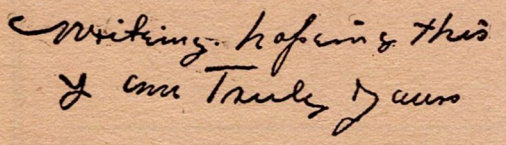


H. W. Beusse, Chief of Police, Athens, Ga.—You are a man who doesn't think more highly of himself than he ought to think. Your low capitals point to the fact that modesty is one of your strong characteristics.

You possess the synthetical type of mind, and believe in reducing particulars to inclusive wholes. You are never guilty of swallowing "line, hook and sinker." You are always inclined to suspect until you sift a mystery to the bottom. You are logical in thinking.

You appear to have a personality that dominates. In this connection you are an ideal leader since you have the ability to say the right words at the right moment. You are diplomatic.

You have strong will power. You are never pleased until you have succeeded in overcoming obstacles. Your staying power is something to be reckoned with. I observe you are by no means devoid of business sense. You would be a stickler for orderliness, and when it comes to organization, you are there with the "goods." Moreover, you are not a person who is all head and no heart. You are very affectionate and possess a nature that is as faithful as it is steadfast. In speaking of your temper, I would classify it as "fiery." Your foibles are well subordinated.

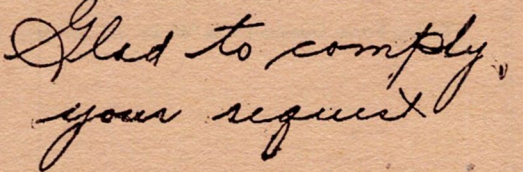


Warren J. Butler, Chief of Police, Logansport, Ind.—You are a typical police officer. You are both inquisitive and energetic in your movements. You show great ability when it comes to reaching correct conclusions. In this direction your power of discernment and faculty for getting to the bottom of things is very pronounced in your handwriting.

Your opinions of men are decisive, and no amount of gossip would sway you from your own way of thinking. You appear to have strong leadership qualities. Your "T" bars are indicative of firmness and determination of purpose. You act on the impulse of the moment, but you are of the type that plods. You never know when you are beaten. You keep on keeping on.

I would say that you are a man who would be approachable at all times. You have a fine openness of disposition, with no signs of dissimulation or hypocrisy about you.

Since many of your looped letters are minus their loops, I gather you are a person who knows what he is after, and when you say "No," you require no night stick to convince your hearer. Moreover, apart from your business and moral qualities, you have never neglected the mental side of your nature. You have kept yourself abreast of the times and know the best in literature. You are a well informed man. You appeal to me as a man well fitted for the high and responsible position you now hold.

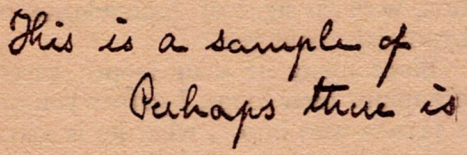


W. G. Walker, Chief of Police, Fresno, Cal.—You are never happy unless you are doing big things. Your imagination is high, and your outlook on life is wide. Your nature doesn't believe in being cribbed, cabined and confined.

Your whole bearing stamps you as a born leader. You have a commanding presence; a positive manner.

You are the last word in sincerity and in straightforwardness. Approachable at all times, and a friendliness of manner which is refreshing. You haven't even a passing acquaintance with the "blues."

I observe the business side of your nature has also been well taken care of. Your perspicacity is sometimes uncanny. You are shrewd to a degree, and as discreet as a Scotchman. Like most men of your type I notice that patience is no virtue with you. Your anger occasionally gets the better of you, and then your office is no place for a Presbyterian elder. In a word, I would say you are all man and no gristle. Fearless and self-dependent, and an exemplary officer of the law.



John Armstrong, Chief of Police, Plymouth, Mass.—I would say that you are meticulous and precise in the matter of small things. You have a very concentrative brain, and have the faculty of excluding extraneous matters that do not apply to the problem on hand. Your small handwriting indicates you are a student of human nature. Severe and critical at times.

