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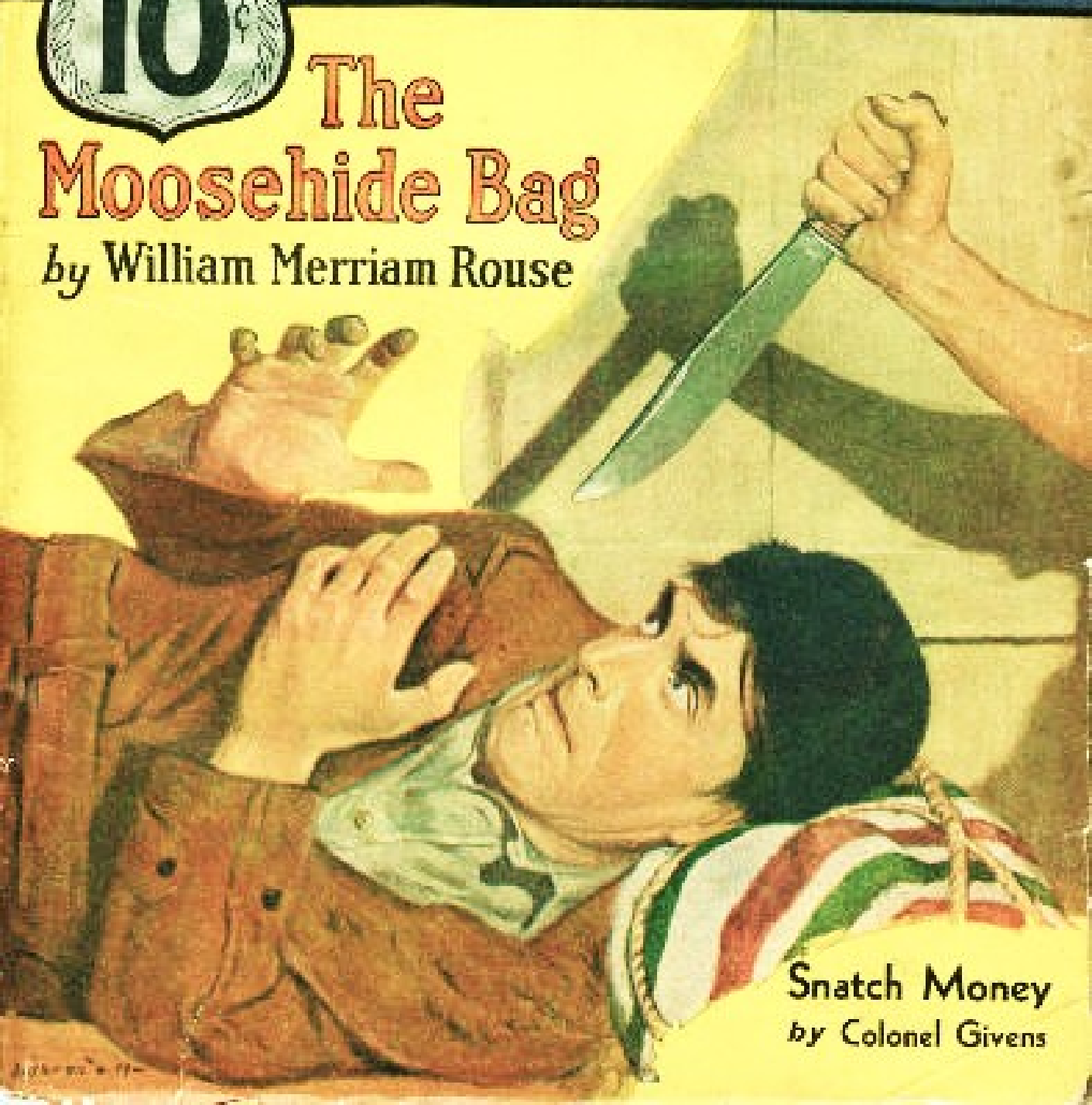
The Moosehide Bag

by William Merriam Rouse



Snatch Money

by Colonel Givens

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME LXVI — *Saturday, March 19, 1932* — NUMBER 2

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

SERIAL

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This Magazine is on sale every Tuesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY - 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y.,

C. T. DIXON, President THEODORE PROEHL, Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.
111 Rue Reaumur

Published weekly and copyright, 1932, by The Red Star News Company. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; in Canada, $7.00; $7.00 to other Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order, or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Entered as Second Class Matter September 4, 1924, at the post office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyright in Great Britain.

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The Moosehide Bag

A Novelette

By William Merriam Rouse

Trent poised to leap down on the creeping brute

Murder Was Stalking the Blizzard-Bound Hotel, Playing a Grisly Game for the Gold That Trent Was Guarding

CHAPTER I

The Legless Man

IN a crudely made bag of moosehide, nearly as big as a man's head, grains and pellets and lumps of metal shifted and rubbed together as the bag swayed and rose and fell evenly. The metal was gold and the bag was in the pack of one of the three men who were just coming down from the north after nearly a year in that vast and little known region of Quebec which the old *voyageurs* called the country above the rivers.

At mid-afternoon the bush was almost as dark as night and a faint ghost of a sigh shuddered now and then among the upper branches of the trees. In the open spaces single hard missiles of frozen snow drove down at an angle from the gloomy regions above. There was wind up there where they came from. In a short time there would be wind among the tree tops, and over all the open country, and the man who tried to brave it might well not live to another day. A blizzard was coming out of the northeast.

The three men marched rapidly, with quick, tireless, space-eating strides, while the world grayed and blackened about them. The tops of the trees blended with the dark heavens. Only the trunks came out of

the murky world like quick wraiths to meet the men. If the Hôtel des Trois Chiens were not at the fork of the river as they had been told they would have to make camp in darkness and spend the night in the shelter of the bush.

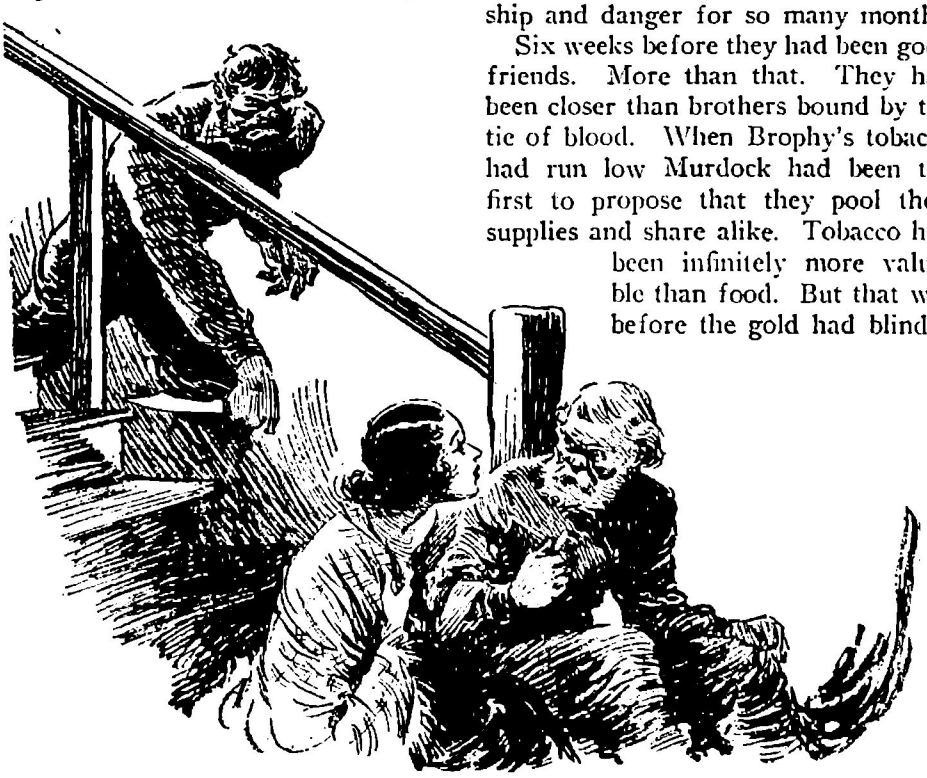
They breathed hard, marching with heads bent against the tumplines of their packs. The wind moaned and began to blow with the swift but ponderous assertion of power of a great storm as the three broke cover. The breath was snatched from their nostrils and their heads bent lower still. The wind-driven particles of ice became like needles against the exposed flesh of cheek and nose. If the men had been marching directly against the storm they could not have faced it as it rose to full strength in the open.

Spike Trent, known to his godparents as Edward Gerald, marched at the rear and took the worst of the blow against his compact body. Ahead of him was Bob Murdock, a fell-fleshed man, laboring now under the additional weight of the gold.

As they drove forward Trent was thinking that lately the man with the gold had always marched in the middle, between the others, as though by a kind of tacit agreement. It was absurd, for no one of them could escape his companions if he wanted to. But it was natural. The bag of gold grew precious as they drew near to civilization.

Trent had taken to watching his partners with a critical eye. Since they had found gold and started out of the bush with some of it he found himself regarding differently these two men with whom he had shared hardship and danger for so many months.

Six weeks before they had been good friends. More than that. They had been closer than brothers bound by the tie of blood. When Brophy's tobacco had run low Murdock had been the first to propose that they pool their supplies and share alike. Tobacco had been infinitely more valuable than food. But that was before the gold had blinded



their eyes, had crept into their blood like a yellow poison, had hardened their souls. Now his comrades had become like strangers to Spike Trent.

Murdock had a habit of wolfing his food. At times he slavered a little. The tall, lean, and saturnine Slim Jim Brophy looked more and more with an eye of suspicion upon all men and things. Murdock was a glutton. Brophy was surly. Trent told himself that he would be glad when the gold was shared and their claims duly recorded. If he had died back there in the bush the other men would have been his heirs. He might have died. Easily.

BROPHY, the pessimist, broke trail to-day. He was the first to speak, after hours of silent marching. He half turned without interrupting the rhythm of his stride, and hurled back a few guttural words. They were dissolved by the wind before they reached Trent, but Murdock understood them and made a hoarse reply.

"What did that long legged grouch say?" shouted Trent.

"He said there ain't no Hotel of the Three Dogs!"

"Tell him he's a liar!"

"Trent says you're a liar!" yelled Murdock.

"And you tell him I'll get even with you and him both!" howled Brophy, over the roar of the storm. "Wait till we get clear of this mess and I'll show you whether I'm a liar or not!"

They went on. It was Brophy, in the lead, who first saw lights, and shouted and swung his arm. They made a brave attempt to penetrate the thick night, those lighted windows, but to the marching men they were little more than spots of yellow against the gray wall of the world. But, however dim, they meant warmth and cheer, and good food, and beds.

The partners forgot their necks and shoulders, aching under the weight of their packs, and they made a clumsy attempt to run toward the first real house they had seen since they passed beyond the outskirts of settled country.

Although Trent was the last man in line he was the first to reach the door. In his trembling eagerness to get clear of his snowshoes he cursed when the frozen thongs clung to his feet. He kicked himself free.

In a moment three pairs of snowshoes were upended beside the doorway and the men went tumbling into a room that seemed to meet them like the embrace of a welcoming woman. But after the first pleasant shock of warmth and light, Spike Trent felt the touch of something cold and sinister, like the atmosphere of the bush in its worst mood.

HE found himself in a broad room with a long table in the center and an open stairway at one end. He stared across the table, blinking at the light from a great fireplace, and met the eyes of a little group there.

Three men and a girl stared back at the strangers as though a wolf pack had come in out of the howling night. Of these four in the Hôtel des Trois Chiens one instantly caught and held and dominated the attention of Trent.

A vast, clammy looking man sat in an enormous homemade chair at one side of the fireplace. At the first glance he seemed to be fat, but at the second his rounded arms and deep chested body gave the impression of tremendous muscular power. The cloth of his shirt sleeves was drawn taut upon his biceps. The great hands that curled upon the arms of the chair

looked fit to bend horseshoes. But it was apparent that the blanket that was draped over his lap from mid-thigh to floor hid nothing at all. The giant's legs were gone. They ended in stumps halfway between hip and knee.

He turned a bland and childlike face toward Trent.

"Enter, *messieurs!*" he purred. "Georges, another log on the fire! Alma-Rose, bring the whisky *blanc!* Move over there, Louis, if you please, and let the strangers up to the fire!"

Trent and Brophy and Murdock moved toward the fire, blowing and thawing ice out of their beards. They pulled off fur *casques* and unbuttoned jackets with awkward, cold stiffened fingers. Trent was conscious that a girl of dark beauty, whose eyes flashed at him appraisingly, was making hot drinks, that a time-dried old woodsman was chattering, and that a big, brutish looking fellow tossed a log upon the fire.

"You came up the river to-day?" cried the old man. He spat expertly through his teeth and hit an andiron from a distance of ten feet. "*Sacré bon Dieu!* Me, I have been fifty years in the bush and I would not travel on a day like this! I could smell the blizzard this morning!"

"We did not come up the river!" answered Trent, laughing. "We came out of the bush, and we wanted to make the Hôtel des Trois Chiens. This must be it?"

He turned to the crippled giant, instinctively assuming him to be the proprietor. A drink was offered to Trent and for an instant his hand met that of the girl. Even though he scarcely looked at her, as he waited for a reply from the man in the armchair, he noticed that her fingers were cold.

"*Monsieur,*" began the cripple, in a voice which was almost like a caress, "this is the Hotel of the Three Dogs, at the service of you and your friends. I am Omer Simard, also at your service. The old *bûcheron,* who talks so fast that he chokes himself, is our only neighbor, Louis Tremblay. The gross animal there, who handles logs like matchwood, is my servant, Georges Godette. And the little one, who makes the *ménage* for me, is my relative, Alma-Rose Lamarre. Now you know the household. We are on the edge of the bush, too full days march from the nearest village, and we are always glad to have guests."

Trent, settling himself on a bench, mentioned the names of his companions and his own. It was good to be welcomed like this, and he dismissed as ridiculous the memory of the chill which had struck him at the first sight of Omer Simard. He was hungry, and he had been cold. That was all. Decidedly, the girl was good-looking. Yes, she was beautiful; as slender and as graceful as a willow branch, and rich with the dark beauty of the black haired, blue-eyed *Canadienne.* Or did he think so because he had seen no women but a few half-breed Nauscapees for the past ten or eleven months? He filled and lighted his pipe.

CHAPTER II

Murdock Talks Too Much

WITHOUT further orders the girl set on the table a meal fit for the appetites that the strangers had brought with them. Trent ate slowly and with the enjoyment possible only to a man who has lived from the frying pan for months. Old Tremblay, finding that all the newcomers could speak French, kept up a staccato fire of questions and

comment which for the time rode down all other conversation. The big Godette had retired in silence to his corner. The girl served the table. After her first show of interest the life seemed to have gone out of her.

Suddenly Trent realized that Murdock, in the intervals when his mouth was clear, was telling all of their affairs to the old man. Black looks from Brophy had no effect upon him. At the mention of gold Tremblay had sprung to his feet open mouthed. Godette leaned forward with his eyes fixed upon the gleaming, reddened face of Murdock. Even the girl had paused halfway from table to kitchen, and only Simard remained calm.

"And so," exclaimed Tremblay, "you have brought some of this gold with you?"

"But yes!" cried Murdock. "Enough to—"

A violent kick from Brophy silenced him at last. He turned with a slowly comprehending gaze, and stopped eating long enough to laugh.

"What's the matter, Jim? We don't have to be careful now we are out of the bush! These are all good folks here!"

Brophy muttered something venomous in his throat, but the voice of Simard came like oil upon the waters.

"Your partner is right, Monsieur Murdock," he said. "It is always best to be careful. Although, truly, we are honest people here."

Murdock went on shoveling away great sections of meat pie and chuckling to himself. A quarrel was saved, and Trent was grateful to the cripple. He wanted nothing to happen now, and he was glad when at last even Brophy expanded under the influence of food and drink and tobacco, and the warmth of the fire.

It was not long before Murdock was snoring on his bench and sagging gently toward the floor. A quick word from Simard brought the girl with a candle and she led the way upstairs. Murdock, staggering with fatigue, was barely able to carry his pack and rifle.

The building, Trent decided, was very old. It had, perhaps, been a trading post when this was the frontier. The thick stone walls and the small windows were of that time when men built for defense, not only against the climate, but also against the still more to be dreaded savages. Long since the interior of the building had been changed and now a corridor ran from the head of the stairs to the opposite end of the building, and from this corridor a series of box-like bedrooms opened. There was apparently a wing at the rear which held the kitchen on the ground floor and the room above it.

The partners allowed themselves the luxury of separate rooms, and Trent realized that the others were as glad as he was to be rid, for a time, of the constant companionship which necessity had forced upon them in the bush. He dropped his pack with a sigh and looked about him in the light of the candle which the girl had left. This square little room, with its bed and chair and quavery looking-glass was luxury at the moment. He was no longer sleepy. He opened his pack and shaved in ice water. Perhaps they were still awake below stairs. After all, that girl was beautiful.

TRENT started downstairs, as presentable as soap and water and a razor could make him. His broad shoulders were straight now and a returning zest in life had brought a

sparkle into his eyes. He was no longer a machine, putting one foot endlessly in front of the other, weighted by a heavy pack. He was a man again, with money to buy what he wanted. And downstairs there was a girl who was worth investigating.

His shoepacs made no sound, and he was unnoticed when he stopped three steps down the stairway and gazed in silent astonishment at what he saw there below him.

What first gripped Trent, and held him motionless, was a casual glimpse of the big servant Georges Godette, coming out of the shadows of his corner. The man, Trent realized now with a shock, was more formidable than he first appeared. His proportions had been dwarfed by the personality of Simard, the proprietor.

And now as Godette started across the room noiselessly, crouching so that his big hands swung at the level of his knees, and with his low forehead wrinkled after the fashion of a gorilla, Spike Trent knew that he was looking upon something come out of the abyss of time. Godette was on his way to kill.

Trent saw this in a span of time covered by a few watchticks. His glance followed the fixed gaze of Godette. At the foot of the stairs, in the shadows there, he saw Louis Tremblay and the girl Alma-Rose whispering with their heads bent close together. Their backs were toward the room and they were entirely unconscious of the destruction that was coming toward them on feet as soft and silent as those of a panther.

Trent's hand dropped to his knife and he put one hand on the stair rail. A cry of warning might bring a rush from Godette too swift to be stopped. Either the girl or Tremblay would break like a pipestem in his hands. Trent held himself poised to vault the railing and drop down upon the shoulders of Godette the instant the man came near enough.

But both Godette and Spike Trent had reckoned without the legless man in the great chair. He seemed to nod, with eyes closed and the firelight playing over his smooth, round face. Godette was halfway across the room. A gleam of steel came into his hand. Then suddenly a voice spoke from that inert form in the armchair, and it was not the voice that had purred at the three men who came in out of the bush.

"Animal!"

THE ape man halted between two steps, and straightened up, and became human again. His face was turned toward Simard. Slowly he thrust his knife back into its leather sheath.

"Sit down!" commanded Simard.

Godette turned and went back to his corner without speaking a word. Now his shoepacs made a faint shuffling sound. It was hard to believe in their cat-like stealth of the moment before.

At the first words from the lips of Omer Simard, Tremblay and the girl spun around; and they stood frozen, staring, while the man who had been about to kill one or both of them went obediently back to the dimness of his chimney corner.

The back of Simard's chair was toward them, and it was too high for him to see if he had turned his head. But he spoke as one having knowledge of what was going on there at the foot of the stairs, out of his sight and hearing.

"Alma-Rose, my pipe and tobacco! Louis, be careful that you do not get into trouble!"

The girl fairly ran toward the cupboard. Old Tremblay went toward the fire, waving his hands before he could find words or a tongue to speak them with.

"That fellow is dangerous! He'll kill somebody yet! *Malédiction!* He's jealous like a wildcat, that man! Just because I talk to Alma-Rose—"

"You do not fool me at all, Louis," said Simard. "Save your breath!"

Louis Tremblay flung up his hands. He spat expertly at the fire and after a moment of irresolution sat down with a sigh of helplessness.

Alma-Rose came hurrying with a filled pipe and held a coal in the tongs while Simard drew in long, slow puffs of tobacco smoke.

Spike Trent took his hands from knife hilt and stair rail. He coughed to announce his coming, and went on down the stairs.

"Ah!" said Simard, in his velvet voice, "*Monsieur* comes to join us in a final pipe before he goes to bed!"

"If you are agreeable," replied Trent.

He sat down, shaken by what he had just seen. But the face of Omer Simard remained as calm as the waters of an unruffled pool. Louis Tremblay sat inscrutable, alert, with no visible hint of what might be going on behind the leathery hide of his face. In the shadows of the chimney corner the servant Godette was motionless, visible only as a monolithic blot in the semi-darkness.

"*Monsieur* has witnessed a little difficulty," said Simard. "It is nothing."

"And yet one does not feel entirely comfortable," said Trent, "with a little fortune to guard!"

At the moment Trent's gaze met that of Alma-Rose Lamarre, who had taken a seat by the table. The candlelight fell clear and strong upon her face. Her blue eyes had darkened until they seemed black and she was staring so fixedly at Trent that for an instant he expected her to speak. Whether she was trying to convey something to him, or trying to probe his mind, he could not tell from her expression. Certainly the color had left her cheeks and she looked pitifully fragile and out of place there in the crudeness of the Hôtel des Trois Chiens.

"CONSIDER, *monsieur*," said Simard, slowly, "that you are practically three against one. Even if my stupid Georges were a thief he could do little against three strong men armed with rifles. As for my condition, *monsieur*, you behold it. And our friend Tremblay is past the age for such adventures as robbery, if he had the desire."

"Thanks for the compliment," said Tremblay, dryly."

Trent laughed.

"I am probably an old woman," he said, with a shrug. "We are able to take care of ourselves, even if Murdock does talk too much."

"You have only to call in the night, if you are alarmed," said Simard. "Beside my bed there is a cord which runs upstairs to the room of Georges, over the kitchen. It rings a bell there when I pull it. I sleep very lightly. Of necessity, because of my infirmity, I must live on this floor. My chamber is behind that door which you see at the end of the room opposite the stairway. I repeat, *monsieur*, you have only to call once and I will hear you. And now I think I will go to bed."

The eyes of Simard shifted toward Godette's corner, and he raised his voice in a tone of command.

"Georges!"

Instantly the big servant appeared in the firelight.

"Yes, *monsieur*," he said.

"Bed!"

Godette bent and almost without effort lifted the enormous body of the cripple from its resting place in the armchair. He strolled across the room as though he were carrying a child and disappeared in Simard's bedroom. Trent met the eyes of the old woodsman. Tremblay shrugged, and got to his feet.

"Me, I go to bed also."

"You live here?" asked Trent, with the idea of making conversation.

"Now and then," answered Tremblay brusquely. "I have a cabin and a line of traps a short march to the northwest."

Trent would have lingered, but he received no encouragement from Mademoiselle Lamarre. He did not know whether or not it was his imagination, but he fancied that she glanced apprehensively toward the door of the bedroom. So he took a fresh candle from the table and started upstairs behind Tremblay. When the two men were halfway up to the second floor Alma-Rose followed them with heavy feet.

Trent saw old Tremblay enter the room beyond his own. He made slow work of closing his door and saw the girl go into the room at the end of the corridor beyond that of the old man's. That made every room in the hotel occupied, thought Trent idly, as he slid the bolt behind him.

The snores of Murdock reverberated along the corridor. They came dully through the thin partition, and for a moment Spike Trent wished he were of Murdock's type, capable of such wholehearted eating and sleeping. The failure to rouse any interest from the girl had dampened his spirits. The Hôtel des Trois Chiens depressed him. Outside the blizzard howled and tore at the stout windows.

Some time during the night Trent awoke suddenly and stared into the darkness with a feeling of the presence of evil, of danger. Then he remembered that he was under a roof, not in the bush with his feet to a camp fire. The snoring from Murdock had ceased, but the wind still beat against the strong walls of the hotel. Trent fancied he heard, as an undertone, a faint shuffling somewhere outside his room, but it ceased even before he drifted off again into a deep and comfortable sleep.

CHAPTER III

Murdered in the Night

WHEN Spike Trent awoke again the gray morning filled his room and he felt like himself. Youth and a bush-hardened frame had thrown off the effect of yesterday, and even the memory of the many yesterdays before it. He remembered the gold, and his share in a mine which might be worth a fortune. He thought of Quebec, of Montreal, of New York. And he thought, with a kind of wistful irritation, of Alma-Rose Lamarre. Perhaps it was for her sake that he shaved again this morning.

The corridor was still when he stepped out of his room and hesitated before the door of Bob Murdock. The blizzard still raged and they would hardly start on this morning, but certainly Murdock would rather have his breakfast than an extra hour's sleep. Trent knocked, and knocked again, but there was no sound from within the room. He tried the door, expecting to find it bolted. To his astonishment, it opened and he stood upon the threshold

speechless and for an instant paralyzed by what he saw.

Murdock's pack was open, as well it might be, but the contents were spilled out across the floor as though by an alien hand, and Bob Murdock lay staring at the ceiling with the hilt of a hunting knife sticking up grotesquely under his chin.

Trent whirled and ran and drove his shoepac against Brophy's door.

"Jim!" he cried. "Get up quick!"

The bolt grated, the door opened, and Brophy looked out with a dark face.

"What's the matter with you?" he growled. "It's blowing cats and dogs and—"

"Bob's been murdered!"

The brows of Slim Jim Brophy drew further down and his hand fell away from the door. He took a step backward.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"How dumb are you?" cried Trent. "I said Bob had been murdered! The gold is gone!"

"I've got the gold," said Brophy.

"You!"

The men stood looking at each other, staring now over an immeasurable distance.

"Yes, I have it!" barked Brophy. "He wasn't fit to take care of nothing, after the way he made a hog of himself! And you had an eye on the girl. I don't like the looks of them people downstairs!"

"So," said Trent, in a low voice, "you took the gold without saying anything to anybody! Bob was asleep when you did it, wasn't he?"

"Yes! Of course!"

"How did you get in?"

"Pushed the bolt back with my knife. Anybody could do that."

"Where's the bag now?"

"Want to see it?" sneered Brophy. "It's over there in my pack. What are you trying to get at?"

"I don't know yet," replied Trent, staring at his partner with a kind of fascinated horror. "Not yet!"

The brown weathering of Brophy's face changed to an unwholesome greenish yellow.

"You skunk!" he whispered. "You're trying to make out I killed him! We'll see who's going to make out what when I know more about this!"

"Come with me," said Trent, and he turned toward Murdock's room.

THERE was little that they could learn. Murdock had been killed with his own knife, and the blow had been skillfully struck so that no sound could escape him.

Brophy insisted that he rolled up the pack after taking out the moosehide bag, and Spike Trent did not know whether or not to believe him. It seemed impossible to believe that this man, with whom he had marched and eaten, had shared hardship and danger, would commit murder.

Yet Trent knew that the pull of gold was stronger than bands of iron. He had seen it the night before in the faces of the people of the house; yes, in the eyes of the cripple, behind the weathered mask of Tremblay, gleaming darkly through the girl's beauty, twisting in the coarse features of Georges Godette. Neither Brophy nor he himself was free from that pull.