Your mind travels a mile a minute, and you are always a jump ahead of the other fellow. You seem to be matter-of-fact in your manner of speech, adhering to facts, and never giving your imagination any loophole when it comes to making statements.

No one could call you vain or self-conceited. On the contrary, your pen formations mirror a nature which is devoid of any desire for display. That you are a business executive goes without saying. You are the last word in discretion, and know when to keep your mouth shut, and when to speak.

There must be no waiting with you. When you give orders you expect them carried out to the letter. There are no half measures with you. Furthermore, you have a very ambitious nature. You are always aspiring and striving after something bigger. Plymouth has a man at the head of its police force who would be hard to duplicate when it comes to genuine manhood.

Fill out the coupon with specimen writing and send it with ten cents, or one dollar for a thirteen-weeks' subscription to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. *You will receive a letter from Mr. Fraser giving his analysis of your character.*

To John Fraser, Detective Fiction Weekly, 280 Broadway, N. Y. City

Signature.....

Street..... City.....

12-15

FLASHES FROM READERS

Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

A FEW knocks we have published now and again in this department have made some of our warm friends warm under their collars. The result is that recent mails have brought in numerous knocks for the knockers and plenty of kind boosts for DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Read what some of the DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY fans have to say:

EDUCATOR COMMENDS US

We have a right to be proud of this letter, which is from the vice-president of one of the greatest correspondence schools in the world. Apparently Mr. Mann has not looked lately at our "Cipher Secrets" page. We have a notion he'll find the new way of presenting it *with* instructions a fascinating game.

DEAR SIR:

I have read the DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY and have done so even a long time before the magazine changed its name.

I have always enjoyed reading it and it is very rarely there is anything appearing that I do not read. Once in awhile I do not read the serial stories because I find I prefer to save the magazines up till the whole serial will have appeared before I start to read, and then during that time somebody perhaps gets hold of one or two of the numbers, and I lose the story that way. This is the only objection I have to the serial stories. At the same time, I see no reason why they should be discontinued, but I think that one good serial would be about enough, or at the most, two.

I enjoy those fact stories very much. I do not see how anybody can object to them because since they are fact stories they are instructive and in many cases they bring to mind the quotation: "Truth is stranger than fiction."

I like the *Kennedy* stories, the *Calhoun* stories, and the *McArthur* stories. In fact, let me repeat I do find them all so interesting.

I have read the criticisms on the page "Flashes from Readers," and I have smiled at the condemnation some of them give to some of the stories. I really think you would be making a mistake if you made any serious change in the magazine, and since I have read a great many magazines, I have no hesitation in repeating how much I enjoy yours.

I have sometimes wondered, though, why you would take up space on such a subject as "Ciphers." I suppose it is a prejudice. I cannot imagine this being of any very general interest. I do not think either that the personal items under the heading, "Missing People," mean very much.

I notice some of your readers are criticizing the items appearing under the heading "We Pin a Medal On." These items might be left out, still I think perhaps it is good for the people to read these.

In expressing my appreciations of your magazine I know I am voicing the opinion of many people in high places, because I have met many of them who take your magazine regularly.

Wishing you every success and with best wishes, I am, Yours very truly,

GEO. MANN,

Vice-President, International Correspondence Schools, Canadian Limited, Montreal, Canada.

SURE IT'S GOOD

Here is an amusing letter from a reader in Boston, who uses that well-

known scene from Victor Hugo's book, "Toilers of the Sea," to describe how he feels about DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. This man breaks dates to read our book.

DEAR SIR:

After looking over "Flashes from Readers" for the 'steenth time, I'd like to ask some of them the name of any magazine that satisfies all the readers. They do admit that there are very few bad points about your weekly publication, and I believe that every knock is a boost when they take time to send in likes and dislikes.

As for myself—a little over the voting age—I'm forced to admit that DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY sure takes all my powers of control for a sleigh ride after I turn to the first page. It reminds me of school days when the class was forced to study "Toilers of the Sea," by Hugo, when "the old boy" describes some ill-fated person walking over the quicksands. To quote a few sentences:

"He sinks in two or three inches"—there I am starting to read the first story. "His feet have disappeared, the sand covers them. He turns back, he sinks in deeper." By this time a "date" has been broken, but try and break away from the story.

It goes on to explain that the aforesaid human being realizes he is caught in the quicksand and is slowly being swallowed up. "He howls, implores, cries to the clouds, despairs."

While the comparison is not quite correct, the interesting stories grip the reader considerably and instead of "howling, imploring" and what not, will settle down quietly and be glad to "go under."

By this time "the sand rises; the sand reaches the shoulders; the sand reaches his neck; the face alone is visible now. The eyes still gaze, the sand shuts them—night. A little hair flutters; a hand comes to the surface of the beach, moves, shakes and disappears."

Taken in by DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY!

When you can put out a better grade of magazine than you are now I'll tell my grandchildren to buy it!

Sincerely,
DAVID B. ROBERTS,
Boston, Mass.

A NEW CIPHER FAN

"When one sees those ciphers, curiosity demands the answer." That's what this reader says about Mr. Ohaver's new cipher department. We suggest more readers indulge their curiosity. There's a thrill and surprise about solving ciphers that was never possessed by a crossword puzzle.

EDITORS:

Have been reading your magazine for some time, and it is the one and only detective stories I read. I like the true stories and novelettes, especially the fast moving ones that keep one guessing to the end.

Wish you could run a long serial in about ten parts, while the three-five part ones are going.

The *Chanda-Lung* stories are good. Will they catch him? Will *Gray* marry *Dagni* at the end? Hope to see some of the old characters, *Dizzy Mac, Calhoun, Riordan* and *Brady, Greer, X. Crook, Tony Trent* and the captain—I forget his name—who was in a Mississippi story by Ware. *Ruggles* and *Clavering* are O K, but too much repetition.

In this week's issue all the stories are good, but I didn't like "The House of Crime" so well, because it was in first person.

"The Man Who Never Blundered" is the best serial in some time. I wonder who is back of the "works." Somebody must be "inside," because no one could guess right every time. Is it *Morgan* or is it *Le Toque-Mousson?*

I received John Fraser's analysis of my handwriting and he hit it to a "T." He's good.

Am now working the ciphers. Had them all done Friday night—not so bad when I read all the stories first. The first time I tried I got two and in the last issue all of 'em. This week I think I got 'em all, but the last one looks "fishy"; you know when one sees those ciphers curiosity demands the answer.

Yours truly,
EDWARD J. SMITH,
Erie, Pa.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name .....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

12-15

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

CRYPTOGRAMS often afford numerous points of attack, and it frequently happens that no two fans will solve a given problem in exactly the same way. To illustrate this point let us consider some of the solutions submitted to the following cryptogram of September 29:

FOJVSNUEZNFO AHOXJVYX CVYFAKEUFJVS GEAKYHEXUT JIYHERI CYNAVZFU
Antediluvian monsters perambulated cumbrously through primeval
MEORUVX SEYNOR CYVINXJHYNG CVYNHSX ECHO JINX IVANXCIVYV
jungles during prehistoric periods upon this hemisphere

This cryptogram was solved by H. D. H., Middletown, Delaware, without the use of a frequency table by guessing ECHO JINX—*upon this.* Substituting in FOJVSNUEZNFO he had *-nt--i-u-i-n,* which, from the predominating V—*e*—and repeated F was soon found to be *antediluvian.*

F. C. R., Chicago, turned the trick by analysis of affixes having letters in common. Taking V as *e,* from frequency, he assumed that CVY- and CYV- were *per-* and *pre-,* and that -VYX and -VYV represented *-ers* and *-ere.* Using these letters in CVYNHSX he got *per - - - s,* which soon suggested *periods.*

The solution of G. W. B., New York City, began with a check for frequencies, after which IVANXCIVYV was at once apparent as *hemisphere.* Besides V—*e*—you will observe that the predominating final, X, is probable as *s,* and that *th* is a good guess for the repeated initial digraph JI.