Moreover, there was an added motive for one of the partners to kill off the others. The share of the dead would fall to the living, both in the mine and the gold already taken out. Trent felt that Jim Brophy suspected him.

They went downstairs together and

found the men of the house about to eat. Godette was just in the act of pushing Simard's chair up to the table. Something in the faces of Trent and Brophy stayed the usual morning greeting, and Trent crossed the room in a profound silence.

"*Messieurs,*" he said, "we have just found our partner, Murdock, dead. He was stabbed some time during the night with his own knife."

No sound but a faint cry from Alma-Rose broke the stillness that followed. With a sidelong glance Trent saw her leaning against the doorway leading to the kitchen, white and shaken.

He was concerned, however, entirely with the faces of the three men at the long table; but from them he learned nothing. It was, as usual, Omer Simard who spoke first.

"This is a terrible misfortune!" he said. Slowly his eyes traveled from the face of Trent to that of Brophy, and then to Tremblay and Godette. He wiped his forehead. "Horrible!"

"It might be any of us!" said Trent steadily. "You understand that?"

"It might," agreed Simard. "Yes!"

"Except you, perhaps," added Trent.

The proprietor spread out his hands.

"It would be difficult for me, *monsieur,*" he said, "but I might manage it somehow."

"*Blasphème!*" Old Tremblay sprang to his feet. "We do not have far to look! That is what I think!"

He stared pointedly at Georges Godette, and Godette's lip drew back in a snarl.

"Georges is hardly more to be suspected than the rest of us," said Simard. "If it concerned Alma-Rose, yes! But in this case there are others who have more to gain. Is it not so, Monsieur Trent?"

"That is true," admitted Trent, and he knew very well what was in the mind of Simard.

"The gold, of course, has disappeared?"

"No!" exclaimed Trent. He hesitated and looked at Brophy. It would be unjust to Slim Jim to tell these others what had happened; unjust in case he were not guilty.

"THE gold is safe!" growled Brophy. "I have seen to that!"

"You mean that the murderer did not find it?" asked Simard; with lifted brows. "I understood last night that Monsieur Murdock had in his possession the treasure which you brought out of the country above the rivers. Was it not so, Louis?"

"That is what I thought!" growled Tremblay. "I suppose it is what Godette thought, also!"

Georges Godette started to get up from his bench. The quiet voice of Omer Simard caught him and he sank back, glaring at Tremblay.

"Rest easy, my Georges! I shall have to forbid Louis the hotel if he does not conduct himself better. Let us at least have no more bloodshed!"

Tremblay sat down at the table, almost speechless with rage. "Me, I am going to eat, dead men or no dead men!" he said.

"You won't try to go on to-day?" said Simard, looking at Spike.

"I shall go if the storm lets up at all," answered Trent.

He went to the door and stepped outside to take account of the weather. The blackness that had hung over the world yesterday had thinned until it was possible to see through the gray storm. The wind had abated even in the past few minutes, and Trent thought that by noon it might be possible to march.

At one side of the doorway, where the partners had thrust their snowshoes the night before, a big drift lay curled half way up the front of the building. Trent thrust his arm into the snow, feeling for the familiar wooden rims. It was not until he had reached from side to side and dug the snow away from a space a yard square that he realized that the snowshoes were no longer where they had been left.

His first thought was that they had been taken inside. But that would be contrary to custom, for melting snow stretches the rawhide and heat dries it out to brittleness. He began systematically to feel about in the snow with his feet.

Suddenly he bent and lifted a splintered frame. The rawhide had vanished except for a few shreds which clung here and there. Frantically Trent plunged into the snow and located the rest of the scattered snowshoes. One of them lay a hundred feet away from the door, and all were half destroyed. He was dazed. The murderer had sprung a trap. No one would leave the place *that* day.

CHAPTER IV

The Damaged Snowshoes

THE others, even Brophy, were eating when Trent went inside again with the snowshoes held under his arm so that it was not instantly apparent what had happened to them.

"Took you long enough!" exclaimed Brophy. "How's the weather?"

"It's going to clear," answered Trent, hoarsely, "but something's happened to our snowshoes!"

He suddenly held them up, for all the room to see, but in the faces before him he found nothing but surprise.

"The wolves are here again!" cried Simard, after a moment.

"Wolves?" snorted Tremblay, disgustedly. "Are you crazy? Nothing but a *carcajou* would play a trick like that! I have known one of those devils to spring a whole line of traps, just for the fun of it, without even stealing the bait!"

"A *carcajou* or a man," said Trent, slowly.

"We can fix 'em," said Brophy, glowering, "and when we get 'em fixed it will be time for us to go!"

"We have some rawhide—" began Alma-Rose.

The glance of Simard rested upon her face and she became abruptly silent.

"Which we will be glad to offer you!" Simard finished for her, directing his words at Trent.

"It's going to take all of two days to get those fixed up," growled Brophy. "Can't we borrow some?"

"*Monsieur* will understand why I have none at all," replied Simard politely. "Alma-Rose does not use them. And Georges has but one pair, which he needs for his work."

"*Saccajé chien!*" barked Tremblay. "I cannot spare mine!"

Trent and Brophy looked at each other. In spite of their mutual suspicion they were drawn together by this common misfortune.

"Come on upstairs," said Trent. "You and I ought to have a talk."

"Well?" said Brophy after he had led the way into his room and seated himself on the bed.

"What are we going to do with him?" asked Spike, nodding toward Murdock's room.

"He'll keep," replied Brophy callously. "What I'm worrying about now is the gold and my own throat."

"We can get the snowshoes repaired so we can start to-morrow."

"And in the meantime who's going to keep the moosehide bag?" Brophy's head lurched forward belligerently.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Trent, after a moment of thought. "To-night you keep the gold and I'll sleep outside your door. If we don't get the work done and are stuck here another day and night I'll keep the bag and you sleep outside my door. That's fair. Neither of us can get away, anyhow, and we'll be protected from anybody in the house. I don't want to sleep in the same room with you. For all I know you might get up in the night and stick a knife into me!"

"Or the other way around!" snarled Brophy. "But that's a fair offer you made. I'll take it!"

Trent nodded and turned to go. He felt uneasy in the presence of his partner now, and even preferred the company of those downstairs. He stepped into the corridor, and spun around at the sound of a stifled sob.

AT the end of the long hallway he saw Alma-Rose and old Louis standing as though they had been surprised in the discussion of some vital and secret matter. The girl was confused, flaming scarlet, but Tremblay stared at Spike with a look which seemed to be little less than malevolent.

Trent suddenly flared into anger. The girl would not pay any attention to him, but she found time to talk to this smoke cured old *bûcheron!* He strode toward them.

"Let me remind you, *mademoiselle*," he said, "that there's been a murder here. Do not become involved with any one who may compromise you when the police come!"

"*Mademoiselle* will not compromise herself by talking to the only real friend she has in this accursed house!" cried Tremblay.

With that remark he went into his room and slammed the door so that the sound went echoing up and down the corridor.

In the face of the girl color came and went like leaping streamers of fire. Her eyes were filled with fear, but suddenly the suspicion faded out of them.

"Oh, Monsieur Trent!" she whispered. "Can you help me? I believe in you! I don't care what they say!"

"Of course I'll help you!" he cried. "Only tell me what I can do. Tell me—"

The bell in the room of Georges Godette jangled three times. At the sound the girl turned and ran toward the stairway, again in the grip of the nervous terror that dominated her.

"That is my call!" she flung over her shoulder. "I must go!"

When Trent reached the head of the stairs she was already crossing the room below, so swift had been her response to that summons. Simard was just lowering his hand from a cord which hung above the fireplace. Evidently this was an attachment to the bell cord that he had said ran to his bedside.

Spike was still furious when he started downstairs, but by the time he reached the bottom he realized that it would be folly at this time to precipitate a quarrel with any one. Certainly it would not be wise to quarrel with Simard, who maintained at least an outward show of neutrality.

Godette was standing by the fireplace, motionless, when Trent approached. In the face of the big servant Spike fancied he saw something of that expression which had been there when Godette had started for Louis Trem-

blay with the intent to kill. At a nod from Simard, Godette padded softly into the kitchen. The door closed behind him.

"Somewhat dangerous, but I know how to handle the fellow," explained Simard. "He is very valuable to me, as you have probably noticed. Without him I should have difficulty in moving about as much as I do."

"It is not my affair, but if I were in your place I think I'd rather do without him," said Spike.

HE brought the snowshoes up to the fire and began to work on one of them. In a few minutes Brophy joined him, and hour after hour they kept steadily at their task of getting the means to leave the Hôtel des Trois Chiens.

When the midday dinner had been eaten, and the storm had died to a stiff breeze, Louis Tremblay spoke a brief farewell to Simard and Alma-Rose and departed by way of the kitchen. Godette took his ax and went out to the bush. Through the afternoon the only sound in the room other than the occasional voice of the fire was the whisper of knife blade against wood and rawhide.

As soon as Trent and Brophy had finished their supper they went upstairs, and at that time Tremblay had not returned to the hotel. Godette and Alma-Rose went to their rooms while Trent was smoking a final pipe in much appreciated solitude, and waiting for Brophy to say that he was ready to go to bed.

Spike thought of Bob Murdock, dead in the next room, and shuddered. He did not yet dare to let himself speculate much as to who had committed the crime. The blizzard that had been raging practically precluded the possibility that it had been the work of some one outside the house, and yet that was possible. Trent felt of his own throat. Twenty-four hours before Murdock had been full of life, and the hope of enjoying his new wealth.

"Come on," said Brophy, from the doorway. "Take a look at the gold, if you want to, and then let's turn in."

Trent followed into his partner's room. Silently he unrolled the weathered blankets of Brophy's pack. Nestling between a frying pan and a wadded shirt was the moosehide bag. Spike untied the thong with which the top was drawn together. There, undisturbed, lay the dull yellow treasure for which three men had given nearly a year of their time, and for which one of them had already yielded his life.

With an inquiring hand Trent probed to the bottom of the bag. He felt the nuggets, the little lumps, the coarse grains. A few particles of dust gleamed on his fingers as he drew them out of the sack.

"All right," he said, and left Brophy alone.

Trent heard the bolt grate behind him. From his own room he brought blankets and pillows and made a bed for himself across the doorway. The hardness of the floor was nothing. He had slept on rocks. But he had the feeling of a grim presence closing in, as when he had once watched the circling eyes of a wolf pack draw nearer to his dying camp fire.

He stretched out, and then a thought came to him. He took the lacing from one of his shoepacs and tied it to the door knob. The other end he fastened to his wrist. If Jim Brophy got out of that room during the night without being discovered it would be by some supernatural means.

Spike, accustomed as he was to any

kind of a bed, found it hard to sleep, nevertheless. The timbers of the old building creaked; rats scampered in the attic above him. Now and then wood snapped somewhere, as it does in the intense cold of the north, with a report like a pistol shot.

Once he thought he heard the same faint shuffling sound which had come to his ears in a moment of wakefulness the night before He raised his head to listen and the floor groaned under him. The shuffling, if there had been such a sound, ceased. Then a deep and brooding silence infolded the hotel. Trent concentrated on the ticking of his own watch until at last he fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

Murder Again!

WHEN Trent awoke it was daylight and Brophy, in no very good humor at the discovery of the shoe lace, was stepping over him. Spike sat up, rubbing his eyes. The smell of breakfast came up from below.

Trent shaved with his door open, and once he heard a voice raised in anger in the living room, but he gave no thought to that until he went down and saw Brophy bolting his food with eyes that fairly blazed. At sight of Trent he sprang up from the table.

"If I thought you had a hand in what's happened I'd take it out of your hide!" he cried.

"What?" asked Spike, astonished. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

He stared around the room. Alma-Rose, white to the lips, was laying a place for him at the table. Simard sat in his chair with lifted eyebrows and an intent gaze upon Trent. Godette smoked impassively by the fire.

"Look at that!" choked Brophy, as he pointed toward the fireplace.

The four snowshoes on which they had worked through most of the previous day lay in a charred heap at the edge of the hearth. A faint, disagreeable smell of burned rawhide was in the room.

"I have waited for you to appear to make an investigation, Monsieur Trent," said Simard. "They must have fallen down during the night. Then one of the logs in the fireplace dropped apart, and the rest is easy to understand. I have seen embers as big as a man's fist roll out on the hearth to the edge of the bricks. The accident is most unfortunate, but the important thing is to find out who left them there."

"I don't remember what we did when we quit work," said Brophy.

"Anyhow, it will all have to be done over," shrugged Trent. "Another day here! The rims can be used, but the mesh is nearly all burned away."

"Alma-Rose," said Simard, "did you move the snowshoes of *messieurs?*"

"No," answered the girl.

"Or you, Georges?"

"No."

At that instant the outer door opened and Louis Tremblay came stamping into the hotel. The breath of fresh air that came with him relaxed, in a measure, the tension. He walked slowly to the fireplace, pulling off his cap and mittens, while his keen glance traveled from the burned snowshoes to Trent and Brophy. He nodded to the partners, and spoke to Simard.

"Not much in my traps to-day," he said. "It's been bad weather."

TRENT devoted himself to his breakfast, satisfied that Tremblay was lying indirectly. A trapper could always find plenty to do

at home if he wanted to. The old man had some reason for loafing at the Hôtel des Trois Chiens.

For Spike Trent that day was a never-ending monotony through which his fingers repeated the same motion with strips of rawhide until his arms ached and the work blurred to his eyes.

There was nothing to break that monotony. By no maneuvering could he get a chance to speak to Alma-Rose alone. She apparently never got beyond reach of the invisible tentacles of Omer Simard.

Was the cripple trying to protect her from Godette? From the two strangers who were both under suspicion of murder? Or was he guarding against some kind of an alliance between the girl and old Louis Tremblay?

It was certain that she would like to speak to Trent alone, for her eyes told him that to-day, and yesterday she had tried. But whenever Spike followed her upstairs the bell in Godette's room jangled for her to come down. It rang, in fact, if she were alone up there with any one.

Trent was glad when the time came to go to bed. He took his snowshoes under his arm, and Brophy did the same. To-night their work would not be destroyed. Together they went upstairs. Brophy brought the moosehide bag and a roll of bedding from his room.

"Here, Trent," he said, holding out the gold. "It's your turn to guard the treasure."

For the first time in many days there was a look of friendliness in his eyes, and Trent instantly responded.

"All right, old-timer!" he said, with a broad smile. "See you in the morning!"

Trent, still smiling, closed his door and shot the bolt. He heard Brophy make up his bed on the floor. His heart warmed and almost he regretted bolting the door. For an instant Jim had seemed like himself, and it was impossible to believe that he had had anything to do with the killing of Bob Murdock.

Spike sat down on the edge of his bed. He heard a long sigh as the watcher outside lay down and curled up in his blankets.

A day indoors had taken away Trent's appetite for sleep. He wondered if he could find out anything by going downstairs. Tremblay was in the house again to-night. If Brophy were not guilty then he was in danger out there on the floor. If one of the men in the house had killed Murdock he would hardly stop at one or two more killings in order to get the gold. Perhaps Trent himself had been in danger the night before when he slept in the corridor.

Spike considered. Brophy had begun to snore with a regularity which meant that he had composed himself for a good rest. Spike knew every variation of Slim Jim's snoring. But if he should awake it would not do for him to know that Trent had left his room. He might become suspicious again.

First Trent made sure that the gold was safe. He rolled it up in his pack. Then he cut a small piece of wood from the washstand and wedged the bolt of the door. That bolt, he told himself, was not going to be pushed back from the outside. If Brophy tried the door he would find it impassable.

Still Spike was not satisfied. He dragged the heavy wooden bed across the floor with as little noise as possible and set the head board squarely against the door. In the event that the bolt

were wriggled loose the bed would stop any one who tried to enter.

TRENT then went to the window. It was easy enough to open the casement sash inside, but the storm window outside presented a problem. He found, however, that it was nailed to the frame, and managed to pry it loose with the hand ax which he carried strapped to his pack.

He drew the window in through the opening and looked out into the still, cold night. The stars were bright now and there was light enough for him to see what he was doing. There was a window underneath with a projecting cornice. He felt confident of being able to get back into his room by that route, so he swung down by his hands and dropped into a snow drift.

Trent was now at the front of the house with the window of Simard's room on one side of him and the door on the other. The glass was so heavily frosted that he could hardly have seen inside if the interior had been brilliantly lighted. He tried the door gently and found it barred, as he had expected.

It was at the rear of the house that he had hoped to find entrance through a window, and he still carried the hand ax to pry up the frozen sash. But he discovered that he could reach the wooden bar of the ill-fitting kitchen door with the blade of his ax.

The bar worked back without great difficulty and Trent stepped into the silent darkness of the house. He felt his way slowly across the room, hands extended. Suddenly, when he thought he had gone about halfway to the door of the main room, a vague sound came through the vast stillness of the hotel. It was a sound much the same as that shuffling which Trent had heard before, but this time it was slightly more distinct. It was as though moccasined feet were being moved gently over rough boards.

Trent could not locate what he heard, and it died away as he listened. He moved on to the wall ahead of him, found the door of the main room, and softly pushed it open. Here there was a play of firelight over walls and rude furniture. Spike looked and listened and then crossed with infinite care to the door of Omer Simard. From inside came steady, regular breathing. Then the bed creaked as a weight shifted upon it.

Spike listened at the foot of the stairs, but the mysterious sound that he had heard did not come again. He decided to go back and sit for a time in his room. If he heard anything he could either wake Brophy or come downstairs again by way of the window. In a few minutes he was back in his room, brushing himself clear of snow and warming chilled fingers.

After a moment Trent became conscious that the snoring of Brophy was no longer coming from beyond the door. He could not remember whether he had heard it when he returned to the room. It would start again. It always did.

But minutes passed and the snoring of Slim Jim Brophy did not come to the ears of his partner. Trent, warm and comfortable again, began to get uneasy. Perhaps he'd better look at Jim and make sure that he was all right.

Spike lifted the bed away from the door and stood frozen with astonishment. The piece of wood that he had used to wedge the bolt lay on the floor and the bolt was slipped back. Trent shivered. He felt as though he had broken through the ice of a river and

plunged into a cold which chilled him to the bone. Some one had tried to enter his room while he was downstairs, and but for the bed would have succeeded. He reached out and tore the door open.

At first he thought Jim Brophy was asleep, or feigning sleep, for the blankets were drawn up to his chin and his face was buried deep in the pillow.

But a touch, a quick stripping away of the blankets, showed that Brophy was in a sleep from which he would never awaken. The hilt of his own knife protruded from his throat.

CHAPTER VI

The Trapdoor

FOR an instant the shadowy corridor spun before the eyes of Spike Trent. His first feeling was a vast pity and a vast regret. He had suspected Jim, and just when they were feeling right toward each other again the murderer struck from his concealment and forever ended a friendship that had carried through months of hardship and suffering.

In that moment Trent hated the gold, and then he forgot it as a great rage took possession of him. He sprang over the dead man and raced down the corridor to bang at the doors of Tremblay and Godette.

"Get up!" he yelled. "Somebody's killed Brophy!"

He ran downstairs, half beside himself, and kicked against the door of Simard's room. Instantly there was a stir inside and Simard answered.

"Yes, *monsieur,* I hear you! Has there been more trouble?"

"My other partner's been killed!" shouted Spike. "Murdered while he slept in front of my door!"

"Ah, that is horrible!" exclaimed Simard, in an agitated voice. "I will pull the bell for Georges and he will take me out to the fire. Patience, *monsieur!* I'll soon be with you!"

Tremblay was already half way down the stairs, and on his heels came Godette while the bell was still ringing in his room. He went, without a word, to answer his employer's call, and a moment later the four men were gathered in front of the fire, all but Trent half dressed. But they were all fully awake now. Godette and Tremblay had seen what lay on the floor of the corridor as they came downstairs.

"How did you happen to find out about this?" asked Simard, from the big chair where Godette had placed him. He buttoned his shirt with fingers which trembled slightly.

"I opened the door to find out if Brophy was all right," replied Trent. "I didn't hear him snore."

"And you were dressed, listening for his snores?" asked Tremblay, with a pointed look at Spike's laced shoepacs.

They were dark with spots where snow had melted, and Trent knew that there was no use in trying to conceal the fact that he had been out of doors. He told exactly what had happened, concealing nothing. Before he had finished a sarcastic smile pulled at the battered lips of the old trapper. Trent looked up at a slight sound and saw that Alma-Rose, coming down the stairs, had heard him.

"THIS affair has gone beyond belief," said Simard. "To-night we barricade the doors, at least."

"The murderer does not come from outside!" exclaimed Tremblay. "Where is the gold now, Monsieur Trent?"

"In my pack," answered Spike.

"And who benefits by these murders?"

"I shall benefit, if I live! But it appears now that my chances of living are small unless I get away from the Hôtel des Trois Chiens before another night! Perhaps they are under any circumstances!"

"If you leave here and go south," said the trapper, "you will have practically no chance at all! In the province of Quebec they hang murderers!"

"Louis!" cried Simard. "You go a long way in accusing *monsieur* directly of this crime!"

Certainly Louis Tremblay was a man of courage, whatever else might be said of him. He faced squarely around so that he could look both at Trent and Simard, and spoke to the latter.

"Omer," he said, "there is no use in being mealy-mouthed! I thought at first it was the long, black fellow who killed the fat one, or perhaps Godette. Now I am sure that it is either Trent or Godette, and probably Trent. If you had a pair of legs under you I'd think it was you!"

"Anybody except yourself!" replied Simard.

"At least," volunteered Spike, "the murderer will get nothing for his trouble but a sack of gold! The map of the country where the mine lies is in my head, and nowhere else!"

"And you, of course, are the sole heir!" exclaimed Tremblay.

"Yes!"

"*Sacré bon Dieu!*" exploded the trapper. "The police will not have to work long to solve this mystery! But let me tell you, young man, keep away from Alma-Rose! I have seen the way you look at her!"

"He will keep away from her," said Simard. "And so will you, Louis! I shall see to it, unless Godette finishes you and saves me the trouble!"

"What are you going to do with her?" demanded Tremblay, and his bony fists knotted until the knuckles stood out white and strained.

"The affairs of my household," answered Simard, "are entirely my own affairs! Suppose I intend to marry her myself?"

The face of Louis Tremblay turned from brown to dark purple, and for a moment it seemed that he was about to attack Simard.

"You can't do that!" he cried. "You are her cousin!"

"So far removed that she is only a relative by courtesy," explained Simard. "But we are getting away from the matter in hand. If Monsieur Trent was able to enter this house last night without discovery, then another could do the same thing. Some one might have been abroad even in the storm. To-night I shall see that the doors are fastened so that they do not open at the first attempt on them!"

With a gesture of despair old Tremblay dropped to a bench. Muttering, he stuffed his pipe with tobacco and lighted it. Trent remembered that Brophy was lying up there on the floor of the corridor.

HE turned away from the fireplace to go upstairs and noticed that neither Godette nor Alma-Rose was in the room. At the moment he thought nothing of that. His mind was on his sad and gruesome errand, and he climbed with slow feet to lift his dead partner and carry him into his room.

Now Trent felt the loss as he had not when Murdock was killed. At that time his eyes had still been blinded by the gold. He realized in this hour that these men had been his friends, in spite

of surface quarrels and suspicions, and that not all the gold in the world could repay him for the loss of even one of them.

With Murdock and Brophy he had gone hungry, he had endured cold almost to the point of death; the three of them had saved each other's lives so often that such an event had become commonplace. And he had allowed himself to criticize Murdock for eating too much, Brophy for surliness! Now they were both dead and he had no friend left who had been proved a good man and true as had these two.

Trent laid Brophy gently on his bed and covered him with a blanket. There would be time enough to do more for the dead men if he found that he himself was going to survive this bivouac at the Hotel of the Three Dogs. That he did not yet know.

It was when he turned away from the bed that Spike noticed the absence of the snowshoes which Brophy had brought upstairs the evening before. They were certainly not there. In a sudden panic he ran into his own room. His snowshoes also had disappeared.

This seemed unbelievable, and Spike searched the room twice before he convinced himself. Then he dashed at his pack and found the moosehide bag intact, somewhat contrary to his expectation. But of course the murderer did not need to take that now! That could stay with Trent until it was his turn to meet the knife!

Suddenly Spike realized that something far more important than the snowshoes was missing. His rifle had left its corner. A wild dash into the other two rooms told him that all of the rifles were gone. He was helpless to leave that place, and he was nearly powerless to defend himself against attack. His knife would amount to little or nothing if the murderer chose to use a rifle.

Trent tried dizzily to remember when he had last seen his rifle, and could not. But certainly the snowshoes must have been there when he went out into the corridor and found Brophy. This meant that the rooms had probably been looted during the past half hour, while he was downstairs announcing the death of Brophy. Godette, he remembered, and Alma-Rose had vanished while he was talking to the others. He had not seen either of them go up the stairway, and he would have noticed Godette, he felt sure. Alma-Rose might have flitted back to her room without attracting his attention, but hardly the big Georges. Hence there must be some way of reaching the upper floor without ascending the main stairway.

Spike went out into the corridor. There were windows in the rear hall of the house, but from them he could see nothing. It was still long before dawn. He went to Godette's door and knocked lightly. There was no answer. He slowly entered a room where a single candle burned.

The chamber, a square apartment, evidently the size of the kitchen below, was empty of human tenant. A battered bed and a still more battered trunk were the only furnishings. Trent was about to back out when his glance caught the dark circle of an iron ring against the floor boards. He had found a trapdoor.

CHAPTER VII

Outbluffed

SPIKE set his fingers into the ring and lifted carefully. As soon as he could get his hands under the edge of the door he knelt and found himself

looking down into the kitchen, where a half dozen bracketed candles revealed Alma-Rose in the act of taking bacon from a frying pan.

Standing on the table which was underneath the trap a man could easily push open the trap and swing himself up into the room above. It was nothing at all to drop from the bedroom to the table, and then to the floor of the kitchen. Georges Godette had a swift and easy means of getting in and out of his room without using the stairway at all.

Trent opened the trapdoor wide and let it gently down against the floor. Then he dropped with a light thud to the table. His feet were on the floor and his hand was raised for silence when Alma-Rose turned and saw him. The plate in her hand tipped. The bacon slid to the floor.

"Don't be afraid!" whispered Spike. "Where's Godette?"

She nodded over her shoulder toward the rear door, and sat down weakly in a convenient chair. Trent opened the door and stepped out into the gripping cold which preceded the day. The doorway of one of the barns was a square of faint yellow light and toward that Spike went.

His nose told him that he was entering a stable where there were horses. A lantern hung on a peg drove back the shadows, and at a movement in the semidarkness Trent became motionless. He saw Godette completely absorbed in the work of cleaning one of the stables.

The munching of the horses and their slight restive movements concealed any sound that Spike made as he crept forward. He was able to get within arm's length of Godette undiscovered, and when the big Georges realized that he was not alone a knife point was pricking his ribs and a low voice was speaking into his ear:

"Put up your hands and turn around!"

A dung fork slipped out of the enormous hands and slowly they reached toward the dusty beams overhead. Godette turned and Trent let the knife run along his jacket until it was where a movement of his forearm would send it six inches deep into the stomach.

"Where are the snowshoes and rifles that you stole?"

"I don't know anything," answered Godette, after a moment of hesitation. He spoke thickly and the expressionless eyes were wide with fear now.

"Do you want to die?" asked Trent, as viciously as he could manage to speak.

"Let me go, *monsieur!*" pleaded Godette. "I have done nothing!"

"Nothing!" cried Trent. "Do you call murder nothing?"

GEORGES GODETTE remained stubbornly silent, and it became apparent that he no more intended to answer than Spike intended to stab him in cold blood. Trent was bluffed, and there was nothing to do but give it up. He backed toward the door, cursing the big servant earnestly in English.

"I hope you'll start something with me when the showdown comes!" Spike said as he stepped out of the stable. "I'd like a chance to get even for this!"

Trent returned to the house, passed through the now empty kitchen, and lifted himself up into Godette's room. He closed the trapdoor and decided to go downstairs. Evidently the household had decided to begin the day now, and the decision was welcome to him. He felt that he could sleep no more under that roof.

Voices were crackling like rifle fire in the room below, and Trent found Tremblay and Simard glaring at each other from opposite sides of the fireplace.

"So you think I did it?" Tremblay was saying with suppressed fury. "Why not Godette?"

"I said I would as soon suspect you as Georges or young Trent," replied Simard. "You are a bad lot, Louis! I remember some things you have done in the bush! Besides, there is something going on between you and Alma-Rose. You ought to be thankful that I don't let Godette kill you! He would do it if he were not under my control!"

"And if you were not a cripple!" cried Tremblay, taking a forward step.

"What then?" asked Simard, in a strangely low voice.

The air grew fairly poisonous as the two men stared at each other, each with his hand on his knife. Simard somehow gave the impression of being even more formidable than Tremblay, regardless of the fact that he had no legs.

Trent's voice broke the tension.

"*Messieurs,*" he said, "some one has stolen the rifles and snowshoes of myself and my dead comrades!"

Tremblay turned sharply, but his hand did not leave his knife hilt. Simard relaxed and shifted his glance. Doubt and then amazement spread over his face.

"When?" he asked, hoarsely.

"The snowshoes disappeared when I came downstairs after I had found Brophy," answered Trent. "I don't know when the rifles were taken."

"Then there are only two persons in this house who can be guilty!" announced Simard, in a voice of thunder. "Alma-Rose, come here!"

The girl came hurrying out of Simard's bedroom and stood trembling before the proprietor of the Hôtel des Trois Chiens. A glance of inquiry flickered to Trent, and then her gaze was held by the eyes of the cripple.

"Was it you who robbed the rooms of the strangers?"

"Oh, no!" she cried desperately. "I want nothing to do with this terrible affair! All I want is to get away . . ."

HER words died and she became chalk white, as though her lips had betrayed her.

"So that is it?" cried Simard. "You want to leave me? Louis, I think I see traces of your work here! Monsieur Trent, is the gold still safe in your possession?"

"It was when I came downstairs," answered Spike.

Simard seemed utterly puzzled. For the first time he was at a loss for the word to say, the thing to do.

"Alma-Rose," he said at last. "Call in Godette!"

In less than a minute Georges Godette came uneasily into the room. His low forehead was wrinkled, and he, like the girl, flung a look of inquiry at Trent.

"Georges," said Simard, "did you take the rifles and the snowshoes of Monsieur Trent and his companions?"

The silence in the big room became fine drawn. A log broke in the fireplace, and fell apart. Godette shifted from one foot to the other and his chest heaved. He gazed anywhere but at the three men who were watching him. At last a word rumbled up from the depths of his being.

"Yes!"

Omer Simard was shaken. His huge body moved quickly in the chair and his hands closed over its arms.

"*Malédiction!*" breathed Tremblay.

"Did I tell you to take them?" asked Simard.

"No, *monsieur!*"

"Then why did you do it?"

"I'll tell you why!" burst out Tremblay. "He took the weapons to get them out of reach of a dangerous man! I do not care for the gold, me! But there is more treasure here than that. Alma-Rose is here! It is easy to read in Trent's face that he desires her."

"You," said Spike Trent, "are a very bold man, and a very clever one!"

"It appears that I do not know what is going on in my own house!" said Simard furiously. "My faithful Georges and my friend Tremblay arrange a truce and turn upon Monsieur Trent! Is that it? For what? A bag of gold or Alma-Rose? Or both?"

"I persuaded Godette to pull Trent's fangs," admitted Tremblay.

"If your intentions are as innocent as you say," said Spike, turning upon the old man, "you should give me the snowshoes and let me go! You ought to be glad to get rid of such a dangerous character."

"And perhaps have you force Alma-Rose to go with you when I am not here to protect her?" cried Tremblay. "I care nothing about your dead men or your gold! It is the girl that I am thinking of!"

"Bah!" Trent laughed scornfully. "That is one of the thinnest stories that I ever heard! If you people would all work together you'd soon have me. But each one of you wants all the spoil! Why don't you agree to divide?"

"I am glad," remarked Simard, ignoring Spike, "that I have found out what is in your mind, Louis! When the time comes I shall know how to deal with you!"

Spike Trent suddenly turned his back on all of them and brought the remaining snowshoes from their corner. When he came back to the fireplace Godette and Tremblay were on their way out of the room. Alma-Rose had already gone.

"I shall repair these to-day," said Trent, "and make another attempt to save my life. I wonder if it would do any good if I offered you people the bag of gold?"

The thick fingers of Simard drummed on his chair arm.

"*Monsieur* jests, of course," he said. "Perhaps he suspects me?"

"I would if you had any way of moving," retorted Trent. "And for all I know you may have a pair of crutches or wooden legs in your bedroom!"

"Go and look, Monsieur Trent! I give you full permission!"

"And I accept it!" exclaimed Trent, suddenly resolved to make the search whether or not the invitation was in earnest.

He crossed to the room where Simard slept and entered, with the door swinging wide behind him. Somewhat to his surprise the room was well furnished, for the bush. There was a big bed, a chest of drawers, a couple of chairs, and even a shelf with some books. A little table at the bedside held a pitcher and such small articles as a legless man might want within reach. Above the table dangled the bell cord of which Simard had spoken.

Careless of how far his permission extended, Spike began a thorough search of the room. He prodded the bed, and looked under it. He opened every drawer in the chest and made sure that nothing was concealed behind it. When he had finished he was absolutely sure that nowhere in that

room was there a device by means of which Omer Simard could take a step.

"Is *monsieur* satisfied?" asked Simard, after he had returned to the fireplace.

"I am satisfied that you have no means of moving about," answered Trent, and then he yielded to an impulse. "Frankly, Simard, who do you think killed Murdock and Brophy?"

Simard stared into the fire.

"Alma-Rose hasn't the heart," he said, "and I haven't the legs. So it must be you, or Tremblay, or Godette!"

"At least that is a very good answer," remarked Spike, and he settled down to his work of weaving rawhide while he waited for breakfast.

CHAPTER VIII

The Legless Killer

EVEN the iron nerves of Spike Trent grew frayed that day. He did not believe that he would be allowed to leave the Hôtel des Trois Chiens without a battle for his life, not if the murderer knew when he was going. For that reason Trent planned as he worked, always with his back to the solid protection of wall or stone chimney. He trusted none of them now, except Alma-Rose. He regarded her as the victim of something or somebody.

Of only one thing did he feel reasonably certain. All three of the men were not in it together. The bitterness between Simard and Tremblay was too great to allow coöperation even in crime. Therefore the murders had been committed either by one of the men working alone or by Godette in combination with the hotel proprietor or the trapper. The frequent presence of Louis Tremblay at the hotel might be accounted for either by interest in Alma-Rose or the bag of gold.

Spike Trent even took precautions in eating. He waited until the others were seated at the table, and turned on his bench if any one but Alma-Rose passed behind him. Of course the other men had firearms, and they could shoot him down if they wanted to. But he did not believe that either Simard or Tremblay would betray himself in the presence of the other.

The day went on slowly, and when darkness came Trent's work on the snowshoes was far enough advanced so that he felt sure of finishing it in a couple of hours upstairs. He stopped as usual, however, at the lighting of the candles and put up his knife. Already he had managed to slip some strips of rawhide into his pocket. The splicing of the frames was completed. His intention was to finish the work by the light of the candle in his room and get quietly out of the house before the murderer walked again.

"Ah, well!" he said, with a shrug, as he sat down at the supper table. "I fear I must inflict myself upon you for another night, Monsieur Simard."

"I trust you will rest well," said Simard. "The doors will be fastened to-night!"

"He has no reason to worry!" growled Tremblay. "The ones who should have worried are dead!"

"You are not polite, Louis," remarked the proprietor. "Sometimes I wonder whether you are a Frenchman!"

Tremblay glared and Spike laughed dryly.

"We have now complimented each other," he said. "All except Godette!"

Georges Godette raised his eyes

from a well-filled plate and for an instant something like a gleam of humor came into them. He sopped a great hunk of johnnycake in pork grease.

"I don't talk," he said. "I eat!"

Immediately after supper Trent lighted his pipe in a leisurely fashion and went upstairs as though he were resigned to the prospect of another night in the hotel. But once in his room he sprang into a fever of activity. In less time than he had expected the snowshoes were ready for marching. He rolled his pack, but not yet did he put his arms through the shoulder straps. He might have to fight or flee for his life before he got clear of the hotel, and if that came to pass he did not want to be cumbered. So with the pack under one arm and the snowshoes under the other, he slid back the bolt carefully and stepped into the corridor. It was deserted, and there was no sound in the house.

TRENT'S shoepacs made little more sound than falling leaves. He felt his way along the darkness of the corridor until he came to the head of the stairway. Light from the still burning fire dispelled the shadows that far into the upper regions of the hotel. He went down with extreme caution, anxious lest the old stairway creak under his feet.

He reached the bottom of the stairs. He had heard no sound in the house except that once a timber overhead snapped with the pressure of the frost. Spike debated for an instant whether to go out of the front door, risking some slight noise when he lifted the bar, or to leave through the kitchen. If he could get through the darkness there without making a noise it would be far the better way for him to go. Any slight sound which he might make when he opened the kitchen door would hardly carry aloft to Godette.

But the front door was near the room of Omer Simard, and Simard had said he was a light sleeper. Moreover, the idea that he might leave a note in the kitchen for Alma-Rose had come into the mind of Spike. He had pencil and paper in his pocket, and the words that he could write while one match burned would be enough if they reached her. He was coming back, and he wanted her to know it. He decided in favor of the kitchen.

Trent was halfway between the stairway and the kitchen door when the faint scrape of wood on wood caused his head to turn toward the room of Omer Simard. The doorway was outlined in the firelight, and it seemed to Spike that the door was opening inward very slowly. He stared, fascinated. His hair from neck to crown prickled at that uncanny, silent, opening of the door of a man who had no legs.

The door actually was open. It swung inward until there was only a black void where it had been. While Trent stood motionless, held by a kind of horror, into that void came the strangest apparition he had ever seen. At first, although his eyes made a faithful report to him, his mind refused to believe what he saw. For a heavy bodied man was walking head downward on thick and powerful arms, with the stumps that had once been legs balanced neatly in the air!

TRENT recovered in time to sink back under the stairway, concealed by the darkness there, but completely cut off from the kitchen or the front door. With physical movement the first shock of what he saw passed and he no longer felt any hor-

ror of the gruesome cripple. Somehow Simard had managed to kill two men when they were sunk deep in sleep, but he could not hope to be a match for a man with two good legs in under him.

Simard crossed the floor rapidly, and with little more effort than a man makes walking upon a pair of feet. He went first to the fireplace. There he curled his powerful fingers over the edges of one of the bricks in the hearth, gave a curious little hop on one hand and lifted the brick.

Quick as a flash of light he slipped a knife blade between his teeth and started for the stairway. Even in that moment Trent admired the cleverness of the man. He had been to such great pains to demonstrate to all observers his utter helplessness that he had even cached his extra knife in the hearth.

There was one drawback which Simard had not taken the pains to master. His hands, hard as the feet of a runner, made a slight shuffling sound against the boards of the floor. It was this sound that Trent had heard during his brief moment of wakefulness the night Murdock was killed, and again that night when he slept outside the door of Jim Brophy. In all probability Simard had come up to murder Spike, and had given it up temporarily when he found his victim awake.

Simard mounted the stairs one step at a time, but he climbed with agility and with no great effort. Spike stepped out from his hiding place and went to the foot of the stairs. When Simard was halfway up, Trent spoke.

"Simard," he said, "you won't find me asleep as you did the others."

Omer Simard made the quickest movement that Spike had ever seen. Before the sentence was finished his body was curving through the air. He flopped over like an acrobat and landed in a sitting position three steps below the one where he had been. He struck with a force that shook the house, facing Trent, and his hand was at his mouth the instant his body came to rest. The knife that he had held in his teeth flashed through the air.

Spike Trent had only begun to dodge when it reached him. A thin ribbon of pain shot along his arm and he realized that he was pinned to the wall by his own flesh; while the monstrous cripple of the Hotel of the Three Dogs came sliding down toward him with another knife in his grasp. Spike locked his teeth and flung himself away from the wall.

There was an instant when the stairway and the room went dark before his eyes. Then he found himself staggering across the room, and falling, with the loglike arms of Simard wrapped around one of his legs. The cripple still had his second knife. As Trent went down he managed to grasp with both hands the wrist of Simard's knife arm. Locked together the two men rolled, bumped away from the stout legs of the table, and spun so close to the fire that the heat pricked their faces.

AS he fought for the knife Trent saw that the mask had at last fallen from the face of Omer Simard. It was a beast of prey who looked back at him out of the ferocious eyes so close to his own: it was a beast who tried with a snarl to set big yellow teeth into his hand. The cripple was as difficult to handle as a giant toad, but at last Trent got him on his back and with a knee in his stomach forced the knife hand down to the bricks of the hearth. He snatched away the blade and sprang up.

For a moment he stood panting and leaning upon the table while blood ran down his wounded arm and slowly dripped from his finger tips to the floor. Simard sat up, and it was from the movement of his eyes that Trent first learned of the presence of others in the room. There was Godette standing just inside the kitchen door, and Alma-Rose at the foot of the stairs wrapped in a long blue robe, and old Louis Tremblay leaning across the table and staring down at Simard.

Suddenly Simard made a great effort to reshape his face to that expression of indifference which it habitually wore. He raised a tragic arm and pointed to Trent.

"He was trying to escape, Louis!" he cried. "See that he doesn't get away!"

Slowly the head of the old trapper wagged from side to side.

"I might believe you, Omer," he said, "if it were not for a number of things. He's wounded and you aren't. His knife is still in its sheath. I saw him take one away from you just now and let you up when he would have killed you if he had been the murderer I thought. And, anyhow, how does it happen that a helpless cripple is out here thirty feet away from his bed?"

Then Omer Simard lost all control of himself.

"Blundering fool!" he cried. "If you and Godette had not taken the rifles and snowshoes he'd have been content to stay in his room another night and I'd have had him. I kept him busy making repairs!"

The hand of Simard darted up to the back of his neck. Trent caught a gleam of steel in the air and saw the ear of Louis Tremblay turn red as the old man reeled away from the table. With the cunning of an experienced knife fighter Simard had carried a reserve weapon hung over a shoulder underneath his shirt. It was his final gesture. The next instant Godette fell on him and crushed him to the hearth.

OMER SIMARD lay tied down in his bed, kept from expressing his opinion of Louis Tremblay by the threat of a mouthful of sock if he did not stop cursing.

"And so," said Tremblay, "you see, Monsieur Trent, that although I believed you guilty of the murders I was concerned only with getting Alma-Rose away from this place.

"And I was going!" shuddered the girl. "Ah, *bon Dieu!* I felt all the evil that was in that man, and I was afraid!"

"And Godette, it appears," said Trent, laughing, "wanted to protect you from Tremblay as well as from Simard!"

The low forehead of Godette wrinkled.

"Yes!" he said. "That is why I obeyed Monsieur Simard. I did not want him to turn me away."

"Simard was a fool!" snorted Tremblay. "A man of my age paying attention to a chit of a girl! *Sacré maudit!* And how was I to know until to-day that I could trust Georges?"

"Where is it you are going from here, *mademoiselle?*" asked Spike, whose concern now was wholly for the future.

"To the house of my sister," spoke up Tremblay.

"She lives in Château Richer," added the girl.

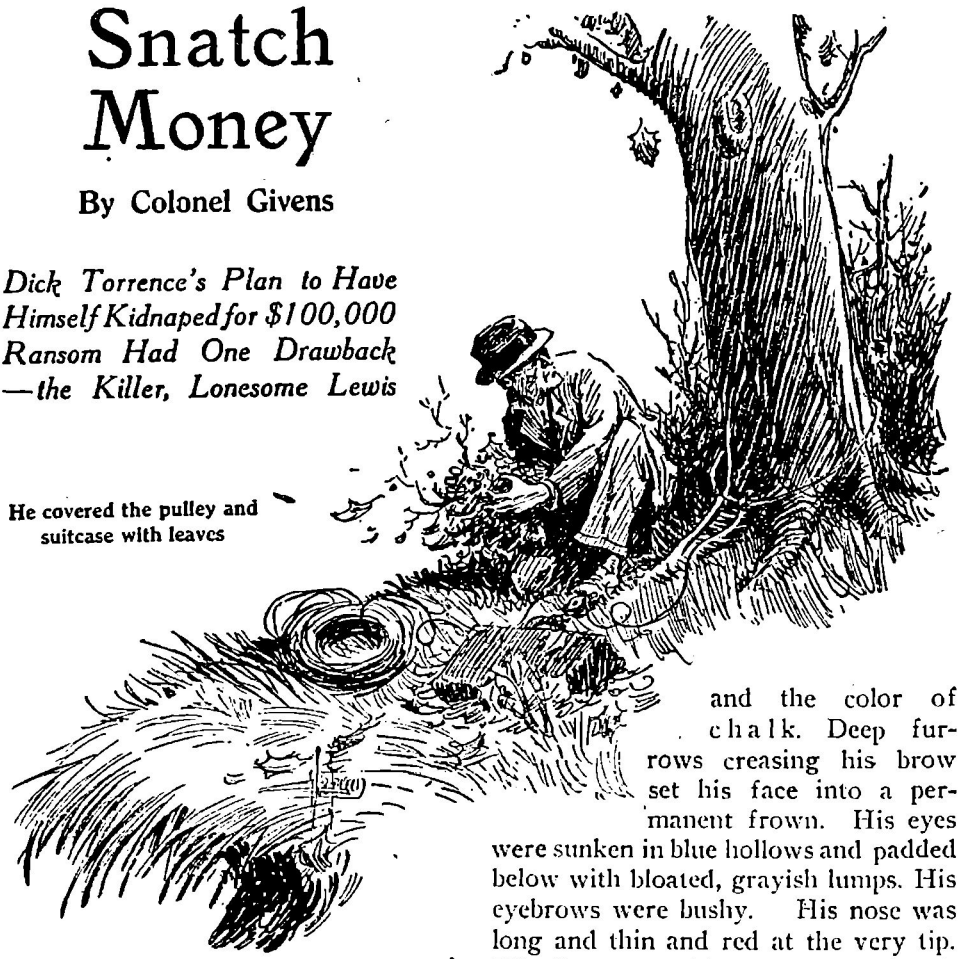
"Ah!" exclaimed Spike. "I shall have business there as soon as I have taken my gold to Quebec!"

Alma-Rose Lamarre smiled at him out of her dark blue eyes.

Snatch Money

By Colonel Givens

Dick Torrence's Plan to Have Himself Kidnaped for $100,000 Ransom Had One Drawback —the Killer, Lonesome Lewis



He covered the pulley and suitcase with leaves

OLD man Torrence sat deep in his desk chair and glared with vacant eyes at the ceiling. A dour little man, old man Torrence, soured with the sourness of dyspepsia, coupled with a naturally surly disposition given him at birth. This surly disposition had been carefully cultivated, it would seem, so that now, at the age of sixty, he was the perfect composite portrait of Sourness, Dourness, Bitterness and Outraged Virtue.

He was a small man, his shriveled body only half filling his desk chair. His face was a network of wrinkles, and the color of chalk. Deep furrows creasing his brow set his face into a permanent frown. His eyes were sunken in blue hollows and padded below with bloated, grayish lumps. His eyebrows were bushy. His nose was long and thin and red at the very tip. His lips were thin and drooped sullenly.

He made no pretty picture as he sat there glaring at the ceiling, motionless, rigid, his eyes fixed, long bony fingers like the talons of some hideous bird grasping the arms of his chair. The skeleton of him seemed to be trying to break through that thin parchment of skin. And yet his physician had told him that he stood a good chance of living twenty more years, perhaps thirty.

Nature is deceptive. The picture of death itself, old man Torrence was very much alive; evil in appearance, he was a righteous, God-fearing man.

Perhaps he was too righteous. Perhaps had he taken a fling at life before the years crept upon him those cold eyes would have softened, the thin, drooping lips might have smiled. But he had never taken that fling, and a graceful old age was not for him. And now, glaring with fixed eyes at the ceiling, the Honorable Charles P. Torrence, the finest corporation lawyer in the Middle West, was carefully planning a way by which he could force his son, Richard, to pattern *his* life after his own.

There was nothing vicious about this planning. Like most ultra-virtuous men, the elder Torrence was certain he was the model father, the model husband, the model citizen. He wanted Dick Torrence to grow up like his father. He loved the boy. His love for his son was the only emotion he enjoyed.

Suddenly he relaxed. He bent over the shiny mahogany desk and read again the letter he had read a hundred times before. It was from the caretaker of his country home, forty miles from the city. The letter was written with a blunt pencil in a scrawly, barely legible hand.

The letter read:

DERE SIR:

I aint want be takin for no tatil tail but youse payen me en you given strik orders to tell you bout mister Dick when he ever come out hear sometimes. Well sir mister Dick he come las nite en they heve littel partie. They wuz mister Dick en mister littel Willie Tailer en then the fore taxie drivers en then me. That mek sevun men in partie but I diden go in en dance with that yellow hair girl by miseff. Mister Dick en Mister littel Willie come drag me outen bed sayen the yellow hair want dance with me en now my wife soren hell at me. They wuz 20 uther girls besides blon en all had good times together. Them girls wuz korus girls because they dance nice speeelly blon girl and some took offen plenty clothes.

En you no that Xmus tree witch I mean to take down las weak but diden. Well they hang all emtuy bottels on that tree. Its plentey full uv bottels now. Yours trueley en I hope you didn't think me no tatil tail en I also hope you also beleeve what I say about me bein drug in to dance with that blon show girl en don blame the taxie drivers because they wuz drug in like me but they seem have hell of a time while my wife soren hell at me.

Yours Trueley

CLIFF EDMOND

THE letter just about told the tale. Cliff could add little to it when old Torrence, his chalklike face now turned green with rage, telephoned the caretaker. There were details, of course. It must have been a party to be remembered. Cliff informed the irate corporation lawyer over the telephone that "Mr. Little Willie" Taylor had arrived first in his own car. With him had been five girls. Then, racing like mad, had come young Dick Torrence. He was alone, but right on his heels were four taxi drivers, their cabs loaded with feminine pulchritude. Twenty-one chorines in all. Seven men in the party—including the tale-bearing caretaker. Three to one in favor of the women.

They had wakened him, of course, arriving, but he had gone back to bed in his cottage after he had ascertained that young Mr. Dick was heading the party.

Yes, sir! There had been some wild goings on, he told old man Torrence. When they decided to play Christmas, somebody—he thought it was Mr. Dick, but it might have been Little Mr. Willie—had snipped off the platinum blonde curls of one of the girls to make Little Mr. Willie a beard. The girl had gone into hysterics, of course,

but by that time he and the four taxi drivers had been drafted into service to aid the male quota of the party, so it was very little trouble to quiet her down.

Little Mr. Willie had suggested that they play Hospital. So they tied the weeping girl with the shorn locks in bed, using a large window curtain—the one the mistress had brought from Armenia—as a sort of strait-jacket. She'd kicked the curtain to pieces, of course, but they had quieted her down by giving her a spoonful of liquor every twenty seconds. And in an hour she was up, roaring drunk, and as happy as the rest of them, hair or no hair.

All this Cliff told old man Torrence over the phone while the old man groaned aloud. He could picture the scene—half nude chorus girls dancing on tables, kicking at the chandeliers; a girl in hysterics kicking great holes in his wife's priceless curtains; his son—his own Dick—and that dammable Willie Taylor prancing about drunkenly, stupidly, inviting taxi drivers and the caretaker to dance in *his* country home. The shame of it! Old man Torrence shivered with rage.

"They all hung their stockings on the Christmas tree," the virtuous Mr. Edmond told a dead telephone, because the old man had hung up. "And Mr. Dick and Little Mr. Willie put a quart of champagne and a fifty-dollar bill in each stocking. I got one and so did the taxi drivers."

For a full five minutes the old man slumped over his desk, his gray head buried in his arms. Then he straightened up, his thin lips tight. He wiped his eyes with his handkerchief. Then he rang for his secretary, a trim little thing. She looked worried. She liked young Dick Torrence.

"Has my son arrived?" the old man snapped.

"Yes, sir—he's waiting outside."

"Tell him to come in. And come with him. I want you to take a letter."

II

RICHARD TORRENCE was a tall, well built youngster of twenty-two. He had blond hair that waved slightly, and blue, very happy eyes. These eyes twinkled all the time and a smile was just under the surface, always. He was good looking, but not handsome. He liked girls, but he wasn't girl crazy, except in one particular instance. He *was* crazy about Doris Sumner, only daughter of Miles Sumner, who made his millions—and they were many—selling mountain cliffs and the tops of mountains in 200-foot lots to thousands and thousands of city dwellers. That is, he was a promoter of real estate; that is, a promoter of promoters of real estate. Old Miles Sumner liked young Dick Torrence, but wouldn't have had that young man know it for the world.

Dick didn't enter his father's private office breezily as he usually did. He came in with solemn face and an attempt to look virtuous.

"Good morning, dad," he said.

"Morning, son."

The grim-faced old man's voice was strangely soft and tender. He looked Dick over for a moment. Deep in his heart he was admiring the boy's build, his masculine good looks, the way he wore his clothes, his manner; but never once did that stern, dour face betray his inner emotions.

"Sit down, Dick," he invited. He turned to Miss Knight, the secretary. "Take a letter, please."

His voice became a monotonous drone as he dictated:

"Miles Sumner, Esq., Equitable Building. Dear Miles: I wish to call your attention to a small matter which you, no doubt, have long forgotten, to wit: you are co-trustee with me in handling the trust fund left my son, Dick, by his grandmother on his mother's side. The fund was invested in bonds of such solid worth that there has been no occasion to bother you with any of the small details of the fund. Furthermore, during the ten years past the bonds have increased in value until they are now yielding around $25,000 a year. This is too much money for a young man to have, especially if the young man be a spendthrift. Too much money leads to bad habits, and bad habits lead to dissipation and dissipation leads to disgrace and an early grave. I'm sure you see my point.