Try your luck with this week's cryptograms. One way to start with No. 1 is to select probable words for KRL and KY. Then substitute the letters so found in KVJKR and YJV, in which the digraph VJ and its reversal JV will be the only unknown values. This isn't hard, but it 'll puzzle you.

In the second cryptogram you might get to work on YCDDBL, noting that B and the doubled D are predominating symbols, and that CD also occurs as a separate word. Fans who have been asking for harder crypts should look to their laurels in No. 3, here offered without hints to solution. This clever construction will keep you busy for the better part of an hour at least.

No. 1.
YJV OMZCQ XYQQLQQ UE ZTKJVL TZ MZQTKMTUPL CLQMVL KY IZYG KRL KVJKR.

No. 2. By John R. Edwards.
ABCDE FBGHIJBA KLBMNABJDM OIEJ CACPM CJA DEIPCM OBQQB-LMIJ MCPB ACR, SNT., OVYR QIV-LDE, BNUEDBBJ EVJALBA DXBJDR-MNZ, QILPBL CD WVNJGR, PCM-MCGEVMBDDM, YCDDBL CD PIJ-DNGBYYI, SNLUNJNC.

No. 3. By Mabel Verona McKeown.
OPYJQDWYUM AODDYAOSH AT-PUHYP ATODWQW HFTOU BEY-STWTBEM, AHSAOSOW, CTTSTIM, DEQUTDYA, BWMAETSTIM, QUA.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

1.—"And they three passed over the white sands, between the rocks, silent as the shadows."

2.—In solving crypts start with suppositious assumptions, make small hypothetical transpositions, eliminate errors by continued comparisons and ever observing context, till at last you establish some definite key, whereupon the rest is easier.

3.—Anxious equestriennes needing horseshoers find expert farriers almost extinct nowadays.

See the next issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for the answers to this week's cryptograms.

Coming Next Week!

FANS, here's a letter from Landers J. Brannigan, the man who sets the type for DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. It will interest you.

DEAR MR. EDITOR:

I know you're a big, fat, roly-poly guy. They tell me you use up four editorial chairs a week. But, lissen, how come this Santy Clauz stuff? We guys over here in the printin' plant have read your copy for the Christmas issue, and, of course, we believe in Merry Christmas and Hark the Herald Angels Sing, but, lissen, remember you're only gettin' a ten-cent dime for your book and there's no need of tryin' to be Santy Clauz on a John D. Rockefeller tip.

LANDERS J. BRANNIGAN.

Mr. Landers Brannigan hasn't got the idea. When he wrote, it was too far away from Christmas. He'll begin to feel as we do as the season draws nearer. Here's what he points to—the list of authors, all in one issue.

Here are some of them:

ARTHUR B. REEVE—H. ASHTON-WOLFE—LESLIE G. BARNARD—EDGAR WALLACE—MAXWELL SMITH—PETER PERRY—LEON GROC—CHARLES SOMERVILLE

Christmas is going to be so good for DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, we feel like ringing the Christmas bells and riding a reindeer down Broadway.

"CRAIG KENNEDY'S CHRISTMAS CASE," by Arthur B. Reeve, is one of the great detective's most exciting adventures.

"THE RINGER'S CHRISTMAS PARTY," by the great English mystery writer, Edgar Wallace, is a thriller.

"THE FROZEN ALIBI," by H. Ashton-Wolfe, is a story of the French underworld. It's the mystery of a fiendish crime that will chill your backbone.

"MR. PHILIBUS' CHRISTMAS PARTY," by Leslie G. Barnard, is a gripping story about a first-rate crook who said "Merry Christmas" with a blackjack.

So be sure old Saint Nick leaves in your stocking the

Christmas Number of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, December 22

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