"I now refer you to clause seventeen in the will of Dick's grandmother and to codicil number two of the will. Clause seventeen leaves the fund to Dick. The codicil appoints us trustees of the fund and gives us power to reduce Dick's income as we see fit and to reinvest the balance. I now propose that we do just that—"

Dick jumped to his feet.

"But, dad—what's this all about?" His face had grown white.

"Sit down!" the old man commanded.

Dick sat down, his face deathly pale.

"I propose that we cut Dick's income to $5,000 a year—"

Dick was on his feet again. He approached the desk.

"Why this is a damned outrage," he shouted, all control gone. "Nobody but a sour old man with a grudge against the world would ever think of such a thing."

"Strike out those figures, Miss Knight," the monotonous voice of old man Torrence calmly instructed. "Make it $3,000 instead of $5,000. Now go ahead. I am sending you the necessary papers, already signed by me, for your signature. Your old friend, *et cetera.*"

Dick had gained control over himself by this time. His face was pale, but he was smiling faintly when he approached his father and patted him on the shoulder.

"Maybe you know best, dad." There was irony in his voice. "Maybe you do. But sometime just take a look at yourself in the mirror. You never laughed in all your life. If you represent virtue, then God help me to die a sinner. Sometime I'll get even for this."

He stalked out of the room.

"You want this letter mailed immediately, I suppose?" Miss Knight asked. Her voice was cold. "Where shall I find the papers you refer to?"

Old man Torrence was again slumped in his chair, glaring with vacant eyes at the ceiling. For a full minute he said nothing while Miss Knight waited, tight-lipped.

"There are no papers, child," the old man said softly, and for an instant a fleeting smile flashed across his sour face. "There are no papers. You needn't type that letter. Throw your notes in the waste basket."

He straightened up and glared at her, his voice became gruff. "And keep your mouth shut, you hear?" he snapped. "Now get the hell out of here. Between us we may scare some sense into Dick."

At that moment, trim little Miss Knight wanted awfully to rumple the old man's white hair and tell him he was sweet.

"You are very wise, sir." Then she

smiled and added, "And sometimes you're very nice."

WHEN Dick Torrence reached the street he heard newsboys shouting an extra. He bought a paper and hailed a taxi. He was going straight to Doris with his troubles after he had changed clothes at his down town department. As he rode along, the screamer of the extra caught his eye. It read:

MURPHY KIDNAPERS CAUGHT RED-HANDED

The story detailed how one of the kidnaping gang had kept a prearranged date with the wife of the big bookmaker, Titbit Murphy. At the secluded spot where he met the bookmaker's wife, the kidnaper had received a satchel containing the ransom money—$100,000. Detectives, dozens of them, scattered about the rendezvous, had managed to tail him to the gang's headquarters. Nine kidnapers had been caught red-handed. When the detectives crashed through the door with drawn guns the mobsmen were seated around a table dividing the spoils. The bookmaker was found upstairs, tied to a bedpost.

"The same old story — the fools," Dick told himself. "It's easy to kidnap a person. But the kidnapers haven't brains enough to get the money without being caught."

He and Little Willie Taylor, his bosom pal, had talked quite a lot about kidnaping and kidnapers right after the little Tracey boy was picked up while at play on the sidewalk in front of his home. Nobody saw the kidnapers; the boy was hustled to a mountain cabin fifty miles away. The Traceys were willing to pay the $50,000 demanded. But the dumb kidnapers couldn't figure out any way to get the money without coming in contact with some person, or exposing themselves in some way. They finally decided to have the suitcase filled with money thrown off a fast-moving train at a given point. Two men were nabbed before they got half a mile away.

Little Willie Taylor had handled that story for the *Herald*. Little Willie's father owned the newspaper, and Little Willie was supposed to be "working his way up." But Little Willie was a trifle wild. Not wild enough to be called vicious, but wild aplenty. He it was who led Dick Torrence into many a scrape. He it was who—well, anyway, had Dick been that sort he could have laid the blame for the chorine party at the country home of old man Torrence squarely on the shoulders of Little Willie.

Dick laughed. Little Willie and he had had some great times together. The little reporter had shown him something of life. There was the time . . .

Suddenly there appeared before Dick's eyes the picture of a sharp-faced man with cold, calculating eyes. A poker-faced man with lips that never smiled and scarcely ever uttered a word. It was the picture of Lonesome Lewis, introduced to him by Little Willie one night in a down town speak as "the shrewdest crook in the country—the shrewdest because he always, always plays a lone hand."

While he was bathing and dressing, the picture of that lean-faced man kept popping up before him. He felt vaguely uneasy. An unpleasant idea was forming in his mind. He tried to shake it off, but couldn't; and finally the idea took full form.

Of course he couldn't go through with this idea, he told himself. But it

would be a good way to get even with his father.

Miles Sumner was lounging on the porch when Dick arrived at the Sumner town home.

"Just talking to your daddy," announced old Miles gruffly. "We've decided you're a damn fool, so we're going to cut your salary. And I don't think my daughter wants much to do with a pauper."

Inwardly old Miles was chuckling. Dick looked aghast. At that moment Doris Sumner appeared in the doorway. A beautiful girl with wavy brown hair and a smooth olive skin to match her big, sloe eyes. When she smiled there was a dimple in her right cheek. She wasn't smiling now. Her face was pale, her eyes cool.

"Please, Dick—please," she said as he advanced toward her. "Considering everything, don't you think you'd better not come in?"

She turned and walked rapidly away. Dick stood stock still for a moment; then he, too, turned savagely and walked toward his car.

"Told you," old Miles's voice followed him. "Told you no daughter of mine would have anything to do with a pauper." He smiled when Dick was gone. It would do the boy good to have a real scare thrown into him.

III

IN a southside speak Dick Torrence found Lonesome Lewis. He seated himself at the same table.

"What 'll you have?" he asked.

"Beer," answered the lean-faced, cold-eyed man.

They drank in silence.

"You remember me?" asked Dick finally.

"Yes."

"You want to make a lot of money—quick and easy?"

"Maybe."

"You know my father is rich?"

"Yes."

"I want to be kidnaped and held for $100,000 ransom."

Lonesome Lewis gazed at Dick in stony silence for a moment. His face betrayed no emotion, his cold eyes never flickered.

"You're a fool," he said finally.

"If I could show you a way that it could be done without the slightest danger, with not one chance in a million of being caught, would you consider kidnaping me—for $25,000?"

"I'm no snatch bug," said Lonesome. "But go ahead—you're doing the talking."

For a full hour Dick talked, while Lonesome Lewis sat across the table and stared at him with expressionless eyes. At the end of the hour the lone wolf rose and yawned, the first time that evening he had moved his facial muscles.

"Tired," he said, "going to bed. See me in a day or two."

Dick was disappointed that no agreement had been reached, but he was hopeful. Lonesome Lewis hadn't rejected the idea. Wouldn't it be a great joke on his dad if he could put it over? By his grandmother's will the trust fund was to be turned over to him when he was twenty-five. He had three years to go. If he and Lonesome could collect $100,000 from his dad, he'd give Lonesome $25,000. That would leave him $75,000 — the amount his dad would be taking from his trust fund income, plus a little interest. Of course the money his dad deducted from his income would be re-invested for him. Well, when the three years were up he'd return th

$100,000 to his dad, plus interest, and tell him the whole story.

He went to bed and was soon peacefully asleep.

It never once occurred to him that he didn't need Lonesome Lewis, or any other crook, to put across this kidnaping scheme of his.

Lonesome Lewis did not go to bed. For long hours he sat in a darkened room and gazed out of an open window at the passing traffic. He was thinking, thinking — thinking with cold, vicious calculation.

The kid's scheme was good, he reasoned, but it could be improved upon. Never for one instant did Lonesome Lewis consider taking Dick Torrence in as a partner in crime. He was a lone wolf within the strictest meaning of the phrase. If he did snatch Dick, it would mean Dick's death warrant. He would murder Dick, and then collect the ransom.

Lonesome Lewis had earned his title. For twenty years he had preyed upon society, and never one of those years, or even one month had he spent behind bars. Frequently he was arrested, but not one iota of evidence could be gathered against him. He planned alone, worked alone. And so now he sat far into the night coldly "improving" Dick's snatch scheme. By morning Lewis had decided to become a snatch bug!

Two days later he met Dick again.

"I'm taking you on, kid," he announced, and for once he smiled. "But listen! *No talking.* Just leave things to me. Do as I tell you."

DICK wanted to tell Little Willie Taylor, but he'd promised Lonesome he wouldn't talk.

He had telephoned Doris Summer vice.

"It's no use, Dick," she told him the first time—and hung up. The second time he called she wouldn't come to the phone. He couldn't, just *couldn't* believe that Doris would treat him this way simply because he had temporarily lost his income. She wasn't that kind. And yet, the facts were there.

He haunted the speakeasy where Lonesome Lewis hung out.

"When are you going to snatch me, Lonesome?"

"Take it easy, kid," Lonesome Lewis would say. "Things are shaping up fine."

Then suddenly Lonesome disappeared. And for ten days Dick fumed. When Lonesome finally did show up, Dick was in an angry mood.

"Well, when are you going to snatch me?" he demanded. "I've made you an offer. If you don't want to go through with it, tell me."

"Just a few more days now, kid," Lonesome smiled. "You sure you haven't told a soul?"

"No!"

The next day Lonesome visited three rooms he had previously rented in widely separated parts of the city. At each room he found a parcel awaiting him.

One package contained a typewriter; one a small suitcase; and the third a pulley. He had purchased these articles in different cities during his ten days' absence.

He also had stolen a great coil of copper wire from a telephone storage shed in a distant town. The wire he had transported back home himself. Lonesome was about ready to go to work.

That night Dick told Lonesome to hurry up. Dick was getting nervous.

"To-morrow night," Lonesome said

tersely. "I want to talk to you tonight. Where can we go?"

"There's nobody at our country place. Dad fired the caretaker two weeks ago."

At the country home, that night, they talked for an hour or so.

"Then everything's set," said Dick, jubilantly. "See if I've got things straight: I'm to leave home at exactly 7.30 P.M., dressed for the opera. I'm to drive to the Stephens' home, pick up Flora Stevens and her mother. We are to go to the opera. Afterward we are to have supper at Brindell's. I'm to drive them home. I'm to be in an excellent humor all evening. Then I'll drive straight toward home, but I'll turn off at Louise Avenue and drive to the county line. There you'll meet me and take me to your bird cage. Say, by the way, where is this joint?"

"Nothing doing," grinned Lonesome. "You're to know nothing until you get there."

"Right. Then let's go down to the wine cellar and drink to success and the chagrin of my dear old dad when he has to fork over $100,000 to get his wayward son back again."

IV

THAT night Lonesome worked feverishly at his typewriter, pecking out a dozen letters. They were sharp, concise, intelligent. Lonesome was not illiterate. They were all addressed to *Miles Sumner*. The first one read:

DEAR SIR:

By the time you receive this letter something will have happened in your family. I don't need to mention what, because you will know well enough.

I don't want you to take this business too lightly, so to show you I mean what I say, one of your best and oldest friends is going to come to grief.

By the time you read this letter your old friend, Charles P. Torrence, will be dead, and your daughter, Doris, will be in a nice, cozy little cage waiting for daddy to cough up.

I'm having my boys do this to your friend Torrence just to show you that blood doesn't mean a damned thing to us. So you'd better not call the police. And don't go to the newspapers making us offers. *We won't deal through newspapers.* You deal with us or we won't deal at all.

You'll hear from me again soon. But not too soon. I'm giving you plenty of time to think it over. In the meantime, every move you make will be closely watched.

The letter was not signed.

After the dozen letters were finished Lonesome took the typewriter and crept down the back stairs of the small apartment building in which he lived. In the basement he stirred the banked fire to life. He crammed the typewriter in the furnace and permitted it to burn for two hours. Then he took it out and hammered it to bits with an ax. These bits he carefully picked up and wrapped in a month-old newspaper. Then he got in his car, drove along the drive skirting Clover River and at intervals of a hundred yards or so threw the bits into the river. A careful man was Lonesome Lewis.

In writing the letters he had used rubber gloves. There would be no finger-prints. The paper could never be traced to him. It was standard stock typewriter paper, sold in thousands of stores over the country. He had purchased it a hundred miles away. Lonesome Lewis was taking no chances. He slept well all day.

At midnight that night Dick Torrence said good night to Flora Stephens and her mother. He had followed instructions to the letter. Now he drove through town to Louise Avenue, turned

out that deserted thoroughfare and drove rapidly to the county line.

Once there he parked his car about one hundred feet off the road in a clump of pines. He was to meet Lonesome Lewis at 1.45 A.M. He wondered why Lonesome insisted on keeping him waiting so long, but he was content to obey instructions.

Now, as the minutes passed, he became vaguely uneasy. He was not as happy as he should have been, he told himself.

Of course, he had a legitimate grievance against his father and he wanted that $75,000 badly. The urge to "put one over" on the elder Torrence was strong. And then, of course, there was Doris. He felt hurt, sick at heart when he thought of her and the way she had acted. It wasn't like her. There was *something* wrong, he felt sure.

Uneasy thoughts filled his mind as he sat there in his car, waiting for Lonesome Lewis to come and snatch him.

He wondered how his dad would feel when he learned that his son was in the hands of kidnapers. The thought worried him. For the first time he thought of his father as a human being rather than some gruff automaton who sat in an office and issued stern ultimatums. He and his dad had been good pals before he'd gone off to college. He'd just about forgotten. He'd just about forgotten that the old gentleman loved him—and he loved his dad.

A vague fear possessed him. The doctors had said that his father was perfectly sound, that he stood a good chance of living twenty years or more, if he took good care of himself. *If he took good care of himself!* Dick thought of that and squirmed.

And his mother. Queer he'd never thought of her before. She was frail and . . .

Dick's motor roared. His car was in high before its wheels skidded onto the road and Dick Torrence was off for home.

He had been a dog, he told himself. A dirty, low-down dog. He would rush home and wake his father that very night and make a confession. And then let the chips fall where they might.

HALFWAY to the city he saw the lights of an automobile. He swept by the car at sixty miles an hour.

His pulse beat rapidly as he approached his home. The house was fully lighted. He wondered if Lonesome Lewis had already sent his father notice that he had been kidnaped. Well, he'd soon straighten that out. He took the steps three at a time.

In the hallway he stopped dead in his tracks. Little Willie Taylor sat there talking over the telephone in excited tones.

"Yes. Yes. His full name was Charles Perry Torrence. T-o-r-r-e-n-c-e. He was shot down half a block from his home. Yes, he was walking home from the Meadows Club, which is on Pine Street, just three blocks from his home. Some guy was parked in an automobile—shot twice—once through the head—once through the shoulder. No, it's not serious. Yes, he's unconscious . . ."

Dick's heart stopped beating. He rushed forward as Little Willie hung up.

"What is it, Willie?"

"Your father's been shot," said Little Willie. "It's really not serious. But something serious *did* happen."

He paused a moment and eyed Dick.

"An hour after your father was shot Doris Sumner was kidnaped!"

Dick's heart stopped beating, his knees wabbled and he sank weakly into a chair. Suddenly he realized how Lonesome Lewis had been planning to double-cross him all the time.

"My God!" he half sobbed. "Oh, my God!"

He buried his head in his hands. After a moment he straightened up. His face was deathly white, his jaws set.

"I know who did it," he said. "I'm to blame. I gave him the whole scheme which now he's using to kidnap Doris instead. But I'll kill him. So help me God, I'll kill him if it's the last thing I ever do."

"What do you mean—you're to blame?" demanded Little Willie. "Out with what you know—and quick! Every second counts."

Slowly, Dick Torrence outlined his scheme to have Lonesome Lewis kidnap him and demand $100,000 from his father.

"Lonesome Lewis! Son, you're lucky you're not laying out there in that pine thicket. He meant to kill you sure as shooting. And he'll kill Doris—"

Dick stared, transfixed. "He won't dare do anything," he shouted. "He knows I will talk."

"What's the difference? Didn't you say this scheme to collect the ransom money was fool-proof, law-proof? And you don't know where Lewis was going to take you. You don't know where he'll take Doris."

Dick groaned aloud. He looked down at his clenched hand, opened it. On his moist palm lay his key-ring, which, in his agitation, he had taken from his pocket and had been fumbling. He looked at the ring with unseeing, terrified eyes, which suddenly took on an expression of frowning concentration.

V

LONESOME LEWIS was worried. For once in his life he had slipped up. Dick Torrence had got away from him. He had meant to kill Torrence so the kid couldn't tell the particulars of the snatch scheme.

Lewis sat before a tiny fire in a room with the shades tightly drawn in the country retreat he had picked. Doris Sumner was directly below him in a stone-lined closet. Presently Lonesome Lewis went out and mailed the letters he had written. They were all to Miles Sumner, but were addressed to different hotels scattered over the city and marked "Hold Until Called For." Then he mailed a letter to the Sumner home demanding $250,000 ransom. He warned the father that he must act, and act quickly, when he received a telephone call the following day. Then he returned to his country retreat.

That night he lugged the heavy wire, the pulley and the suitcase down to a small skiff tied up on the bank of a river that ran by the country estate that was his hideaway. Up Clover River two miles, on the left bank, was a one-hundred-foot cliff. This cliff was Lonesome's goal. Painfully he climbed the winding path to the top of the cliff. Once there he sat down and rested.

In a few minutes he began work. A huge oak reared itself from the cliff's edge. Lonesome passed one end of the roll of wire through the pulley; then he wrapped the wire around the tree's trunk and made it securely fast. That done, he tied the suitcase to the pulley, tried it several times to see that it would ride the wire easily. Then he covered the wire pulley and suitcase with leaves and undergrowth an

threw the coil of wire over the cliff to the river's edge below.

He clambered down the cliff again, recovered the wire, put it in the boat, and rowed slowly across the river, allowing the wire to uncoil itself with the progress of the boat. Across the river he secured the wire to a tree, letting the wire sag so that most of it was under water, hidden from any stray fisherman.

Lonesome Lewis was now ready for the pay off.

At eight o'clock the following evening old man Sumner received a telephone call.

"Go to the Hotel Belvedere, call for mail, and you will get a letter of instructions," Lonesome Lewis told him in a gruff voice. "And go in an open car—by yourself. You will be watched every foot of the way."

"What security have I that I'll get my daughter back if I do pay you the money?" the old man wanted to know.

"None. You'll have to take my word for it. If you slip up, don't expect to see her again. That's all."

There was a click. Lonesome had hung up.

In the Sumner library there was a hurried conference between Sumner and the two detectives. Ready for instant action were a hundred other detectives stationed at various parts of the city. Old man Sumner had disobeyed Lonesome's orders; he had confided in the police.

"I'll go alone," he told the detectives. "I have a little scheme of my own. If it fails—if it fails—then God pity my poor little girl. You may trail me—at a considerable distance. Knowing that this man works alone, I am sure he hasn't a thousand eyes. He can't see everything. But keep out of sight.

On the floor of the library was a hand bag.

"From what you tell me of the man, he'll kill her anyway," the old man half sobbed. "God help me! I hope I'm doing right."

"You're doing all anybody could do, Mr. Sumner. You're paying off, aren't you?"

"I'm trying to pay off," the old man said gruffly. "Now, mind you, not too close."

At the Hotel Belvedere the old man received the first letter. It read:

> Go to Hotel Bankston for further instructions. And if anybody is trailing you you'd better wave them off.

At the Hotel Bankston he received the second letter. It read:

> I'm simply making certain that you are alone. Now drive to the Café Conde on Poplar Street and ask for a letter.

For two hours Sumner crisscrossed, east, west, north, south, over the town receiving similar letters at different hotels and cafés. Finally at the Hotel Beaumont, on the very edge of the city, he received this letter:

> Drive fifteen miles on the Wimpleston Road to the Southern Barbecue Stand. Ask for a letter there.

At the barbecue stand he was given a letter which directed him to the cliff on the Clover River.

> There's a large hollow stump at the foot of the cliff on the north side. Inside the hollow of the stump is a tin can covered with old leaves, and inside the tin can you'll find another letter.

The frantic father was feverish with excitement.

"I'm getting close to the end of the trail now," he said to himself.

And he was right. The letter in the tin can instructed him to flash his car lights off and on six times, then climb a winding path to the top of the cliff where he would find his final instructions under a rock by the big oak.

He read the letter under the rock and got busy. He unearthed the pulley and the container, and as he did so he felt the wire begin to tighten. He cursed under his breath. At the other end of that wire, right now, was the man who held his little girl. A hundred yards of water separated them. God! If he could only get his hands on that— The old man groaned aloud, and then carefully emptied the contents of his hand bag into Lonesome's suitcase.

With a silent prayer he released the pulley and watched the suitcase slide swiftly out over the water.

FROM his hiding place under a clump of bushes, forty feet from the tree to which the end of the wire was tied, Lonesome Lewis saw Miles Sumner's car approaching the cliff. He saw it stop, and in a moment saw its lights flash off and on six times. The moon was full. He could even see Miles Sumner take the bag out of the car and start up the winding path. His heart was pounding with joy. He had won. To hell with the police! He'd make a get-away with that quarter of a million dollars!

There was only one person in all the world who could accuse him definitely of the kidnaping. That person was Doris Sumner. Lonesome smiled to himself. He'd get rid of that bit of evidence right away.

Suddenly he rose to his feet. He heard a whirring sound and saw the outline of the suitcase rushing toward him over the wire. On it came with a hissing sound growing louder every second. He stepped toward the end of the wire. A cool quarter of a million dollars . . .

Of a sudden there was a loud crash, like the explosion of a great gun, and a blinding sheet of flame flew up as the suitcase hit the pine tree with a smack.

Lonesome Lewis was hurled a full twenty-five feet by the explosion. How long he lay there he did not know. Dazedly he stood up. He was as cool and collected now as he had ever been in his life. He felt his face. One side had been blown away. His left eye was gone. One of his legs was buckled under him, broken. His whole body felt numb. His hands, arms, legs, his whole body, in fact, were a mass of burns.

His mind was perfectly clear now. In spite of his pain he lay back and reasoned things out. Well, old man Miles Sumner had put one over on him, all right. He was through. Perhaps he'd die. Perhaps he'd get caught—and that would mean death.

How would he get away from here? They'd be here any minute. After him. He knew he couldn't get to his car. It was parked two hundred yards away.

Directly before him was the river. And forty feet away, the little skiff. Slowly, painfully, Lonesome Lewis dragged himself to the skiff. With an oar he shoved away from the bank. Then for ten minutes he rowed, every stroke bringing horrible agony to his torn and bleeding body. In midstream he sank back with a sigh and in spite of his misery he smiled faintly. The little skiff was drifting rapidly with the current—and drifting in the right direction.

It was a lucky thing, he told himself

that he had picked the place he had for Doris Sumner's bird cage. Otherwise he would have been lost. Now, with any kind of luck, he'd make the country estate where he had her imprisoned. And he was sure, once he was there, that he would have strength enough to finish the job he had set himself.

Queer how an emotion will give a person strength. Hate or love particularly. And now Lonesome Lewis was swirling along peaceful Clover River on a mission of hate. He could not possibly live, he knew, without proper medical attention. And proper medical attention would mean that he would have to give himself up to the law. And that would mean death. But Lonesome Lewis meant to see that Miles Sumner's daughter suffered as much as he was suffering—and more. Not that he had anything against the girl. He rather admired her. She was pretty—and she had plenty of nerve.

But Lonesome Lewis had no pity in his heart, not even for himself. He smiled a thin, cruel smile. He would burn her to death—or nearly to death—and then, by God, he'd telephone Miles Sumner to come and see her. He hoped he was alive and could see the old man's face when he saw her.

It seemed hours to Lonesome Lewis before the little skiff reached the slight curve in the river. But finally, feeling the boat turn to the left with the current, with a great effort he raised himself to a sitting position. Eddies naturally turned the boat left so it was only necessary for Lonesome to use a guiding oar to reach the bank directly in front of his hideaway. It was a great, gray, forbidding looking house with the shutters closed tightly, fronting the river a hundred yards away.

Using the oars as makeshift crutches, Lonesome dragged himself toward the house. Strangely enough, he was quite happy. In spite of his terrible wounds he had an exalted feeling. A queer piece of machinery, the brain. Such a thin veil separates sanity from insanity. Unless there is some malignant disease, or some accident, some emotion is responsible for all insanity. And Lonesome Lewis was insane at that moment. He forgot his own pain in thoughts of the pain he was to administer to Doris Sumner and the grief that was to come to her father.

On his knees he climbed the short stairway leading to the entrance, on his knees he inserted a skeleton key to the front door, and on his hands and knees he crawled through the darkened house to the little stairway leading to the cellar. There he rested for a full five minutes.

Rested, he resumed his torturous way. Head first, using his hands to pull his body and legs along, he snaked his way down the winding stairway—a full thirty feet. Then, in front of a steel door, he inserted a key—a bright, shiny key—and flung the door open.

It was a horrible sight that greeted Doris Sumner as the door swung open. There in the doorway was a creature covered with blood, half of the face blown away, one eye glittering brightly with an insane light. The creature lay on his left hip and left elbow, his right hand holding an automatic. His hair was burned away. His clothing was burned, and where flesh showed it was burned to ashy shreds.

The creature attempted a grin. It was horrible, terrifying. Doris rose from the chair in which she had been sitting and screamed.

"Steady, baby." The voice was thick.

On the right side of the room were half a dozen wine kegs. On shelves

were dozens of cases of whisky and other liquors.

The creature in the doorway took steady aim, and, one by one, punctured six wine kegs.

Then he fired three shots into the liquor shelves.

"Still one for you, baby." He essayed the terrible grin again. Doris Sumner sat paralyzed.

Painfully, Lonesome searched his pockets until he found a box of matches. He lit one and held it to the wine and liquor now flooding the floor. A blue flame shot up.

Lonesome started backing out the door, the terrible grin on his face, his gun still covering the cowering girl.

"Steady, baby—"

Suddenly out of a shadow in the ill-lit room a man pounced upon the crawling figure. The gun was kicked from his hand. Other shadows leaped from other dark corners and extinguished the deadly blue flame.

The first shadow was Dick Torrence. The others were Little Willie Taylor and two detectives, pouncing upon Lonesome Lewis.

Two hours later they were gathered in the Sumner home.

"Now tell me how you guessed where he was hiding her," demanded Little Willie.

"Luck—pure luck," grinned Dick. "I noticed the key to the wine cellar out in our country place was missing from my key ring. It was bright and shiny, brand new. I didn't get the significance at first. Then I remembered that Lonesome and I had been in the cellar and that while I opened a bottle of wine I had left my keys lying on the table. I reasoned Lonesome must have taken the key then. And where would be a better place than the sound-proof wine vault of a country home! So I let out a holler for Johnnie here and we all beat it out home. We got there about twenty minutes before Lonesome Lewis came. Just luck—pure luck."

Old man Torrence, sitting with a bandage round his head, frowned.

"Well, you being a hero now doesn't change that trust fund business," he growled, trying to look sour—which wasn't hard. "That's too much money for a fool boy to have."

Miles Sumner smiled.

"But a married man's not a boy. There'll be two of them now."

"Well, maybe so," old man Torrence agreed. "But, Dick, give me that bright, shiny key. I'm damned if you're old enough to have a key to my wine cellar."

Half an hour later there was some explaining.

"But, Dickie, I didn't even know about the trust fund. I was mad because of the party."

"And it wasn't my party, at all," Dick grinned, "It was Little Willie's. I really tried hard to stop it before it began."

The Prisoners in the Wall

By Garnett Radcliffe

In the Secret Room of Warrington Hall Amore Finds the Shan Necklace, and Stumbles into Unforeseen Peril

She raised the carved lid

DON'T MISS THIS STORY—BEGIN HERE!

HIDDEN in a secret room of Warrington Hall was the Shan necklace of fabulous worth. It was that prize that Amore Alarcon, lovely dancer, vowed she would get, for it was rightfully hers. She asked Jim Vereker to help her.

Warrington Hall was an elaborate gambling hell operated by Minna Gellert, night club queen, her husband, a man named Larrington, and a man named Wilcox. The hall was staffed by Chinese. The mascot of the place was a great ape, Vru.

The night Amore arrived at Minna's she resolved to make a try for the necklace.

CHAPTER IX

In the Wheatsheaf Inn

JAMES VEREKER left the Sybarite *en route* for the Wheatsheaf Inn ten minutes after Amore had driven off with Mr. Booker. He was not in a very happy frame of mind as he set off in the taxi that was bearing him to Waterloo Station.

He had an uneasy feeling that he

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for March 12

was not fulfilling his full duty toward his employer. Amore had promised him about fifteen thousand pounds for his assistance in the recovery of the necklace; he felt he was doing very little to earn the money. Up to date it was Amore herself who had done all the planning and had executed all the moves.

It was she who had secured the invitations first to the Cheyne and then to Warrington Hall, and it was she who had gone on the perilous mission into the latter place. All he, Vereker, had done was to pose as her husband for a day or two and scrape an acquaintanceship with Mr. Booker.

But he could console himself with the thought that the way events had shaped themselves had been none of his seeking. He would greatly have preferred to have gone to Warrington Hall himself. As it was, he intended to do all in his power to protect Amore. And in his own mind he was resolved not to wait until the Sunday before taking active steps.

If she did not appear at the inn they had appointed as their headquarters with the necklace on Saturday morning, he was determined to make a burglarious entry into Warrington Hall to see if he could get in touch with her. But he knew he would have to be very careful lest by some rash move he might ruin all her plans.

A slow train from Waterloo deposited him upon the platform of Billchurch station about twelve, just about the same time, in fact, as Amore and Mr. Booker were arriving at Minna's.

He had a trench coat and a cap for the purposes of his arrival at the Wheatsheaf Inn. He intended to represent himself as an artist, and artists do not as a rule wear garments as resplendent as those in which he had appeared at the Sybarite when playing the rôle of a millionaire from Kenya.

His appearance created very little interest at the station. The solitary porter told him that as there was no taxi available, he would have to walk to the Wheatsheaf Inn, three miles away. He also indicated the road. Vereker gave him sixpence and set off with his suitcase in his hand and his pipe in his mouth.

It was bleak country, desolate and level as a desert across which his road ran, wind-swept commons, stunted trees and vast tracts of waste shingle like the bed of a dried-up sea.

Vereker began to understand how Warrington Hall had preserved its privacy so well. It lay in the centre of the loneliest country in England. There were few prying eyes to mark the comings and goings of the fashionable guests who motored down from London to attend Mrs. Gellert's week-end parties.

The Wheatsheaf Inn, a black and white erection that looked as if it had weathered countless storms, stood at the meeting place of four roads. A fat landlady with the suspicion of a moustache received Vereker without interest or enthusiasm. Yes, he could have a room. Artist, was he? She thought it would be bitter cold work painting the marshes in that weather, and Vereker heartily agreed.

After depositing his suitcase in a bedroom that smelt of apples and mice, but looked clean, he made his way to the public bar. It was his intention to see if he could get some local information concerning Warrington Hall.

But on the threshold he paused in amazement. There, sitting with his back to him and as yet unaware of his presence, was the man with the panther's eyes and the short brown beard,

the man whom he had suspected of spying upon Amore in London, and whose photograph he had seen in the French newspaper.

For a moment Vereker was too dumbfounded to move. This third encounter with the stranger seemed to prove that his suspicions were correct. Lerang *was* shadowing Amore. Surely it could not be a mere coincidence that he had turned up again!

And how on earth had the fellow known Amore's destination? Had he been hanging about in the Sybarite? Had he followed her in a car? Or had he come down *before* her? If so—!

It was then, for the first time, that a suspicion that Amore was not the only person who knew the hiding place of the Shan necklace began to dawn on Vereker's mind. If this man also knew about Dekker's legacy, it would account for his movements. Supposing he had been following her to London, had lost touch with her when she had crossed to France and changed her identity to Mrs. Vereker! That he should now have come to the vicinity of Warrington Hall with the intention of trying to get the necklace himself would follow as a natural sequence.

And there was nothing impossible in the idea that someone besides Amore herself should know about the legacy. Dekker might have been indiscreet; a dishonest servant might have read the letter. Yes; it would certainly have been a big temptation to an unscrupulous person. A necklace worth over a hundred and fifty thousand pounds lying unclaimed in a secret room!

The unsuspecting subject of these theorizings suddenly rose to his feet and put on his cap preparatory to leaving the bar. Vereker retreated into the darkness of the passage lest he should be recognized. The idea of following the man crossed his mind, but he rejected it as being impossible in that open country in broad daylight.

After the man with the panther's eyes had gone, he went into the bar and ordered a bitter. An elderly gaffer, sitting on a settle, put down his mug to voice the very question Vereker was asking himself.

"Who be um?" asked the gaffer with a jerk of his thumb in the direction of the door.

"No use askin' me," said the barmaid, a black-eyed girl with cheeks like apples. "He's not very friendly, whoever he is. Sit's there soakin' whisky and not a word to throw to a dog! Yesterday evening he was in here with three pals the same cut as himself. Nasty looking fellows—not the sort you'd want to meet on a dark night! I think they must be foreign sailors on the tramp."

"Unpleasant weather for tramping, I should imagine," Vereker remarked with a smile. "I'll have the same again, please."

The barmaid responded to his smile.

"But you know what sailors are!" she said. "There's not much they'd mind in the way of cold and wet."

"Even a sailor could hardly sleep out of doors," Vereker said. "Probably those chaps have put up in an inn."

"More likely in an empty house," the barmaid said. "There's no inn near here they could be staying, unless they went to Lydd, which is fifteen miles away. And no decent inn would take fellows like that. We wouldn't take them here, I can tell you." She tossed her head. "Drinking in a bar is one thing, and staying in a place is another!"

"Um can drink whisky all right," said the gaffer, who was filling himself with beer at Vereker's expense. "That

ain't a poor man's drink nowadays! Um's got money for certain!"

"They took three bottles of Scotch away in their pockets last night," the barmaid pointed out. "They'd be better if they got new clothes, to my way of thinking."

"But it wouldn't suit your trade so well," Vereker laughed. "By the way, do you know a place called Warrington Hall anywhere near here?"

The barmaid gave him a sharp glance.

"Warrington Hall? Yes, sir. There's a German lady and her husband living there now. Her second husband that is. Gellert's the name. He's a funny little gentleman, Mr. Gellert. Got an ape."

"A how many?"

"An ape, sir. You never see Mr. Gellert without his ape. He takes it in the car with him out driving."

"Which must be pleasant for the ape," Vereker said. "No, I'm afraid I don't know the Gellerts. But what I'd really like to do is to sketch Warrington Hall. Do you think I'd be allowed?"

The barmaid looked at him curiously.

"Well, they say Mrs. Gellert's very strict about people going into the grounds on account of the pheasants. Still there'd be no harm in asking. They can't do worse than refuse, can they?"

CHAPTER X

An Unholy Alliance

AFTER some more talk, which failed to elicit any useful information, Vereker left the bar to partake of luncheon. When his inner man had been refreshed, he sat down with a pipe to consider his next move.

It was the presence of Lerang that was bothering him. The barmaid had told him that he and three dubious looking companions had been in the Wheatsheaf on the previous evening. So they could not have followed Amore down in a car that morning! They had come down before, and that looked as if his theory about them being after the Shan necklace was the correct one.

Ought Amore to be warned about this new and unexpected complication? Of course it was just possible that the reappearance of the man with the panther's eyes was due to a mere coincidence, but the odds were heavily against that. If he had seen him again in a town—yes. But not on the Romney Marsh.

All the same, it might be better to make certain his suspicions were correct before alarming Amore. And, even if they did prove to be correct, it was obviously his place to settle with the man with the panther's eyes. She would have quite enough to cope with inside Warrington Hall. It was up to him to circumvent this outside danger.

But he would have to act at once. He guessed that Amore would try to get the necklace that very night. It was quite likely that the man with the panther's eyes intended to do the same. He must try to upset the latter's plans so that the coast would be left clear for his partner.

As well as a motoring map, he had also a large scale cycling map of the country around Warrington Hall. He got it from his bedroom and made a careful study of the farms and cottages in the near neighborhood of the hall. Excluding the village itself, there were only two farmhouses and three cottages. If one of those happened to be empty, it would be the most likely

spot at which to commence his search for the Frenchmen.

With the map in his hand he returned to the bar and again consulted the friendly barmaid. His excuse was that he wished to find a picturesque empty cottage to sketch. She was delighted to assist with her local knowledge. Led on by his questions, she described the farms and cottages in detail.

When he left the bar he was certain he was on the right track. Only one of the farmhouses was empty, and that one happened to be the nearest to the hall; it stood, as a matter of fact, only a few hundred yards outside the estate wall. It was called Chapel Farm. It belonged to Mrs. Gellert, but she had never made any attempt either to utilize it herself or to find a tenant.

"If those birds are really planning to break into the hall, it's ten to one that Chapel Farm is where they're hiding," Vereker told himself. "Anyway that's the first covert I'll draw. If it proves a blank I shall have to try somewhere else."

Rain was beginning to fall when he left the Wheatsheaf on his four-mile tramp. He had his automatic fully loaded in his pocket, and in his hand he carried a lead-weighted stick that had been his constant companion in France during the days of the war.

He was a fast walker, and in less than three-quarters of an hour after leaving the Wheatsheaf he had come to where a sunken lane little better than a cart-track debouched on the road. This lane, which was shown as a dotted line on the cycling map, led to Chapel Farm. To the left, looking across a stretch of flooded fields, he could see the woods on the border of the Warrington Hall estate.

There were high hedges on either side of the lane. Keeping close to one of these, and moving with caution, he began his approach. In ten minutes he had come in sight of the empty farm.

From the shelter of a convenient haystack he made a preliminary reconnaissance.

Chapel Farm was a small, squarely built stone house with a slate roof. Despite the fact that it had stood untenanted for so long, there were no great signs of dilapidation. A few of the windows were broken, but the roof and walls were still intact. On that wet afternoon, with water lying in great pools across the weed-choked yard, it had a singularly dismal and depressing appearance.

Seeing no signs of life, Vereker entered the yard and looked about him. A Ford car with a punctured tire stood in an open shed, the rain dripping through the broken roof on to its hood. Despite the punctured tire, it had the appearance of having been used recently.

VEREKER crossed the yard and peered through one of the broken windows. It was an empty room into which he looked. The plaster was peeling off the mildewed walls, and at some slight sound he made two rats scampered squeaking across the floor.

He decided there was nothing else for him save to make a room-to-room search. The door opening on the yard proved to be barred, but he contrived to get a window open with a minimum of noise.

He scrambled inside, drew his automatic, and stood listening.

Not a sound could he hear save the steady patter of the rain outside and the squeaking of the rats with which the place seemed to abound. He was thankful for those rats. Any noise he

himself might make would be ascribed to their presence.

Satisfied that his entrance had not been heard, he began to tiptoe from empty room to empty room. There was nobody upon the ground floor. He then began to ascend the wooden stairs, stepping with the utmost caution.

Suddenly he froze into immobility. Yes, he could distinctly hear a murmur of men's voices coming from behind the closed door of what must once have been a bedroom. At the same time a pungent smell of tobacco reached his nostrils.

Moving as silently as a shadow, he crept to the door and knelt down. By applying his eye to the large, antiquated keyhole he could obtain an excellent view of the men inside the room, and at the same time he could hear what they were saying.

As surely as a magnet draws pins, so will a diamond necklace attract crooks. The men inside that room owed their presence in the vicinity of Warrington Hall to the Shan necklace, just as did Amore and Vereker. And they, also like Amore and Vereker, had not the least idea of the true nature of the place they were seeking to rob.

There were four of them, or it might be more correct to say there were three men and one half-wit. For the giant who sat opposite the man with the panther's eyes was an obvious imbecile. His name was Galopin, and he was only accepted by the other three because his Herculean strength and insatiable ferocity rendered him a useful comrade when there was rough work to be done.

Of a very different stamp from Galopin was Hauffe, who had been valet to the late Hans Dekker in New York. Vereker's surmise as to a dishonest servant having found out the secret of the legacy had been perfectly correct. Hauffe was that dishonest servant.

He had found the torn scraps of a rough draft of the fateful letter in the wastepaper basket in his master's room, had pieced them together, and had thus come into possession of the secret. In appearance, Hauffe was a short, fat man with a white face and sleek black hair. He belonged to the rat type of criminal, cowardly and vicious at the same time.

Being aware of his own limitations, he had at once realized that this affair of the Shan necklace was too big a thing for him to tackle alone. He had therefore invoked help. And Fate had thrown him in the way of three French convicts, newly escaped from Cayenne. Their respective names were Lerang, Galopin and Deval, and they were as desperate a trio as had ever eaten human flesh while escaping across the swamps of Cayenne.

Thus it was that the unholy alliance, whose objective it was to cheat Amore of her legacy, had been formed. Lerang, the man the French papers called the Rouen murderer, who was the leader of the ex-convicts, had considered the story of the Shan necklace too good a thing to be missed. Far better than enlisting under the supercriminal, Dr. Mittros's banner, as he had once intended. The doctor gave good pay, but not as much as a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

CHAPTER XI

Against Odds

IT was Lerang who at once took command. Hauffe very soon had reason to repent his choice of allies. Instead of being the leader of the gang, as he had intended, he found himself

relegated to a position inferior even to that of Galopin, and the ex-valet had been too terrified of the man with the panther's eyes to attempt to protest.

Lerang had taken charge. He it was who had planned and carried out the breaking into a shop kept by an old stationer in Horseferry, but it had been Galopin whose lust for killing had impelled him to commit murder. Sixty pounds that crime had yielded. That was how the ex-convicts had obtained the working capital essential to their preparations for the attempt on the Shan necklace.

And they would beyond all doubt have murdered Amore also had opportunity offered. But her crossing to France and returning as Vereker's wife had thrown them off the scent. After vainly searching for her for some days in London, Lerang had realized that she had somehow given him the slip, and he had promptly ordered the move to the vicinity of Warrington Hall. To forestall the American girl in the attempt to get the necklace had been his intention.

And, after all, it had been Amore who had forestalled him! Deval, the dark Frenchman with the little black moustache, had recognized her sitting in Booker's car as it turned in at the main entrance. She had been pointed out to him in London by Hauffe, who was familiar with her appearance from having often seen her at Hans Dekker's flat in New York, and he had recognized her at once. So the girl had stolen a march on them! That had been the bad news Lerang had found awaiting him when he had returned to Chapel Farm from the Wheatsheaf Inn where he had been buying whisky.

Lerang had decided that they must act at once. At the moment Vereker knelt down to peer through the keyhole a consultation was in progress. All four men were sitting on packing cases around a larger packing case upon which a plan of Warrington Hall was spread out. This plan, which had originally been the property of Hans Dekker, had been stolen by Hauffe, who had foreseen that it might be of use.

It was fortunate for Vereker that during the war years he had acquired a working knowledge of French. It was in that language that Lerang was issuing his orders.

"Danger!" he was saying, in reply to some remark of Hauffe's. "Of course there will be danger, but what of it? Yes; the house is closely guarded, but, name of a dog! it's not closely guarded enough to keep me out! All we have to do is dodge the patrols in the woods and the rest will be easy. And I tell you we cannot wait. Deval has seen that accursed girl driving up to the house in a car as if she were an honored guest. *Mon Dieu,* but she is clever, that one! I wish we had been able to slit her throat in London!"

"Yes, for she is the only person beside ourselves who knows where the necklace is," Deval agreed. "It is a pity, Hauffe, that you were not able to prevent Dekker's letter reaching her."

The valet rolled frightened eyes.

"But I knew nothing until I had found the torn copy in the wastepaper basket! It was too late then. Besides, how was I to know Dekker would die before he could alter the will? It was not until that happened I realized what a chance we had."

"And then you would have done nothing if you hadn't fallen in with us," Deval growled. "Stupid Dutchman that you are! It was a good day for you when you showed me the copy of the letter."

"And a good day for you, too!" the valet plucked up spirit to retort.

"Silence!" Lerang roared. "Listen to me, imbeciles, and stop quarreling. I tell you we cannot delay any longer. To-night we must try to get the necklace. Anyone got anything to say against that?"

"If they have I will tear their throats out," said Galopin, showing his yellow tusks of teeth in a grin.

"Silence yourself, Galopin. Now listen, my braves. At half-past twelve we will leave here and make our way through the woods to the wing at the house that is marked 'B' on this plan. Yes, I can take you to it without trouble. There is a lawn, and facing the lawn there is the big room shown as the 'summer lounge' upon the plan. Look here, Deval. You follow?"

Deval nodded.

"Yes, it is all quite plain. We will force one of the windows of the summer lounge and enter. What then?"

"Then," Lerang bent over the plan, "then all we have to do is to go up the stairway to what is marked as the Monk's Gallery. The door of the torture chamber is opposite the head of the stairs, and once we have found that room we know how to proceed. Nothing could be simpler. Thanks to this excellent plan we know how to reach the necklace by the quickest way."

"And what if we find the little American has already taken the necklace?" Deval asked.

"Then we must find her and Galopin here will wring her throat," Lerang said with a hideous oath. "Name of a rat, but I'm not going to be beaten by a girl! But if our luck is good we will get to the necklace before she does. And if we catch her taking it we'll shut her up in the secret room where Dekker saw the skeletons. *Mon Dieu,* but that would make a fine mystery! Everyone would be asking themselves where she had disappeared."

And at the idea, the brute called Galopin went off in peals of unholy laughter.

OUTSIDE the door, Vereker was in a fearful state of indecision. He had grasped the situation, but how ought he to act? His first impulse was to burst into the room and hold up the four men inside with his automatic.

But there were great risks attaching to that plan. If they tamely submitted all would be well and good, but then three ex-convicts were not men easily to be cowed. It was almost certain they carried guns. If they showed fight, he might get one of them or even two, but the chances would be heavily in favor of his getting shot himself. And if he were downed, all chances of warning Amore would be lost.

No; it would surely be better if he waited until darkness and then waylaid them on their way to Warrington Hall. The shooting would attract the notice of the men who patrolled the woods. Whatever happened to him, it would be pretty certain that Lerang and his evil crew would never reach the hall alive.

For Amore's sake he could not afford to run any risks. To get himself shot at this juncture would be disastrous. The wisest course was to play the waiting game. Having reached that decision, he rose and began to tiptoe away from the door.

But when he was halfway down the stairs a plank creaked loudly. On the instant the door opened to disclose Lerang.

For a fraction of a second the man with the panther's eyes stood staring in

amazement. Then he uttered a cry of rage like the howl of a wild animal. With an incredibly swift movement, he whipped a knife from his belt and flung it at Vereker's face. At the same instant Vereker thrust his automatic between the rails of the banisters and and pressed the trigger.

Without waiting to see the result of his shot, he leaped down the stairs. Just as he reached the bottom something landed squarely on his back with a force that sent him sprawling. It was Deval, who had jumped the banisters like a cat.

In a flash Vereker was on his feet, but the shock of the fall had caused him to drop both automatic and stick. There was no time to recover them for Deval was rushing at him with upraised knife. Lerang and Galopin, the former with blood streaming from his cheek where the bullet had cut, were bounding down the stairs.

A well-timed uppercut sent Deval reeling half senseless against the wall. Vereker dropped on his knees before the oncoming Lerang. He grasped him just below the knees and with the terrible throw the Japanese call the "pitch" sent him hurtling above his head.

Two down! Vereker's blood was up now and he was reckless of the odds. Fighting mad, he met Galopin's rush with an equal fury.

Only when he was at grips with the imbecile did he fully realize the other's colossal strength. It was like wrestling with a wild animal. The ex-convict wound his arms around his opponent's waist and exerted such pressure that Vereker felt his spine must snap.

He spattered both fists into the brutish face so close to his, and at the same time drove his knee into the pit of the convict's stomach. The agonizing pressure relaxed. Vereker tore clear. But Lerang was behind him, and he had Vereker's lead-weighted stick in his hand, waiting his opportunity to strike.

Vereker saw the blow descending and was powerless to stop it. And then it was as if a bomb had exploded inside his head. A shock of pain, myriad sparks flying in all directions, and then oblivion . . .

The instant he crashed insensible to the floor, Galopin was astride his body, knife upraised to strike. But before he could bury the steel in the Englishman's throat, Lerang had seized his arm.

"Stop, fool! He must be killed, but this is neither the time nor the place. Who knows but that he may have told his friends—the police even—that he was coming to this place? If they make a search they will find the body. I tell you it is too dangerous to do it here."

Reluctantly Galopin lowered his knife. For some reason the gigantic imbecile was afraid of the man with the panther's eyes.

"There is the sea," Deval suggested. "It is only three miles from here. We could take him down there tonight in the car. The fishermen leave their boats upon the shore. We could row him out in one of those and drop him over. By the time the body is washed up we shall be well away."

Lerang nodded his head.

"That will be the best. If we do that nobody will ever know how he died. *Nom d'un chien,* but it's as well that we caught him when we did! He is a friend of that accursed girl. I was present when her car knocked him down in London, and I saw her give him her address. Later I saw him enter the house where she was staying. Beyond

doubt she told him the story of the necklace and persuaded him to help her."

"Well, he won't give her much help now," Deval said with a brutal laugh. "Hauffe, you fat Dutchman, fetch a rope from the upper room. Even though he is insensible it will be as well to tie him up. Then we can leave him in one of the cellars until the time comes to take him to the sea."

This plan was carried out. By means of a length of stout manilla the arms and legs of the unconscious man were firmly bound. That done, Galopin and Deval carried him into one of the cellars, and flung him upon the stone floor.

When they left they shut and barred the heavy door upon the prisoner. As he was already bound and unconscious it seemed a rather needless precaution, but they were not disposed to run any risk with a man of Vereker's physique.

CHAPTER XII

In the Night

USUALLY the gambling in Minna's did not end before dawn, and sometimes not even then. It was no uncommon thing for the broad light of day to discover those haggard slaves of the red ball still seated round the roulette table as if held there by a spell.

But on this particular night the rooms were closed at a comparatively early hour. Vance's suicide was the cause. Certain dark stains on the green cloth where the millionaire had sat had damped the enthusiasm of even the most ardent of the gamblers.

Before the hall finally became silent, there was a good deal of coming and going. After the tragedy many of the guests had summoned their cars and left then and there, fearing that they might find themselves involved in a scandal.

The night-club queen allowed them to depart without protest. She knew that when they had got over the first feeling of shock they would return to Warrington Hall like flies to a pot of jam. In the meantime, as the sight of the suicide had subdued even their lust for high play, she was not sorry to see them depart.

And another reason why she was not sorry to have them gone was that that night Dr. Mittros, whose English headquarters was Warrington Hall, had summoned a conference. The supercriminal who had so amazingly and mysteriously risen to underworld power in Europe was himself becoming uneasy. Crawford was the cause. Dr. Mittros had reason to suspect that the relentless American detective had once again picked up the trail.

And Mittros did not desire Crawford's intervention at that particular moment. The moment was fast drawing near when he intended to carry out the most terrible plot against society in criminal annals. His plans were all but ready. Indeed, if it had not been for his uncertainty regarding the whereabouts of Crawford, he could have struck that very night.

But where was Crawford? Some believed him to be in Paris trying to arrange concerted action of all the police forces of Europe against the Mittros gangs. Mittros knew better. He had learned Crawford's methods of old. He knew by experience that the American detective was never more dangerous than when he was least in evidence.

Yes, it was a tremendous game, with tremendous issues, into which Amore and Vereker had unwittingly blundered. The hunt for the Sham necklace was being played against a

background of intrigue and murder of which they as yet suspected nothing. Mittros and Crawford were groping for one another in the dark.

And that night Mittros had summoned his subordinates for a final conference. Even while the cars containing the unsuspecting guests were gliding down the front drive, other cars were approaching the hall by another more private route. In the arriving cars were men of all nationalities; and women too. An American racketeer saw his headlights flash upon the back of a car in which sat a Frenchwoman who controlled an Apache gang. An Ogpu spy had come from the Russian Embassy. An Egyptian drug merchant followed the representatives of a Sicilian murder society.

For Dr. Mittros had achieved what had once been thought to be impossible. He had brought about a European criminal conspiracy. He had welded the dark forces of the underworld into a single weapon with which he might cow society into submission.

One by one the mysterious cars swept round the Hall. It was not at the main entrance they stopped, but at another at the further end of the vast building. Ho Fu was awaiting them. When they alighted, the Chinese butler conducted them with profound bows into the inner sanctum where Dr. Mittros was seated at his desk.

BY a quarter past one Warrington Hall had become so silent that Amore decided everybody must have gone to bed. She closed her novel and rose to her feet with a sigh of relief. She was thankful that the time for action had at last arrived.

Noiselessly she opened her door and slipped out into the corridor. Lights with red shades were burning; from the room occupied by the Moulters came a sound of low voices. Only a few of the bedrooms on that corridor were occupied. The doors of those that had been vacated by departing guests stood open and there was darkness inside.

She began to walk down the corridor, her rubber-soled shoes making no sound upon the soft carpet. In a bathroom a Chinese servant was filling a can with hot water. When she noticed him it was too late to turn back. Luckily his back was toward her, and she got past without being observed.

At the further end of the corridor there was a small landing and a flight of wooden stairs for the use of the staff. She descended these and found herself in an unlighted passage that led to the Monk's Gallery.

Here the darkness was less profound. In the roof above the summer lounge around which the gallery ran there was an oval-shaped window of opaque glass, and the moonlight filtered through this with a gray, spectral effect. Part of the gallery was in shadow; part was illuminated by this unearthly light.

The summer lounge itself was a great cold place of shrouded couches, palms and small tables. Doubtless it was very cool and delightful during the hot weather, but on a winter's night it looked desolate and empty to a degree. Much of the furniture had been removed, and what remained had been covered with white wrappings.

Amore found that she no longer required her flashlight. She switched it off and stood for a moment with her hands on the mahogany top of the ornamental rail running round the edge of the gallery. And while she was standing there she heard the sound of voices and a soft patter of naked feet.

Men, evidently several men, were coming along one of the passages debouching into the summer lounge. They were breathing hard as if carrying a heavy burden. A beam from a lantern flashed across the tesselated floor.

She shrank back into the shadow, but she could still see the procession that passed across the lounge. It was a funeral procession. Four Chinese servants were carrying the body of Vance upon their shoulders, and a fifth walked behind with a suitcase in either hand. Beyond a doubt they were carrying the dead millionaire and his property to a waiting car.

She could see the suicide's face, as white as his shirt-front save where it was disfigured by a blackened mark upon the temple. His sightless eyes seemed to stare up at her. And then he rode out into the night on the shoulders of the silent yellow men, and the lounge was once more empty.

For a minute Amore stood trembling with her hand pressed to her heart. Like all of Italian stock she had a strong streak of superstition, and the corpse being carried before her eyes had seemed to her a sinister omen.

But having got so far she was not going to turn back for a bad omen. When she had somewhat recovered her nerve, she opened the door of the museum and went in. Here the darkness was intense. She switched on her flashlight, and by its aid located the knob in the fresco below the fifth panel on the right. The last person who had pressed that knob had been old Hans Dekker.

Amore was shaking with excitement as she pressed her thumb against that seemingly innocent piece of wood. Supposing there had been some mistake! Supposing the hidden spring refused to act!

To her delight the knob yielded to the pressure. There was a soft click and the entire panel above her head began to slide back, dragged by invisible machinery. So perfectly had those medieval craftsmen done their work that the device still worked as well as when first installed.

The opening panel had left a dark aperture in the wall, measuring about four square feet. With the aid of a chair she climbed through into the jet blackness beyond. Cobwebs brushed her face like ghostly hands; she felt a carpet of dust beneath the thin soles of her shoes. It appeared to be a great block of stone, a part of the wall itself on which she stood. When she directed the beam of her flashlight downward, she saw a short flight of narrow stone steps which terminated in a small iron door arched to a point like a door in an old church.

Leaving the panel open, for she remembered Vereker's grim warning against getting herself imprisoned, she began to descend. Curiosity and excitement had driven out fear. Even the thought of Vru, the ape, had left her mind for the time being.

Six downward steps, and the iron door barred her way. She put her hands against it and pushed.

It yielded an inch at a time with a squeaking sound that sent her heart into her mouth. When the aperture was wide enough she squeezed her slim body through and flashed the beam of her torch around the room.

CHAPTER XIII

The Secret Room

IT was just as Hans Dekker had described in his letter. A tiny circular room with stone wall and stone floor that looked like a section of a large

chimney. Air must have been able to filter through the interstices between the stones, for the atmosphere although musty was quite breathable. As Hans Dekker had surmised, the place must have been intended as a hiding place in the event of the hall being sacked.

But there was evidence it had once been employed for a grimmer purpose. Two skeletons lay side by side upon the stone floor. The boney arm of the larger had been flung across the smaller as if in protecting attitude. They were pathetic witnesses to some long forgotten deed of horror.

Some enemy had captured them and placed them in this living tomb! They must have died mad in the dark and silence. She could picture them screaming their despair and dashing their hands against the unpitying stones . . .

After one long shuddering look at the grisly forms, she stepped past them to where a small iron chest stood close behind the door. It was not padlocked. She raised the carved lid and saw piles of tapestry and linen so brittle with age that it broke and crumpled into dust between her fingers.

She went down on her knees and began to rummage through the tapestry. There were other things beside linen and tapestry in the chest. The point of a dagger pricked her finger. She put it to one side and continued her hunt. Her heart was pounding with excitement. This was the moment she had so long anticipated.

Suddenly her groping fingers encountered what felt like a handful of pebbles wrapped in tissue paper. Hardly able to breathe, for excitement, she lifted the object out. With shaking hands she tore the tissue apart, and the Shan necklace dropped at her feet.

Even at that moment she could not repress a cry of wonder and admiration. She had seen and owned many fine jewels during her short life, but never anything approaching this necklace.

She had not known that such diamonds existed in the world. Fifty flawless stones, perfectly matched and graduating in size from a pigeon's egg to a pea, that was the Shan necklace. They were rose pink diamonds, the rarest and most valuable of the species.

So she had won! The wild scheme for getting what was morally if not legally her own property had been crowned by success. Now that she actually held the wonder in her hands she told herself that she could never sell it. She would raise the money in some other way. She was certain Vereker would agree to some different arrangement.

But then the thought of the perilous journey back to her bedroom brought her to her senses. This was no time to linger admiring the necklace. She must get back to the safety of her room as quickly as possible.

CLUTCHING the necklace in her hand, she felt her way up the stone steps and stepped through the aperture in the paneling on to the chair. Again she pressed the knob controlling the secret spring. The panel slid into position, and the secret was once more hidden!

Suddenly Amore froze into immobility. Something—some sixth sense—had warned her that there was another presence in the room. She could see nothing, hear nothing, but she was certain she was being watched.

The thought that it might be Vru, the great ape, stalking her in the darkness came into her mind. Her heart began to beat suffocatingly, her mouth felt dry. With one hand she felt in the

pocket of her jumper for her little automatic.

When she had secured it she switched on the flashlight. Instantly a vast black figure darted upon her. Before she could think of firing, the gun had been wrested from her fingers. An iron hand caught her throat and pressed her back against the wall. And even in that moment of terror she felt relieved that her assailant was at least human, and not the great ape.

It was Lerang who had seized her. The convict had succeeded where ninety men out of a hundred must have failed. He had brought his companions safely through the woods, dodging the armed patrols as they had dodged the warders in the Cayenne swamps, and had entered Warrington Hall by one of the windows of the summer lounge.

The other three men were guarding the line of retreat. Deval was stationed in the gallery outside, the mighty Galopin crouched at the foot of the marble stairs, and Hauffe was guarding the window they had forced. For Lerang had realized this was no ordinary country house, and he was running no risks of being cut off. He had arranged for a signal to be passed by means of flashes in the event of danger threatening.

Just as Amore was climbing out through the panel, he had crept into the torture museum. He had eyes and ears like a cat and had been able to follow her movements even in the dark. At once he had realized the situation. This was the girl they had been racing for the Shan necklace! Had they arrived a minute later she would have beaten them.

But he *was* in time! He laughed as he pinned her against the wall with his hand to her throat. His other hand slid down her arm until it encountered the hand that held the Shan necklace. With ease he forced it from her fingers, and he laughed again as he dropped it into his own pocket.

"My clever lady! So you have lost in spite of all your scheming! It was kind of you to save me the trouble of going down to the room in the wall. Are the skeletons still there as Hans Dekker described? Were you not nervous at going down there alone?"

CHAPTER XIV

The Battle in Warrington Hall

AMORE felt a shock of amazement. So she was not the only person who knew of Hans Dekker's secret! This must be the man whom Vereker had noticed spying upon her in London. But who was he? How did he come to know the secret?

Lerang's next words enlightened her.

"Do you remember the valet Hauffe, *mademoiselle?* The Dutchman who was Dekker's valet in New York. You must have seen him often. He found out what Dekker wrote in that letter just before he died. So you see you were not the only person planning to get the necklace. Hauffe is a fool, but not such a fool as to miss an opportunity like that. And then I and my friends came into the game. You schemed and we schemed, and we have won in the end. Oh, you were very clever getting into this house as a guest, but not quite clever enough. You never paused to consider that some one else might know the secret, did you?"

All was now clear to Amore. Yes, she remembered Hauffe. A nasty, sly creature. She had often wondered why Dekker should employ such a man.

The Frenchman was gloating over her in his triumph. Although he we

knew the need of hurry, he could not resist the temptation to brag of his own cleverness.

"Oh, when the little Lerang sets out to do a thing he usually succeeds. Those fools of warders could not hold me on Devil's Island when I wished to be gone. And when I heard about the Shan necklace I swore I would get it. But it was a near thing. You came very near to beating us, *mademoiselle.*"

His manner changed. The grip at her throat tightened and his voice became harsh and brutal.

"And now, *mademoiselle,* I much regret that I will have to dispose of you. You are too dangerous to be allowed to go free. I have thought of a very pretty scheme by which I can get rid of you without any trouble. You must go back to the secret room in the wall, and this time you must stay there. Before long there will be three skeletons, you understand?"

For an instant Amore fancied he was trying to frighten her; she could not believe that he would put his ghastly threat into execution. But he was already fumbling for the knob in the fresco. She began to struggle violently.

But though she was strong and active beyond the average, she was like a child in Lerang's grasp. And the cruel pressure of his fingers on her throat was choking her. She heard him laugh in the darkness, she beat with her hands against his face.

Suddenly Deval's whisper came from the direction of the door.

"Lerang? What the devil are you doing? This is no time to make love. Hauffe has flashed his torch. He has heard something . . ."

"Come here and help me with this she-devil," Lerang answered. "*Nom d'un chien,* but she fights like a wild cat! Come here and help me. You hold her while I get the secret panel open."

"No, no. Cut her throat and have done with it. I tell you—"

The report of a revolver stopped his words. They heard Galopin's voice raised in a bull-like roar.

"Lerang, Deval! We're cut off! Come quickly—"

There was a second report, and then the scream of a man in a paroxysm of terror tore through the night. It was the luckless Hauffe. Three Chinese had crept upon him in the darkness, and he was meeting his death like the coward he was.

Lerang had ceased to think of Amore. He released her and ran out to the gallery. Men were coming from all directions. Two bare-footed Chinese gangsters were leaping up the marble stairs, knives in their hands.

Lerang and Deval fired simultaneously. A Chinaman flung his arms above his head and fell backwards, shot through the brain. His companion collapsed in writhing agony. Whistles were being blown; Larrington's voice could be heard shouting directions.

Automatics spitting defiance, the convicts dashed across the lounge to where Galopin still held the window that was their way of escape. Bullets sang all round them, but in the darkness and confusion accurate shooting was impossible. Two parties of gunmen entering the lounge from opposite directions mistook each other for intruders and began to exchange shots.

WHEN at last the mistake had been discovered and a certain degree of order had been restored, it was too late to do anything. The convicts had gone. Only Hauffe remained. They found the valet's body

by the window almost hacked to pieces by the knives of the Chinese.

Such guests as had remained in the hall had been aroused. Larrington, who had taken command of the situation, met the crowd of terrified men and women in the corridor, and comforted them with consoling words.

"Burglars," he explained. "They were surprised in the summer lounge by some of the staff and shots were exchanged. No, nobody was killed. How unfortunate that this should have happened on the night of Mr. Vance's sad end! At this rate Minna's will be getting a bad name."

He must have had some strange hypnotic power, that tall man with the sidewhiskers and the loose red mouth. His words acted like oil upon troubled waters. With jokes and reassuring speeches he coaxed the frightened people back to their rooms.

The other members of the syndicate had appeared, and they too helped with the good work of restoring order. Mrs. Gellert and Wilcox assisted with honeyed words. No; they were certain the burglars would not return. They could go to bed and sleep soundly.

Mr. Gellert, a comical little figure in nightcap and flannel dressing gown, flourished a pistol of antiquated design.

"If they come again, I'll shoot 'em with this," he told everybody. "Who were they? Some of those Mittros gunmen, of course. The doctor must have heard about all the rich folk who come down to Warrington Hall for weekends. Well, this time he has bitten off more than he can chew. Serve the scoundrel right!"

And the little man waxed quite eloquent about what he would do to Dr. Mittros if he caught him, until Mrs. Gellert told him sharply he was much more likely to catch a chill than the doctor.

"If I do I'll send for Mittros to cure me," was Mr. Gellert's parting shot.

So once again Warrington Hall, the most mysterious house in England, sunk into silence.

In the summer lounge, parties of swiftly working Chinese under the command of Ho Fu removed all traces of the fight. The dead bodies of the men who had been killed were removed to some secret place to await burial.

When all was at last silent, Amore rose from behind the screen where she had crouched ever since Lerang had released her. It was as well she had memorized the way for she dared not use her flashlight. But at last, to her profound relief, she found herself back in her bedroom.

Her feelings were mixed. Although she was bitterly disappointed at having lost the Shan necklace at the very moment of success, she was thankful for her escape. Supposing the Chinese patrol had not come! Supposing Lerang had carried out his fiendish threat . . .

Anyway, there was no further occasion for her to remain in Warrington Hall, and for that she was thankful. The very air of the hall seemed permeated with evil. She had guessed that more went on there than gambling.

Worn out with excitement and fatigue, she undressed and got into bed. For the time being, at least, she was safe. The syndicate had no reason to suspect her, and there was no reason why Lerang should return.

"I'll join Captain Vereker at the Wheatsheaf tomorrow," was her last waking thought. "He may think of some plan by which we can get the necklace back."

For she had no intention of abandoning the struggle. She had a streak

of Italian blood that made her obstinate to the point of recklessness.

CHAPTER XV

The Men from Cayenne

THANKS to an uncommonly hard skull, and also to the fact that his tweed cap had somewhat deadened the force of Lerang's blow, Vereker had not been as badly stunned as would have been the case otherwise. In fact, little more than two hours after they had flung him into the cellar he had begun to recover consciousness.

He did not feel at his best and brightest. His head throbbed atrociously and the manilla rope cut into his wrists and ankles. Nor did the darkness, the hardness of the stone floor and the unseen presence of about a score of inquisitive rats contribute in any way to the pleasures of the situation.

But his bodily discomfort was as nothing compared to his mental. Had it been possible, he would have liked to have kicked himself. He'd been the complete goof. To get caught out like this at the very outset of the adventure!

It wasn't himself he was worrying about so much; it was Amore. From the silence of the house he knew that Lerang and his evil crew must already have departed for the hall. The only hope was that they might have been stopped by one of the patrols in the woods. But it was a very faint hope. If there were any men in the world capable of penetrating the defences of Minna's, they were those escaped convicts from Cayenne.

By comparison with them the syndicate appeared almost harmless. Vereker told himself that he would far prefer that she should be caught by the Gellerts in the act of taking the Shan necklace than that she should encounter Lerang in the darkness of the Monk's Gallery. Later he was to learn his mistake.

The thought of what might be happening while he lay there drove him nearly frantic. For over an hour he wrestled with his bonds regardless of the pain of the cutting rope. But he had been tied by expert hands. The net result of his efforts was to give himself a considerable amount of pain, and to send the rats scampering in terror around the cellar.

Those were the longest hours he had ever spent in his life. It was almost with relief he heard the growling voices that announced the return of the convicts. Had they entered the hall or not? He strained his ears to catch what they were saying, but it was impossible owing to the thickness of the cellar walls.

There ensued about a quarter of an hour's wait which seemed an eternity to the soldier. He guessed, and guessed rightly, that they had gone to the upper room for a drink. Their voices and loud laughter when at last he heard them coming in the direction of the cellar told him his supposition had been correct.

Vereker listened as a condemned man might listen to the footsteps of the chaplain on the morning of his execution. He did not believe he had another hour to live. Would it be Galopin's knife, or would they fulfil their threat of throwing him into the sea?

His one chance—and it was a mighty slim chance—was to play possum. They must not know he was conscious. He closed his eyes and began to breathe stertorously through his mouth, after the fashion of a man suffering from bad concussion.

Yes; the convicts had been drinking all right. He could hear Galopin stumbling, and when Deval bent over him he smelt a reek of whisky. That would be to his advantage. They would be less cautious in their fuddled state.

Deval raised his head and rolled back an eyelid. Vereker contrived not to flinch. Apparently what the convict saw satisfied him, for he let Vereker's head drop back on the floor with a thud.

"You gave him a pretty good welt, Lerang my friend," he said in French "We'll have no more trouble with this young swine. All that remains is to carry him down to the sea and throw him in."

"And slit his throat first," was Galopin's kindly suggestion.

"Be quiet, imbecile," Lerang said. "If the body was washed up with the throat cut there would be no end of a fuss. Already the English police are after us for one murder. We don't want another. We'll remove the rope when we have him in the boat, and then when the body is washed up they'll think he died by accident."

"But I say slit his throat," Galopin said stubbornly. "It's always safest to make sure. If you'd cut that girl's throat when you had her—"

"Hold your fool's tongue," Lerang roared. "There was no time—those Chinks would have been on us in another second. But you mustn't be afraid she'll tell the police. She was trying to steal the necklace just as we were. Why should you criticize me, you son of an ill-begotten pig? Was it you or I who got the Shan necklace?"

"Anyway we have got it and that is the great thing," Deval cast oil upon the troubled waters. "And since Hauffe is dead there will be one less to divide the money among. That Dutch coward! How he squealed when the Chinks jumped upon him!"

"Damn those Chinks," Lerang muttered. "I tell you, my friends, that house gave me the horrors. The sooner we get back to London the better I will be pleased. Come, we must get rid of this carrion before the light comes. You two carry him out while I see to the car. That will be the easiest way to take him down to the shore."

Vereker had learned all he wanted to know. So the worst had not happened after all! He had gathered that the convicts had taken the necklace from Amore, but they had not killed her.

The news gave him renewed hope and confidence. It was anybody's game yet. His captors were fuddled with drink and excitement. The odds on his being able to take them unawares were rosier than he had dared to hope.

WHEN Deval and Galopin raised him, he let his head roll back and kept his body slack. All depended on their believing him to be still unconscious. But they suspected nothing. Galopin, who had drunk nearly a whole bottle of raw whisky, could hardly walk, and Vereker heard Deval cursing his clumsiness as they staggered up the cellar steps with the inanimate form between them.

In the yard Lerang was waiting with the antiquated Ford. It was a car they had stolen in London for the purpose of coming down to Warrington Hall.

Vereker was propped on the back seat between Galopin and Deval. Lerang, who was less affected by the drink than the others, drove. The distance from Chapel Farm to the shore was only a couple of miles of rough, shingle-covered road.

In a few minutes the car was lurch-

ing down the sharp incline to the beach itself. The swish of waves upon the shingle and the smell of seaweed told Vereker they had reached their destination. Galopin began to sing at the top of his voice. Lerang turned with a furious curse.

"Silence yourself, imbecile, or I'll put a bullet through your pig's carcass. Do you want to attract the coast-guards? Be quick."

The car stopped and the three men alighted. Vereker was dragged out and flung upon a heap of shingle. Despite the pain, he contrived to fall as limply as a sack of potatoes.

Left alone, he ventured to open his eyes. In the semi-darkness he could see the convicts dragging a small rowboat down the beach. Beyond them there was the angry, tossing sea already illuminated with the pale light of approaching day.

They were coming back now, and he shut his eyes again. He heard Lerang's voice.

"Take him out fifty yards—that will be enough. In the meantime I will drive back to Chapel Farm and get things ready for our departure. When you return you will find that all is ready. We can then start at once for London."

"I wish you would let me slit his throat before we throw him over," Galopin grumbled.

"I tell you no. Deval, you see to it that this imbecile behaves himself. We must make it appear that he was drowned by accident."

Again Vereker felt himself being lifted and carried. There was a pause while they collected their strength to heave him into the boat. He set his teeth and grimly awaited the inevitable crash. When it came it hurt even more than he had anticipated.

But he had not cried out nor made any movement that might betray the fact of his consciousness. Lying on his side, with a couple of inches of foul water at the bottom of the boat washing against his face and almost choking him, he listened while Galopin and Deval settled themselves to the oars. They were rowing. He could feel the little boat pitching and tumbling as the waves caught her.

At last the creak of the oars in the rowlocks ceased. He was rolled on his back, and he felt Deval sawing at the rope round his wrists. Not yet! When his hands were free he allowed them to drop loosely to his sides.

Deval was now cutting the rope round his ankles. Galopin was standing up, steadying the boat with an oar. Vereker marked their respective positions with one lightning glance. *Now!*

That was when the convicts got the last and greatest surprise of their lives. A mad grizzly bear would have been a pleasanter companion in a small boat than the man they had believed to be unconscious.

They had barely time to realize what had happened. No sooner had Deval severed the last strand of rope around the prisoner's ankles than he was rewarded by a kick in the face that would have done credit to a mule. It sent him reeling back with a smashed jaw. And a sudden lurch of the boat pitched him headlong into the water, where he sank like a stone.

Next instant the boat had capsized and Galopin had followed his companion with a despairing bellow. The gigantic imbecile was unable to swim. He sought to save himself by clutching at Vereker, which was tactless. The terrific blow he received upon the temple must, however, have reduced the subsequent pangs of drowning to a minimum.

Twenty minutes later Vereker was crawling up the shingle. Even though he had been assisted by an incoming tide, the struggle back to land had been something of a nightmare. Being tightly tied up for several hours is not a good prelude for even a short swim.

His strength and his skill as a swimmer, however, counteracted the handicaps of clothes and cramped limbs. Once safely out of reach of the waves he lay prone on his back and gasped for breath. Then he remembered having placed a flask of brandy in his pocket before leaving the Wheatsheaf. It was still there. He drank the spirit neat, and felt life and strength flowing back to his chilled body.

A brisk rub-down completed the good work commenced by the brandy. He dressed again and looked about him. Dawn was just beginning to break, and it showed him the overturned boat sliding about like a turtle among the white-capped waves. Galopin and Deval had disappeared forever.

But there was more work to be done, and he could not afford to loiter there for long. Lerang had got the Shan necklace. It was true that he had also got an automatic and Vereker had not, but the soldier did not let that thought trouble him for a moment. Apart from the Shan necklace, he had a strong desire for a word alone with the man with the panther's eyes.

"He'll be sorry he ever left Devil's Island," Vereker vowed to himself. "Frightened Amore, did he? Well, he'll have to be taught better manners."

A heavy piece of driftwood with a few rusty nails attached presented itself as an excellent implement for the purpose of giving Mr. Lerang the much needed lesson.

Running and walking alternately, he set off up the shingle-covered road leading back to Chapel Farm. When he came within sight of the house he began to approach with the utmost caution. Lerang was a dangerous customer, and everything depended upon his being able to take him by surprise.

From the shelter of the same haystack as he had used on the preceding afternoon he made reconnaissance. Yes; Lerang was undoubtedly inside the farm. The Ford was in the middle of the weed-choked yard, its headlights still glowing, and the door leading into the kitchen stood open.

For all his size Vereker could move as swiftly and noiselessly as a cat. He darted across the yard and crouched in the shadow by the open door. His intention was to wait until Lerang emerged and then to return compliments with the piece of driftwood.

During ten long minutes he crouched there as motionless as the wall itself. But there was no sign of Lerang. Stranger still, he could hear no sound of movement within the house.

CHAPTER XVI

A Tuft of Brown Hair

THE thought that Lerang might have seen his approach and at that moment be stalking him with the automatic in his hand made the hair at the back of Vereker's neck tingle. The shifting shadows were beginning to expose him. He knew he would be an easy target silhouetted against the white-washed wall.

At last he kicked off his shoes and crept into the house where all was still dark. The kitchen was empty. He crossed into the tiny hall where he stood listening.

Still no sound. As he stole across

the hall his foot touched a small, hard object. It was his own automatic which he had lost during the scuffle on the afternoon before. He picked it up and found it vastly comforting. He could now meet the man with the panther's eyes on equal terms.

But where was Lerang? One by one he searched the rooms on the ground floor. What was that? He whirled about with automatic raised. Had he imagined it, or had he really heard the faint shuffle of bare feet? Then Lerang *was* stalking him! He stood quite still, his eyes straining through the darkness.

After what might have been a minute and seemed an hour, he decided that his nerves must have played him a trick. The sound of those shuffling feet had ceased, and when he went to the door, the passage, which was comparatively light, was empty. Through a window he looked out into the yard. Again his nerves played him a trick. He had imagined he saw something like a deformed man crouching on top of the wall. When he looked again, it had disappeared.

Convinced that Lerang was not anywhere on the ground floor, he began to ascend the stair. He now noticed something that he had not previously remarked. The farm was pervaded by a curious, disagreeable odor, almost like the odor that might have been left by some great animal. It awoke a dim recollection in his mind of his last visit to the zoo.

"It's the rats," he said to himself. "They must have made that sound like footsteps also."

Satisfied with that explanation, he proceeded with the search for Lerang. And it was not long before he found him. The man he had been tracking was lying on his back in the room where the consultation had been held. He was quite dead. His throat had literally been torn out, and the expression in the staring eyes was such that Vereker felt constrained to lay his handkerchief across them. The face of a man who has died from fear is not a pretty sight.

"Poor devil!" Vereker muttered. "What in the name of fortune can he have seen to make him look like that?"

His own nerves were badly shaken. What was there in this seemingly empty house to make a man die of fear? And Lerang had been no chicken either . . .

It was quite plain that the convict had made a desperate struggle for life. His automatic lay upon the floor, and when Vereker opened it he discovered empty shells in every chamber. And he found that the dead man's hand was clutching a tuft of coarse brown hair.

As he bent over him he noticed a small white object lying upon his chest. Picking it up, he found it was a visiting card. But by the light of a flashlight he was able to decipher the words written in pencil. "*With the Compliments of Doctor Mittros*" was the legend upon the card.

DR. MITTROS! The evidence led him to believe that the slayer had been an immensely powerful man with a beard. And a homicidal lunatic. How did the "Dr. Mittros" card fit into that? Unless the mysterious supercriminal employed a lunatic in his dreaded gang.

Vereker considered that explanation. Only a lunatic would have had the strength to inflict such a hideous wound. Galopin might have done it, but then he knew Galopin to be dead.

And then he saw something else that confirmed his belief that Lerang had

been killed by a lunatic. Lying on the ground, evidently knocked off the top of the packing case during the struggle, was the most magnificent string of diamonds he had ever beheld in his life. Beyond all doubt it was the Shan necklace itself. Surely no sane man would have left it lying there?

He took it to the window and examined it. In the gray half-light the stones seemed to shine with a fire of their own. He examined it with a wonder that was not untinged with awe. He knew something of its history. Each of those fifty flawless pebbles must represent at least one man's life . . .

How many men had died violent deaths that very night for the sake of this ill-fated necklace? Of Lerang and his evil gang not one survived. And how many of the Chinese staff of Warrington Hall had fallen to the convict's bullets? And where did the mysterious doctor come in, and why had the killer left the necklace?

From the window Vereker could now see the chimneys of Warrington Hall just visible above the trees. Amore was somewhere there. How was she faring? What would she say when she learned that he had got the Shan necklace after all?

That she was still alive and unharmed he felt certain. During the ride down to the shore he had listened to Deval's and Galopin's remarks, and from what they said he had been able to form a fairly clear picture of the night's doings in Warrington Hall. He knew that Lerang and Deval had been struggling with the girl in the torture museum, where the arrival of the Chinese had compelled them to release her. And he had gathered that she had not been hurt in any way. They had expressed loud regrets that Lerang had not had time to use his knife . . .

But what had happened after? Had the syndicate found out the reason of her entry into Warrington Hall? Well, if they had it was too late for them to do anything. The Shan necklace was gone, and he judged it most unlikely that they would hand Amore over to the police.

He puzzled over these questions on the walk back to the Wheatsheaf Inn, but without being able to arrive at any definite conclusion. On the whole, he decided, it would be better to wait until evening before taking any active steps. Indeed, that was the only possible course. Now that the excitement was over the reaction had set in, and he was conscious of extreme fatigue and nausea. To go then and there to Warrington Hall was out of the question. It was as much as he could do to reach the Wheatsheaf without collapsing.

Yes, he would have to wait till evening. Then, if she had not appeared and he had not had word from her, he must take action. What the action was to be he had not the least idea.

People at the Wheatsheaf were astir when he arrived. The stout landlady cast eyes of horror upon his drawn face and torn clothes. What a spree the young artist must have had! He'd been painting the Romney Marsh red by the look of him! You'd almost think he'd been swimming in the sea . . .

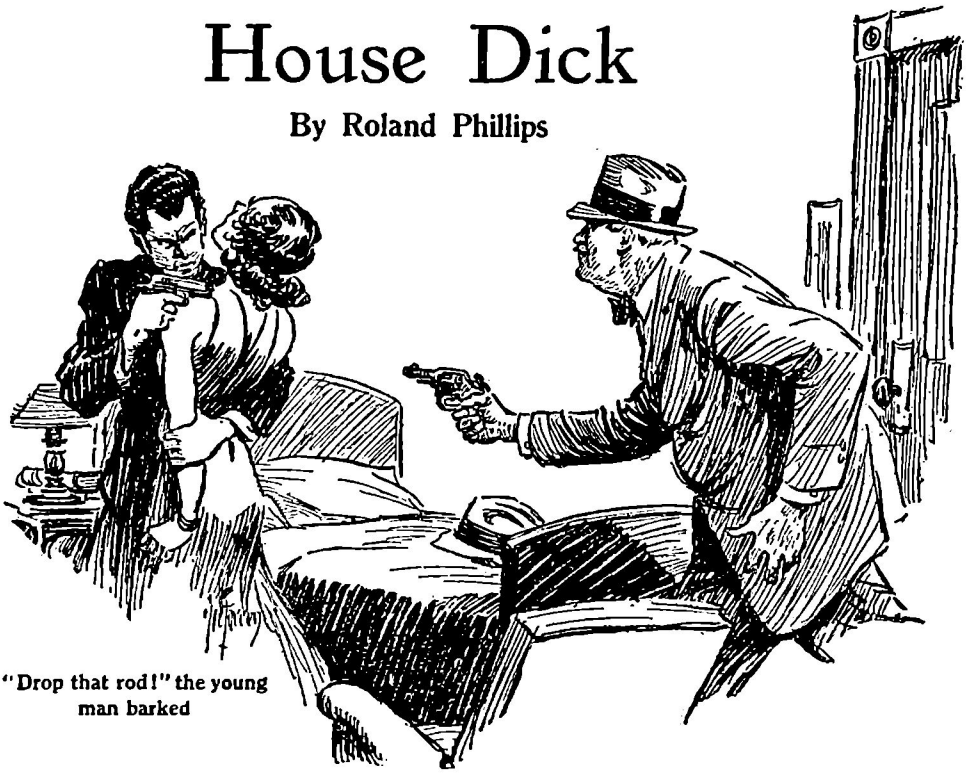
Vereker was too dazed and weary to hear these comments. He had just enough strength to drag himself upstairs, get off his clothes and tumble into bed.

And his last conscious action before sleep engulfed him was to place the Shan necklace beneath his pillow.

CONTINUE THIS STORY NEXT WEEK

House Dick

By Roland Phillips



"Drop that rod!" the young man barked

Clem's Gun Was Too Old and Rusty to Fire, but That Was No Reason for a Killer to Figure Clem's Wits Were Rusty Too

CLEM BREWSTER, house detective, saw the girl come through the revolving doors and cross the lobby, trailed by a boy with her suitcases. He stiffened as he looked the second time at the slim, attractive miss. His heart thumped, there was a curious tightening in his throat. She glanced at him once as she swept toward the desk, a mere impersonal flash from her brown eyes before she looked away again. She was so close he might have reached out and touched the sleeve of her coat.

Perhaps it was because he was standing in the shadow, and his hat was tilted low over his face; perhaps it was because Norma Brewster never expected to see her father in the hotel, in this town of all places, or that he had changed so, that she failed to recognize him.

Clem wanted to think that, made himself think it. She would not deliberately have snubbed him, in spite of the angry, hasty words that had passed between them. Norma wouldn't do that. Maybe she was sorry now, wanted to see him again, as he did her. He thought of her all the time, worried about her. She was all he had left in the world.

He was so shaken, stunned, that he remained where he stood, holding to the back of a chair, watching through blurred eyes as she signed the register,

stepped into the elevator and was whirled aloft. Even when she had gone, he remained there, smiling a little, winking back the tears.

Passers-by jostled him. The faint strains of music from the dining room sounded above the shuffle of feet, the babble of voices. He would go upstairs presently, knock on her door. Better to meet that way—just the two of them alone. There would be so much to say, so much to talk over. A year had been a long, long time. He had been afraid, not hearing from her, that something had happened. The world was full of rough corners. They weren't always gentle to a girl alone.

Some one jabbed him in the ribs. "I say, Clem!" It was Dugan of the *News*. He was grinning, his hat cocked over one eye, a cigarette pasted in the corner of his mouth.

"Hello!" Clem said. He was fond of Dugan, but he wished the reporter would go on just now.

"Come out of it!" Dugan bantered. "You in a trance or something? Listen, old dickerino. I got some red-hot to pour into your shell-like ear. Just between ourselves. To you I'm spilling it. Why? Because you might help a deserving scribe."

"How much do you need?" Clem asked, absently thrusting a hand into his pocket.

"Nix, nix!" Dugan protested. "It isn't the filthy I'm after. Not this time, old sleuth. Listen! About that stick-up and double murder this afternoon. You got the flash in the last edition—yes?"

"I guess so," Clem said. He wasn't interested. He wondered where Norma had come from; how long she was staying; where she was bound?

"Just a couple of sticks, that's all," Dugan ran on. "It didn't tell you much, did it? A mug pots a guy in a car, scrams, smokes a bull who tries to stop him, and puts a couple of slugs into Sergeant Cooper, who's in plain clothes, and happens to be coming out of a speakeasy. It's all over in two shakes, and the bozo fades. The first guy is dead when he's found, and so's the copper. And the sergeant never got a good squint at the killer—not good enough to register. A good start, eh?"

CLEM nodded and moved toward the desk. He would find out what room Norma was in. He tried to picture how she would look when she opened the door on him, what she would say. He wouldn't tell any one — not even Dugan — until afterward.

But Dugan had hold of his arm, was dragging him into a corner. The reporter was grinning like an ape.

"I beat the other papers on the flash because I was right on the scene," Dugan declared. "Talk about fireworks! Nothing like it ever happened in this town before. Fifty thousand in pretty glassware on the loose, a pair of lovely murders, and the cause of it all still at large. Still at large, Clem, my lad, and likely to be for some time. Why? Because nobody knows who he is, what he looked like. Did I say nobody? Wrong. One man knows."

Dugan chuckled and Clem smiled. He had never seen the man so excited, so jubilant before.

"The mystery killer," Dugan said, and winked. "All the bulls and dicks and a pack of news hounds chasing their tails. Getting nowhere, except dizzy. Why? Because, Clem, you old ex-flatty, how can they put a finger on a guy when they don't know what he looks like?"

"I've got to go upstairs," Clem murmured. "You come around later and I'll—"

"Listen!" Dugan urged. "I know who he is. I know his name. I'm going to find him. I ask you, Clem. Isn't that the coffee for your saucer?"

"Sure," Clem agreed absently.

"It was like this," Dugan continued, before Clem could pull away. "I'm pushing my bunions along Ninth Street when I hear a shot and see a bird hop out of a car and sprint. A bull wakes up, shouts and goes legging after him down the alley. There's another boom and the copper folds to the cobblestones. Next thing I pipe the sergeant rolling out the back door of a speak and giving chase. There's another rattle of musketry, but I'm not waiting. I streaks it for the car that nobody's paying attention to. I find Peck Nelson doubled over on the cushions, groaning and cursing. I know him. He looks at me and spills a few words. In a whisper. I have to bend low to catch 'em. And the next minute he's winked out."

"Told you who'd shot him," Clem said, trying to appear interested, but keeping his eyes on the elevator doors. Norma might be going out, and he didn't want to miss her.

"Lew Kohler. And listen! It wasn't long ago I'm chinning with Lew right here in this hotel. Get that? Here in the lobby. He used to hang out here a lot before you were on the job. That time I'm telling you about he'd come from H. C., where they'd tried to hook him up with a robbery, but they didn't make it stick. I didn't know he teamed with Peck then—didn't suspect he was a mug at all."

Clem tried to appear attentive, but failed to hear half of what the man was saying.

"Well," Dugan resumed, "Peck no sooner draws a last breath than the bulls close in. They ask me did he say anything, and I ask how could a stiff talk. Cagey, I am. I'm keeping the sugar for myself. If I'd spilled it, Lew would have vanished. But now, reading the papers in some hideout, seeing he's in the clear, he'll break cover. That's what I'm waiting for. Like as not he'll breeze in here.

"Lew's a young guy, nice looking and a neat dresser; got curly black hair—a chunk out of the top of his right ear. He's running off with his back to me this afternoon, or I'd of twigged him. The sergeant, too. But the alley's dark, and Cooper lit."

Dugan grinned. "Lew and Peck, masked, stick up a jeweler over on Melrose, beat it with a hatful of swell stuff. The way I got it figured, Lew balks at a split and smokes Peck. A rat if there ever was one, and he ought to burn. You look alive, Clem, if he drifts in here. He'll be heeled, so throw a rod on him first. Get him off by yourself, and whatever you do, don't call the police. Get hold of me. It's my story. That bunch at H. Q. won't like it, but we should worry."

Clem smiled and endeavored to betray enthusiasm. "I'll keep my eyes open," he promised. "Maybe I'm a little rusty, but—"

"Rusty, hell!" Dugan snorted. "You were in this game when the local dicks were boy scouts. You'll know how to handle things. I'll be hoofing around town—looking in here every hour or so. 'Bye."

II

DUGAN scurried off, but Clem did not look after him. He limped a little as he walked toward the desk. His knees weren't as springy as

they used to be. Getting old. Ought to be drawing a pension now, basking somewhere in the sun. Would have if the breaks hadn't been against him. A lot of politics; some of the big bugs covering up and making him the goat. Kicking him out after twenty years.

Just a house dick now, and thankful. Even the hotel was second-class, a bit shabby, run down at the heels like himself. There had been talk of remodeling the building, freshening it up. Competition was keen and business none too good. You could make a new building out of an old one, but you couldn't do that with a man.

The newspaper boys liked to josh Clem, wisecrack, pump him for copy. He didn't mind, and always had a come-back. Some of the plain-clothes men who drifted into the lobby, on business and otherwise, passed remarks that hurt. They were younger, arrogant, impressed with their authority. But Clem tried to take everything good naturedly, recalling, in the past, his own opinion of house detectives.

His eyes strayed to the register, and he heard nothing of what the clerk was telling him. Miss Norma Fairfax, he read. That was the name she had taken going upon the stage. He hadn't objected so much at first, although he had had other plans, hopes; but it was the road that bothered him, the associations, the thought of her being so far away. She had laughed at him, called him a fool. He had said things, too. He wished so much that he hadn't. His temper . . .

Clem's eyes were misty once more, tracing the lines of her signature. He saw she had been given a room on the fourth floor—412. It was one of the smaller, cheaper rooms on the side of the building. He suspected she hadn't much money.

It was after eight now. He was quite sure Norma hadn't come downstairs, and wondered if she had eaten yet. He decided to wait a while longer before going up. He moved back a little, nearer the switchboard, watching the lights wink on and off. She might be calling some one, or some one calling her.

He was still there, his eyes on the elevator door at the moment, when the girl at the switchboard exclaimed, jabbed a bell.

A boy answered the summons. "Chase up to four-twelve and see what's happened," the operator directed impatiently. "The receiver's off the hook. The signal keeps flashing, but I don't get no response."

Clem put out a hand to stop the boy. "I was just going up to the fourth floor," he said, striving to keep his voice normal. "I'll look into it."

HE was trembling when he stepped into the elevator, as he went up, and as he got off and fairly ran down the hall. He didn't know why, but suddenly he was frightened. The room was at the far end of the long hall. Most of the rooms in this wing were vacant, out of order. There were scaffolds along one wall, where painters had been working; a litter of plaster that hadn't been swept up.

He stood a moment in front of the door before he knocked, his heart pounding. When he did knock there was no response, but he imagined he heard some one moving across the floor, and he repeated the summons, louder this time.

"Who's there?" a voice demanded. It was Norma's voice.

"Look to your phone," he ordered. "You've left the receiver off the hook."

There was a pause, footsteps. Then

Norma called back, "Thank you. I've replaced it."

That was all. She hadn't come to the door. Clem remained, staring at the smooth, numbered panel, as if hopeful of seeing through it. He wanted to knock again, call her by her name, but somehow he hesitated. Perhaps she was dressing. He'd better wait. At least she was all right.

He was starting away when a new voice reached him. A man's voice. Clem wheeled swiftly, stepped close to the door and pressed his ear against it. The voice was sharp, lifted in anger. He heard Norma's lowered tones. And suddenly he realized she was crying.

As his hand was raised to thunder on the door a better plan flashed into his mind. He fished for his pass-key. His fingers shook as he guardedly inserted the key, turned it softly in the lock. He swung the door wide and stepped into the room.

His eyes swept to Norma, and for an instant nothing else registered. She was staring at him in alarm. He shut the door and stood with his back against it. The man in the room, astounded by the sudden intrusion, merely gaped at the newcomer. He was bareheaded, his hands thrust deep into his coat pockets.

Clem ignored him. He stood still, looking at the girl—his girl. He saw her face change, her lips part. Then a low cry broke from her, scarcely more than a whimper. She stumbled toward him.

"Pop! Oh, pop!"

Always she had called him that. She was in his arms and his arms were tight about her. He was trembling, blinking back the tears, holding her close to him.

"Norma—honey," he choked.

"Oh, pop! You—here. Where—how—"

"You passed me in the lobby," he said. "You looked square at me and never even smiled."

"But I—I didn't expect—didn't know," she stammered, her tear-blurred eyes searching his face. "You—work here? It was you—a while ago—about the phone?"

"Sure. The same old racket—in a different way. House detective." He smiled. "It's all I'm good for."

"Say, what's all this?" The man beyond spoke up curtly, bringing Clem to earth again. "A surprise party?"

"This is—my father," Norma answered tremulously.

"And the house dick in the bargain, eh? I suppose that gave him the right to bust in here like he did."

"What are you doing here?" Clem asked.

"Visiting. Don't go telling me it isn't permitted. I know all about that."

"He's a friend of mine, pop."

"Why's he here—in your room?"

"We were talking over some business, Norma and me," the man explained. "Don't that satisfy you?"

Clem walked up to the man, eyed him intently under the shaded light. He was a presentable young man, well dressed, with curly black hair. He saw more than that, as Norma's visitor turned slightly. There was a notch in the top of his right ear.

"What's your name?" Clem asked.

"He's Mr. Kohler, pop," the girl spoke up quickly. "He—"

"Lew Kohler?"

"You said it," the man returned flippantly.

III

CLEM marveled at his own self-control, that he was able to fight down the horror that swept over him. Lew Kohler here, in Norma's

room! And they were friends! The thing stunned him.

"What's eating you now?" Kohler snapped. "Still sore? You needn't be. Everything's right and proper, isn't it? Norma knew I was calling tonight—and that's more than you can say for yourself."

"Where'd you meet Norma?" Clem asked.

"In Philly," the girl answered. "Lew's in the show business."

Clem nodded. "I see. The show business." He contrived a smile. He must be careful now, give nothing away. Kohler would be armed, and quick to act if he suspected. A killer he had been, a killer he would be again. Clem wondered if he could get at the gun on his own hip, cover the man in time. He hadn't used the gun in years. It was a standing joke, among the boys, him packing one. They called it a prop, laid bets that it wouldn't go off. Nothing ever happened around the hotel to make gun play necessary. Nothing until now.

"Go chase yourself," Kohler told him. "We're talking private. You can come back in ten minutes."

Clem didn't move. "What were you crying about when I came in?" he asked the girl.

"It—it was nothing, pop. Honest. I been sort of—nervous and upset," Norma struggled. "The show closed last week and—"

"What happened to the phone?" Clem persisted. He knew she was lying, endeavoring to protect her companion. The thought seared him, but he tried to speak and act calmly.

"I must have brushed against the table and knocked the thing over," Kohler explained. His eyes were upon the girl now. "We were talking and didn't notice."

"Talking?" Clem repeated.

"That's what I said!"

Clem half turned to the girl as if to question her, and at the same time slid a hand under his coat. His damp fingers touched the gun, eased it from his pocket. Instantly he whirled, the gun out, waist-high, leveled.

"Don't move, Kohler!" he snapped. "Keep your hands in sight."

The man, taken by surprise, froze. Norma recoiled, stifling a scream.

"Get his gun, Norma," Clem ordered.

"Say," Kohler began, "what the—?"

"You hear me, Norma?" Clem broke in. "Do as I tell you."

The white-faced girl stumbled toward Kohler. The man was smiling now, but his eyes were narrowed, glinting.

"What's this fool play mean?" he demanded.

"Get your mind working! You—"

Clem swore and his finger tightened upon the trigger, but it was too late then. He groaned. As Norma stepped in front of Kohler, the man's arm shot out. It looped her waist, jerked her against him, screening his body. The next instant the snout of a gun appeared over the girl's cringing shoulder.

"Let go that rod!" Kohler barked.

CLEM slowly lowered the weapon. What a fool he had been! Dumb!

He might have known the fugitive wasn't to be snared so easily.

"Drop it!" Kohler snarled. "Quick now!"

The gun, released from Clem's fingers, thumped to the rug. Kohler laughed and flung the girl aside. She tottered, barely saved herself from falling. The man paid no attention.

"Just what's on your mind?" he flung at Clem. "Shoot it, snoop! You throwing a gat on me just because I'm here talking to your girl? Is that all?"

"Lew!" Norma's voice was touched with panic. "Please — please! He didn't mean anything."

"Didn't he? I'm not so sure. But I'm going to make sure." Kohler's glittering eyes searched Clem's lined face. "It looks funny to me. The gun play, I mean. You'd think—"

He checked himself and moved warily toward the detective. "How'd you come to know my name—all of it? I don't remember seeing you before, here or nowheres else."

"I never saw you before either," Clem stated quietly. He had to think fast, get hold of himself. It wasn't too late. His one blunder wasn't to spoil everything.

"Lew," Norma pleaded, "put away the gun. Please! It's all right. Pop was just—just mad."

"Yeah? Well, I'm mad now," Kohler retorted. "I want to know why your old man waves a cannon under my nose—why he pulls that crack about getting my mind working. You going to explain?"

Clem wasn't explaining. That would have been suicide. The fugitive must have thought himself in the clear or he wouldn't have risked being abroad tonight. What business he had with Norma, Clem could not fathom. It frightened him. Norma must be kept out of this affair at all cost.

Clem shrugged. "Maybe I was a little hasty," he said. "I hadn't seen Norma for a year—even heard from her." He had to stall, bluff his way out somehow, placate the man whose suspicions seemed to be rising. "If you and Norma want to talk, I'll go along."

He turned and started for the door. Once outside, away from the gun that menaced him, he could frame other plans.

"Hold on!" Kohler cried, walking up to him. "Not so fast. You're going to explain first."

He glanced down to see Clem's gun on the floor, kicked it under the bed. Norma crept up beside him, pleading, but he ignored her. The girl looked into her father's troubled face, into Kohler's sinister one. She struck suddenly and with all her strength, her clenched hands descending upon Kohler's right wrist.

The blow jolted the gun from the man's fingers. He cursed and turned. Clem's spurting fist cracked against his jaw, sent him sprawling. Before he could get to his feet again, Clem was upon him. The pair crashed to the floor, rolled over, their arms and legs threshing.

Kohler was young, powerful, and the blow he had received seemed not to have distressed him. He wriggled and twisted like an eel in Clem's embrace. He drove a knee into the detective's stomach, loosened an arm and drove two blows into his face. They hurt, and Clem's grip relaxed. Instantly Kohler rolled free, lurched to his feet and made a dive for the gun he had lost.

Norma cried out and darted toward the weapon. As the man stooped, she kicked it. The gun skittered along the rug, and Clem, on his knees now, still groggy, fell upon it. With a snarl, Kohler reached for a chair, hurled it across the room. Clem threw up an arm, partly warded it off, but the impact sent him backward.

Instead of rushing him, the killer dropped to the floor, raked Clem's gun from under the bed, leveled it. Norma screamed. Clem swept aside the

wrecked chair, rolled over, groped for the gun that had been knocked from his fingers. He was faint and dizzy, and his eyes were playing tricks on him.

He saw, dimly, that Kohler's gun was aimed. The man was frantically squeezing the t r i g g e r, swearing. Nothing happened. He flung the gun at Clem and reared to his feet. He had stumbled halfway across the floor, cursing like a madman, before Clem found the weapon he sought, lifted it, rasped a warning.

"Stay put, Kohler!"

IV

THE man halted. Clem, breathing hard, swayed to his feet. His battered lips patterned a smile.

"I guess your gun's in better working order than mine," he gibed. "It's been used a lot more. Used to-day. All primed to use again, wasn't it?"

Kohler did not answer. His dark face was livid with rage, his jaw was swollen and blood trickled from his nose.

"The first time my gun's been called on to perform in years," Clem resumed, speaking s l o w l y, waiting for his strength to come back. "It must be rusty and all gummed up." He kept smiling. "Just a prop, the boys labeled it. I guess they were right. Lucky."

"Pop!" Norma was beside him, supporting him, crying softly against his shoulder. "You—hurt, pop?"

"Nothing at all, honey," he assured her. "A good turn you did me, Norma. I'm proud of you." His left arm went around the girl, but his right one, his eyes as well, held unswervingly upon the fugitive.

"You wanted an explanation a while ago, Kohler. You'll get it. I let too much slip, and it scared you, didn't it?"

He moved to the phone on the table, lifted the receiver from the hook. He spoke crisply, bending down to the mouthpiece, but his eyes and the gun he held remained fixed upon his prisoner.

"Hello . . . Clem speaking. Have you seen Dugan about?"

"You better lay off," Kohler broke out. "Lay off, I tell you! You'll find yourself—"

"He ought to be around pretty soon," Clem went on as if he had not heard. "When he comes in, send him up here—four-twelve. Tell him I'm waiting . . . What? . . . No, no trouble. Just a little story . . . Thanks."

"Who's Dugan?" Kohler demanded, as the detective hung up.

"You met him once, talked to him."

"A dick?"

Clem shook his head. "A newshawk. I promised to get in touch with him if I spotted you. This is his story—a big one. The police will be sore when they find out what Dugan's put over."

"He's put nothing over yet," Kohler snarled.

"Dugan expected you'd drift around the hotel this evening. He had a tip from a friend of yours. A friend you'd double-crossed."

"Yeah?"

"Peck Nelson."

Kohler started, but covered it with a laugh. "Peck's dead. He was dead when the bulls found him."

"He didn't talk to a bull," Clem said. "That's where you've blundered—reading the papers. You figured yourself in the clear."

"Me?" Kohler repeated. "What you driving at? I haven't seen Peck in a year."

"You shot him in the car this afternoon," Clem charged. "You'd pulled

a stick-up before that. You drilled Peck, you murdered a copper who tried to nab you, sent a couple slugs into Sergeant Cooper. And you would have smoked me, if you'd been using your own gun."

Kohler's hands were clenched and he swayed as he spoke. "That's a pack of lies."

"Peck died — w h i s p e r i n g your name."

"Who says so? That reporter?" Kohler sneered. "What'll it get him? What's all this going to get you? I'm leaving here before this Dugan guy shows up. You'll want me to. You'll keep your trap shut afterward—tight shut." His eyes switched toward the girl who stood against the wall. "She's the reason."

"You'll leave her out of this," Clem snapped.

"The hell I will! If I'm nabbed, she'll go with me. You want that to happen?"

"It won't happen," Clem answered. He spoke quietly, defiantly, but his pulse started drumming. This was something he had not anticipated. The very thought of it chilled him.

HE turned to the girl. She looked so frightened that for an instant his heart stopped beating. "Norma," he said, "how long have you known this man? Why is he here to-night?"

"I—I met him in Philly—two weeks ago," the girl faltered. "The show closed—he was to get me another engagement. We reached here at noon to-day, and—"

"This afternoon," Clem demanded. "Where were you?"

"I checked my bags at the station. Lew said he had business—for me to meet him there later. I—I walked around. About five he met me. He gave me a package to put in my suitcase—take care of for him. He told me to come to this hotel and he'd see me after dinner."

The girl's stricken eyes jumped to the open suitcase on the bed. There was a package, wrapped in a newspaper, on top of her clothes. Clem looked at it, looked across at Kohler.

"You had Norma take care of the stuff you'd s t o l e n," he charged. "Afraid you'd be picked up—searched. You had her bring it here—and now you've called for it."

Kohler's lips twisted. "Smart dick, aren't you?" he jeered. "She knew what she was doing. Don't let her—"

"No, no!" the girl cried, her hands fluttering. "You've got to believe me, pop. I didn't know what was in the package until Lew called. I—I never thought anything about it until—when I took it out of the bag and it broke open—"

"Go on," Clem urged, as she hesitated.

"I—I was scared—terribly scared. Lew tried to tell me—it was all right—he said it belonged to him—his family. I knew he was lying. He wanted me to leave with him—to-night. I wouldn't listen and—and he threatened me."

The girl's voice sank to a whisper. "He told me I'd have to go with him now," she continued brokenly. "Admitted he'd stolen the jewelry—might be suspected. I'd have to help him—or we'd both be in trouble. I wouldn't listen. I begged him to leave. He just—just laughed, and when I started crying he—he hit me. I knocked over the phone and—"

"It brought me." Clem's voice was none too steady. "It had to happen that way. I'm glad."

"You're believing me?" Norma pleaded.

"Of course," he answered.

"You and who else?" Kohler broke in with a grimace. "The cops? Yeah? With the stuff there in her bag and me here? Sweet chance. I'll talk plenty, if it comes to a show-down. Want me to? Want to see your darling daughter take a long rap?"

Clem said nothing. So that was it! He looked into the killer's leering, hostile face. It sickened him. The man's life was at stake. If nabbed, he would not hesitate to carry out his threat, drag Norma down with him. He could, with his lies. Clem couldn't protect her. The evidence was too damning.

"Think fast!" Kohler shot out.

Clem did think fast, but he remained silent, stricken by this dread extremity. He was afraid, if he spoke, that the words would tear his throat. His anguished mind labored crazily, futilely. What was he to do? To let this smirking killer escape was unthinkable; but to hold him until Dugan arrived, until the police swarmed in . . .

V

HIS shoulders sagged a little and his gun hand wavered. His eyes dropped to the shiny, black weapon, held there. Here was a way out! A mere twitch of his finger—even now hard against the trigger—and Lew Kohler's lips would be sealed, Norma spared. Why not? The man was vicious. He had killed, would kill again. He should be blotted out. Even a slug through his heart would be too swift, too merciful a death for him.

Kohler's derisive laugh brought Clem alert, his eyes grim with purpose. He stiffened and lifted the gun. But the man it covered, apparently interpreting the detective's thoughts, rocked back on his heels and grimaced.

"Forget it!" he mocked. "You won't shoot. You don't dare. You'd have too much explaining to do afterward. The police might want to know how come I was found in this room, and what the girl occupying it had to do with me. No, you won't take that chance. You won't risk it. The game isn't worth that."

Kohler laughed again, whipped out a handkerchief and wiped the blood from his face. He was cool now, brazen with assurance, scorning the gun that was no longer a menace. He had Clem licked. No question of it.

"A tough break for you, ain't it?" he gibed. "The big moment in the life of a house dick—a chance to make yourself a hero and get your name in the headlines. And you've got to pass it up!"

Turning, he strode to the bed. Clem watched as the man lifted the package from the suitcase, held it up with a provocative grin at the two who looked on, abruptly ripped open an end of it.

"Want to get an eyeful?" he jeered. "Want to see the pretty—trinkets?"

He tilted the package. A cascade of fire poured upon the coverlet. It became a glittering mound of jewel-incrusted bracelets, rings, necklaces; of smoldering unset stones—blue-white, topaz, blood red and green and sapphire. They flamed wonderously in the narrow dingy room, shaming the puny lights overhead.

Kohler chortled as his fingers raked among them. With a leer at Clem, who stood rigid, he began to stuff the gems into his pockets. His movements were swift. Bit by bit the bed was cleared of its jeweled splendor.

Clem uttered no word of protest, made no attempt to stay the man's purpose. Kohler straightened, buttoned his coat, crossed the floor to where he had left his hat.

"Get this, you!" he flung out, his eyes shifting from Clem to the girl. "I'm blowing. You're not stopping me, and you'll keep your traps shut. The both of you."

Norma shrank back against the wall. Clem's face was a hard, gray mask.

"You can't get away," he said. "Not now. Dugan will be coming upstairs. He'll—"

"I won't be meeting him," Kohler broke in. "Don't let that worry you. I'm leaving through the window. Safer."

"Window?" Clem repeated. "There's no fire escape—"

"Don't I know it? Say, I know this house like a book. Used to be my hangout. I used to have this same room—this one—four-twelve. I been thinking about it for some time." Kohler grinned. "There's a roof eight-ten feet below this window, and a fire escape down from it to the alley. Yeah! I took that route once before, with a bull hammering on the door. Easy!"

"Easy—if you make it," Clem answered.

"How'd you mean that?" Kohler retorted, suspicion flaring into his eyes. "You planning something?" He moved up to Clem. "Think maybe you'll pot me when—"

Brisk footsteps along the hall outside, a bang on the door, cut the man short. With an oath he snatched the gun from Clem's limp, yielding fingers backed off.

"I say, Clem!" It was Dugan's voice, "You in there?"

Kohler hissed a warning, turned and sped toward the window. Clem reached out and clicked off the lights.

"Hurry!" he urged in a whisper.

Kohler raised the window. It was pitch dark outside. The room was deep with shadow, except for the faint light from the transom. Clem saw the blurred form of the killer as he slid a leg over the sill, as his body followed swiftly. For an instant, hanging by his hands, just his hat was visible. Then he let go.

The pounding on the door was renewed, the knob rattled. Clem turned on the lights and Norma rushed to him, sobbing. He put an arm about her and smiled.

He was glad he had thought to turn off the lights, glad that Dugan had knocked when he did. It all helped. Lew Kohler might have known the house like a book, escaped from this very room once, but he hadn't figured that the roof below was no longer there, that the building had been razed months before and a deep excavation yawned in its place.

Clem opened the door to greet Dugan. Once the story had been told they would go down and "discover" the fugitive. There would probably be a host of theories to account for Kohler's broken body, with the damning evidence on it, being found in the pit. But, trusting Dugan, the right one wouldn't see print.

Criminal and Spy

A True Story*

By
Richard Wilmer Rowan

Titin, King of French Rogues, Joins the Secret Service Long Enough to Do a Dangerous Job for Which He Was Peculiarly Suited

He saw a dim form at the end of the rope

AS Captain Pierre Lautrec of the French secret service had predicted, the young Swiss spy arrested in Thonon was eager to tell all he knew. Unfortunately, however, he did not know much about the German secret service, which had but briefly employed him.

The poor fellow was petrified with terror. Certain of his own guilt, he was expecting to be shot within a very few hours. Lautrec, who questioned him in company with his assistant, Paul de Grenadan, and their American ally, Lieutenant Jeff Beauregard, of the counter-espionage service, A. E. F., found it needless to play upon the prisoner's emotions. He was already too emotional; and it was necessary instead to suppress his fears and to a degree brace up his sagging spirits so that he could coherently reply to the few questions it seemed sure he would be able to answer.

His name, said he, was Franz Borel. He had been engaged to make the round-trip to Thonon by a man called

*Much of the material used in this series of exploits of Secret Service the author has obtained from special sources, including government records and statements from persons still active in international secret service work. In some cases, for obvious reasons, names, places, and even dates have frequently had to be changed.

Heinrich Dichmann, who had paid him twenty francs in gold, and promised him twenty more upon his returning with a small piece of luggage which a lady at the French lake resort would turn over to him.

"How were you to identify the lady?" Lautrec queried.

"I—I wasn't, sir. That is—whoever approached me and handed me a check for a piece of luggage—she was the right one. She would have recognized me by the bag I carried, which was to be turned over to her."

"Careless way of transacting important business, didn't that occur to you?"

"No, sir. Because, you see, Dichmann didn't call it important—just a little errand, he said. He would have attended to it himself, to oblige the lady—an old friend—but he just happened now to be called away. And he couldn't very well telegraph her and ask her to meet a different boat than the one they'd already arranged."

Lautrec, de Grenadan and Jeff by turns tried prodding him. How had he ever come to meet such a man as Heinrich Dichmann?

"My brother sent me to him. My brother's an electrician in Berne, and a good one. Dichmann hired him to fix several electric bells in a big house a little way outside of the city. Dichmann had to have my brother out there several times. And then one day recently he asked my brother to recommend a reliable fellow who could make a trip to Thonon for him, and my brother recommended me."

"Thereby presenting you with a short cut to prison, or worse."

"WORSE!" gulped Franz Borel. "Oh, God—I was a fool not to suppose there was something tricky about it. Forty francs gold, just to take a pleasant trip along the lake—"

"You were worse than a fool," Lautrec observed. "You were helping a spy, participating in espionage. You haven't a chance, my friend. If I send you to Paris, in a week you will be tried by court-martial. In a month you'll stand against a wall at Vincennes. They will blindfold your eyes—"

He paused, seeing the other grow so pallid he appeared about to faint.

"By the way," Jeff put in, "just where is that big house near Berne which you say had a good deal of trouble with its electric bells?"

Borel, trying abjectly to be attentive and answer at once, swallowed hard and said: "My brother isn't a talkative sort. He always seemed kind of unwilling to tell about his trips out there. But I know the place myself. You take a street car to Kirchenfeld, and then it's only about fifteen minutes' brisk walk, there at the end of the Willading Road."

The three secret agents hardly appeared to notice that he had run out of breath and broken off his narrative. Their thoughts were uniformly far away; for the house mentioned at the end of the Willading Road beyond Kirchenfeld seemed to them a very vital matter now, indeed.

It was identified by them as the headquarters in Switzerland of Von Richber, operating chief of the Austro-German espionage system. And in front of them, hopeless, intimidated, and completely in their power, sat a young man whose brother had more than once been bidden to that house to repair the electric wiring.

Alarm bells! Von Richber's place was noted for them. Because of them and many another deadly safeguard

no counter-spy of France, Italy, or England had been able to penetrate the place in thirty months or more of trying.

"How do you and your brother get along, Franz?" Lautrec inquired casually.

"Oh, very well, sir. Erik is a good sort. I'm sure he had no idea I was running into danger. He's six years older than me, and ever since our father died, he has always been more than just a brother to me—except, of course—"

"This one ghastly mistake of his."

"Yes, sir. It'll break Erik's heart when he hears what—what's happened to me."

"Will he revenge himself, do you think, on Heinrich Dichmann?"

"Maybe he will, sir. Erik's got spirit—he's smart and energetic. If he'd come on this fool's errand now—you wouldn't have grabbed him so easy."

The three inquisitors laughed. "Oh, yes, we would," said Jeff. "Maybe you noticed that I limp. Well, I got that way when I was with the Canadians in '15, and fought in Flanders against the Prussian Guard—a good deal bigger and stronger Germans than your big brother—"

"Erik's no German," Franz protested. "I never said it. He's Swiss like me, and he's neutral. Though, of course, he's out to make money, like anybody else. Dichmann paid him well, and as it was his trade—fixing wires—"

"Suppose," said Pierre Lautrec, "we got in touch with this brother of yours who's so neutral. Suppose we told him that he could save your life, my friend. That he could do that and even more—earn himself a certain sum of money and run no risks whatever while doing it. What do you suppose his answer would be?"

The prisoner sprang to his feet, his deathly pallor swept away by a surging flush of hope. "Oh, God, captain, sir, please tell Erik—tell him what you want. He'll save me. I know he will. Maybe even if you want to try kidnaping Dichmann . . . Erik, I know," he gasped, "will do anything to save my life, captain. He'll do anything you want!"

Erik Borel was, in truth, going to do a good deal.

II

VERY carefully guarded negotiations soon were proceeding at Berne with the electrician whose younger brother's peril could not be exaggerated. But meanwhile, the town of Thonon had experienced a second sensation, surpassing in publicity the arrest of Franz Borel and the woman spy called Ernestine Herault. At midnight, two days after that first event, a band of ruffians led, it was discovered later, by a woman of the lower sort, known as La Rouquine, swooped down upon the local jail, overpowered one warder, killed another, and gravely wounded two elderly gendarmes. The ruffians had rescued the woman.

Franz Borel had been awakened by the violent assault on the jail, the rescuers furiously surging toward Mlle. Herault's place of imprisonment. Franz cowered in his cell. He did not cry out or beg to be set free also. He assured Lautrec and Jeff afterward that he had suddenly come to feel much safer in the custody of the French. Yet, however true that may have been, it was a bad blunder on the part of *Mademoiselle's* champions to overlook the brother of the Berne electrician.

For the Berne undertaking, Jeff

Beauregard was now elevated to responsible leadership, since both Lautrec and de Grenadan were well known by sight to the police of the Swiss capital, and would there be shadowed and hampered at every turn. In consequence, Jeff had Lautrec's other valued assistant, Gaston Moreau, associated with him, and was coöperating with a British agent named Cartwright and an aggressive officer of the Italian secret corps, Captain Passini.

Erik Borel, as his brother expected, had declared himself eager to supply valuable information about the interior of Von Richber's Berne headquarters in return for a formal French guarantee that no harm save temporary internment would befall young Franz.

Erik, it appeared, had spent a good deal of time studying and reflecting upon the safeguards which surrounded the German secret headquarters.

The first evening after he arrived in Berne, Jeff, with the Italian captain and Moreau, and guided by the local electrician, took a street car to Kirchenfeld. A walk of about a quarter of an hour brought them—in pairs, and keeping an inconspicuous distance apart—to the end of the Willading Road. Less than five hundred metres beyond, said Borel, by way of a straight, deserted avenue they could reach the grounds surrounding their goal.

"This building has two wings," he went on to explain. "The rooms you wish to have visited are in the left one."

"How can you be certain?" demanded Moreau, who was anxious about treachery, since their position as active belligerents in a neutral country was at best a hazardous one.

"You will soon understand why I am so sure of these things," Borel answered. "The most intricate system of alarm bells is in the left wing. Naturally, that then in the one part of the building thought most in need of the protection."

"AND these are the bells you have helped to keep in repair?" Jeff asked.

"Yes, lieutenant. I am speaking only the truth. My brother is a hostage in France. That is surely guarantee I will neither lie to you nor betray you.

"The whole place is electrically wired, of course," he continued. "Some of it so intricately arranged that whenever it breaks they have had to call me in as an expert. None there of their own staff is competent to detect the short circuit. In addition, at night there are watchdogs about—and pitfalls, I am told, are concealed in the yard, covering the windows of the private offices.

"In the colonel's own study certain boards in the floor have bells hidden beneath them. A false step would start one terrible commotion, I expect. And what is much worse, there are keys always left with apparent carelessness in various special locks on desk and cabinet drawers. These, though never needing attention from me, I happen to know are electrically connected. I saw some of the contacts. And the current is strong!"

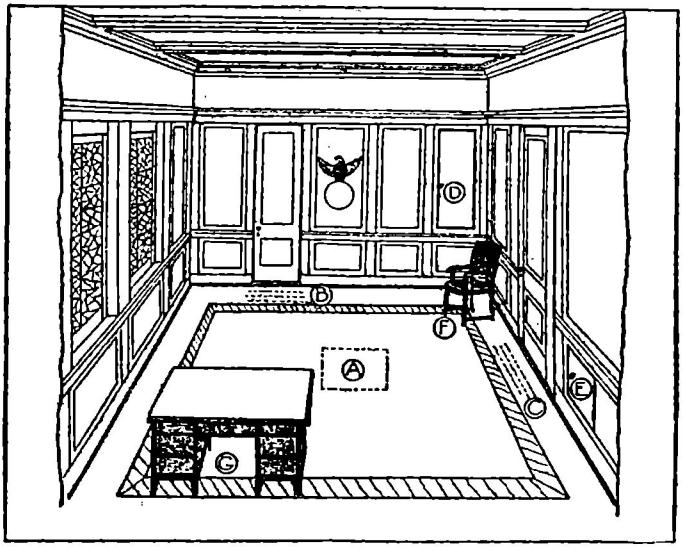
"There has long been a rumor about," the Italian officer exclaimed, "that one of Von Richber's secretaries, who'd been warned but whose memory was bad, was unlucky enough to electrocute himself when he laid hold of a desk key ever so lightly."

"It is built like a scene in a theater, really," Borel assured them. "I know—I have done some theater wiring. There is even a trap-door hidden beneath the larger center rug in the colonel's study. And several of his

armchairs can be made unsafe to sit down in. They are traps, too—"

"That hospitable colonel!" said Passini.

Jeff finished jotting down a few notes. "Some of this information of Moreau with a bland smile— "was quite willing to take Borel's word for it that this is the place. We needn't have troubled to come at all. And as for the German sanctum's hazards—" His gesture was faintly derisive.



Sketch of interior of the secret service headquarters at Berne, Switzerland

A—Trap-door concealed beneath rug. B and C—Electrically connected floor signals. D—Cabinet electrically protected. E—Imitation wall safe, protected by electric current of high voltage F—Chair electrically wired as spy trap. G—Desk with key left in special lock and electrically connected to shock the unwary intruder

yours, Borel, must be guess work—unless all their wiring has been chronically bad?"

"I have entered confidentially, lieutenant, three times," the Swiss craftsman explained. "The servants have talked a little, too, of course. Several discharged soldiers are employed about the place. One has lost an eye, and another the left arm. They never chat with any one, but are vigilant and surly."

"Cripples doing guard duty—!" The Italian captain shrugged. As he was the senior officer, Jeff and Moreau waited for him to propose some further move.

"We shall only attract undesirable attention," he decided, "if we linger out here. I for one"—he favored

"But it's true, I'm afraid, sir," the electrician admitted gravely, "not one of you gentlemen can hope to get near enough to the colonel's study to be in any danger from wires, keys and bells, trap-doors and other trickery. What with the sentries and watchdogs, the pitfalls and wires strung up on the outside, the inside's as far off as—as the Matterhorn."

Jeff objected to such early pessimism —while Gaston Moreau seemed disposed to leave a hard decision to his allies.

"Tell me," Passini spoke sharply now, "you, Borel, could draw accurately a plan revealing all you actually know of the place—both within and without?"

"Yes, sir—of course—"

"Then that's all my man will require, I think."

"Your man, captain?" Jeff inquired.

"Our man—forgive me. I have already enlisted him for such an enterprise," said Passini. "His name is Baptistin Travail—"

"Sounds sort of familiar," said Jeff.

"To familiar to me," Moreau snapped out. "He's notorious and has exiled himself from France—for the duration of the war."

"A deserter?" said Jeff.

Passini quickly corrected the American's surmise. "No, lieutenant. He is brave enough, as you yourself shall see. Baptistin Travail is one of Europe's most original and audacious criminals."

III

THE time was not far distant when Jeff Beauregard would heartily agree with his Italian colleague. Passini as a secret service agent had once made frequent journeys into Austria, and had first encountered Baptistin Travail in the half-world of Vienna—the spy recognizing a celebrated criminal, but the criminal failing to identify the spy. Passini had found the French rogue amusing. While Baptistin—known to the whole Continental underworld as "Titin" and "the King of the Alibis"—had been attracted to Passini, as well as mystified by his unrevealed though obviously subterranean occupation.

The great war had burst upon Europe. Italy, on the verge of declaring against the Central Powers, had summoned home Passini and many another underground operative. That was in the early spring of 1915. In the winter of 1917 Passini had once more encountered Baptistin in a shady café of Milan. The Italian captain was not at the moment in uniform, and so his outlaw acquaintance readily accepted him as a fugitive from military discipline like himself.

Knowing the manifold accomplishments and dexterities of Travail, the shrewd Passini had straightway begun to consider making some special use of him. Secret service—how easily a man like the King of the Alibis would find a rôle in that complex drama of modern warfare!

Passini, in the guise of a commercial traveller, with Baptistin provided a passport and a whole new set of officially fraudulent identity papers, had eventually come to Switzerland to determine what might be done there in the way of tormenting Von Richber, Meyer, and their horde of shadows and informers. The prospective combination with Jeff Beauregard, Cartwright, Lautrec's man, Moreau, and the timely intelligence vended by Franz Borel's brother, had fortunately developed soon afterward.

"Baptistin," the Italian captain confided to Jeff, "has boasted to me of several of his more remarkable exploits. For example, in 1911 he contrived to empty the safe in the office of the *Messageries Maritimes*, and then proved in court that he had been playing billiards with a sergeant of gendarmes and a fat wine merchant from Barcelona at the time the steamship office was robbed. There, indeed, was an alibi worthy of a monarch!

"He prides himself on his thoroughness and painstaking preparations—always. Did he not walk the entire length of the railroad line from Brindisi to Calais before selecting the exact spot where his confederates could best throw a signal, and cause the famous Calais-Brindisi express to slow down

and stop, enabling him to climb aboard!"

"A big haul, that time, I dare say?" Jeff guessed.

"No—Baptistin admits the joke was on him. He got away with a large metal case stuffed full of British bank notes.

"A gigantic coup—or so it appeared until, in seclusion, he and two accomplices had a chance to examine their prize. Every one of the notes had been officially cancelled!"

AS this extraordinary recruit was likely to feel uneasy in the presence of a French military detective, it was arranged that Gaston Moreau should absent himself from all the preliminaries. Passini and the American lieutenant met Baptistin Travail in out-of-the-way resorts, and conveyed to him such information as they obtained through Erik Borel. Jeff found the criminal entertaining, and, after their first rather reserved meeting, a surprisingly amiable, engaging companion. Travail had the true cosmopolitan's ironic view of local events. Even a world war he treated as a slightly outmoded and provincial form of hysteria.

But any prospect of an unusual adventure excited him.

"Only that my father was a thief and my mother an habitual drunkard—I, too, might have landed in the secret service in my youth," he said once to Passini, almost wistfully. "It would give me all the thrills and intrigue my spirit craves—and yet I, like yourself, captain, would have become an officer—and a lawbreaker—by government authority."

For three evenings in succession then, assisted by the Italian, Jeff, and the knowing Swiss electrician, Baptistin rode out from the city and cautiously scouted the grounds and the building he never for an instant doubted he would penetrate.

On the fourth night, a very dark one, he pronounced himself ready, even eager, to begin his great experiment. And so they added both Gaston Moreau and the British agent, Cartwright, to their little force, making the journey to Kirchenfeld and beyond in an ancient motor car which Borel had hired and drove.

Baptistin's sensitive avoidance of other Frenchmen was still humored, Moreau consenting to call himself Moreno and appear as a colleague of Passini's.

Borel had managed to supply the raider with a small kit of burglar tools, rubber gloves, a heavy automatic revolver, and a formidable knife which was a weapon much more to his liking. Baptistin carried a good length of rope wound like a sash around his waist, and had a gas mask swung up under his chin at the "alert."

It had been Erik Borel's final effort on behalf of his imprisoned younger brother—this warning in regard to the probability of poison gas. Passini and Jeff for a moment glanced uneasily at Baptistin Travail; would he think better of his promise, resign from the illegal expedition on the spot? The vault or strong room of the enemy chief of espionage might be supposed to enjoy every conceivable modern safeguard—except jets of live steam. And it was Baptistin himself who argued that no steam could be kept on tap at all hours to scald the intruder, without at least one of the chimneys disclosing signs of a fire beneath some boiler.

The building in question, a large and placid-looking villa modeled after an English country house, suggested none

of the perils that Borel—and many a local rumor—vividly ascribed to it.

"IF the police are summoned," said Passini, "we're all in the same leaky boat, you understand. This is as contrary to Swiss law as—as a murder would be—"

"As my murder will be if the Germans got hold of me, eh, captain?" Baptistin interrupted cheerfully. "But never fear—I'm not marked for a hero's death. No German will even *hear* me inside. And the Swiss police alarm me less than a threat of indigestion from yesterday's breakfast."

"We'll wait for you till after dawn," Jeff assured him. "If you should have to make a break for it, and are being pursued—fire one shot. We'll come running to your aid, I promise."

"But don't I know this is secret service?" the young Latin adventurer objected. "I should not think of firing unless overpowered and surrounded. And there can hardly be enough men lodged in a house of that size to accomplish all that!"

They shook hands with him hopefully. "Best of luck! Whatever you find in writing, we want," Passini urged. "Whatever you find in cash—that is yours, besides the bonus promised you."

"I understand, *messieurs*. And I thank each one of you! Whether or not I am able to bring you anything of value I cannot tell. But," he prophesied proudly, "my breaking in is bound to be historic."

IV

HE left them standing by the motor car. The last glimpse they had of him was of a stocky, broad-shouldered, muscular figure, with head lowered, stealthy, resolute, disappearing suddenly into the shadows.

Since there were watchdogs lurking in front, Baptistin circled far around and approached from behind a screen of outbuildings at the rear. Since there were pitfalls, and live wires, and tricky alarms spread about to betray him, he contrived without making any noise to scale the roof of the virtually unoccupied right wing.

And, since he was in Switzerland, he regarded it as highly appropriate that he should advance upon the inviolate left wing in the manner of a mountain climber.

Making his length of rope fast around a chimney, he lowered himself to a window on the second floor. One hour after shaking hands with the counter-espionage officers he was well inside the stronghold of their enemy.

He had proceeded with the greatest amount of deliberation. He knew now he must be even more cautious as he crept nearer and nearer to the quarters held so intricately secure. He used a tiny electric torch, shedding the merest hair-line of light before him. In his other hand he held ready not a weapon, but a pair of wire nippers. He was anxious to cut every electrical connection that came within his view.

Erik Borel had provided him a roughly accurate diagram of the ground floor of the building. And this he had studied and memorized, so that he knew when he at length had come to the colonel's own private room.

He found it to be unlocked—a most disturbing sign. Shrewd men fearing nocturnal invasion and having confidential affairs of State to hide seldom if ever leave a key unturned, unless they are very well satisfied with what secret hiding places they may have!

Baptistin, pushing open the door a little way, peered in, listening. He pushed it further open, and then he got down on his hands and knees to creep, since here was to be found the seat of Erik Borel's most threatful predictions. Each floor board as he came to it must be tried, and with the lightest touch. And now and again, when he caught a very faint vibration, he was warned in time that his whole weight would, indeed, have set a bell to jangling and roused the foreign household.

He flashed his tiny light upon surbase and molding. He found wires as he had expected. This elaborate trap had been crudely—and, no doubt, hurriedly—devised since the last time the room had been redecorated. It was, in truth, a slick enough job to trip up the unwary prowler. But when one hoped to frustrate Titin one rose, *monsieur,* before dawn . . .

The criminal's handy nippers cut through every wire.

He still, however, in no way relaxed his caution. There were keys that protruded invitingly from half a dozen keyholes. He had the rubber gloves on to defeat that dodge. He was also wearing rubber-soled shoes. But, even so, he held the gas mask in his hand as an additional insulation. And yet each drawer, when he had pried and plucked at it, revealed nothing that was remotely worth his while.

The room was a snare, but also a delusion when it came to producing records. The officers outside were going to be sadly disappointed. And so was he—his bonus payment would become insignificant.

BAPTISTIN TRAVAIL spent one hour searching Von Richber's study with all the thoroughness an accomplished and leisurely thief can display. He tried the rooms adjoining. He finally returned in disgust to the study. Borel, the electrician, had said there was a trapdoor hidden underneath the large rug. Well, there were several rugs, but the red Bokhara, a beauty, was the largest. On hands and knees once more—his favorite pose for perfect security and stealth—he located the trap.

Here one might get an ugly fall and a very noisy one. But Baptistin rolled back the rug and examined the device with his little spotlight. It was theatrical appearing, all right. It opened on a released spring control; and he saw how it was fastened securely during the business hours of the day. Impulse was stirring in him, and with great care he let himself down through the trap and dropped into a whitewashed chamber that smelled and looked like an ordinary cellar.

Upon landing there he minutely inspected his surroundings, swinging his light in an arc until he had satisfied himself the room was bare. He discovered a door. Between the spot where he stood, directly beneath the trap and the door, he suddenly discerned two fine, silvery wires, stretched taut from wall to wall, knee high and breast high. Taut! Broken or cut, then, they would damage some contact, registering his presence. So he carefully passed between them, stepping high, and ducking his head.

What other stratagems now remained to challenge him? Hadn't they tried about everything? The cellar door he found yielding to his gentle pressure. No bells to ring! He simply discovered a room very similar to the one he had been searching, save that it held that for which he had been hunting high and low, a genuine vault.

The imitation safe in the study over-

head he had avoided like plague, for that, Borel had warned, was the wickedest snare of them all, and wired to kill. Now, however, there was no mistaking the genuine qualities of a real and useful strong box. He knelt and quickly spread out his kit and crouched in front of a small steel door. Almost immediately he coughed, and coughed and choked again, in spite of his own rigid discipline. His eyes began smarting.

Perhaps merely moving the door at night opened a jet somewhere? He fumbled anxiously with the gas mask and adjusted it as the American had instructed him. He also generously called down a blessing on that head crammed with trusty information which belonged to the elder Borel.

Even thus hampered he made his haul with a rapidity justifying the underworld fame of the King of the Alibis. When he had cleaned it out, he shut the vault door again. But then he heard a curious, distant scratching or faint rapping sound. He resolved, lest he still walk into some ambush or other, to investigate while he yet had both hands free.

There was a second door in the chamber with the vault, and he crept beyond it quietly. He advanced at least ten meters. He found a heavy door, and was startled to discover light shining underneath it.

Baptistin was as cautious as ever. The faint, somehow pitiful, helpless scratching sound continued. He knelt and tried to peer under the door, but could make out nothing. He listened. Here was something decidedly curious, a cell, some kind of torture apparatus.

He heard, very distinctly at last, a sob. It was a woman behind that door, sobbing pitifully.

Well, he had dodged every wire, trick and pitfall. And a woman could be the trickiest snare of them all. And yet . . .

It was simply absurd to suppose the phenomenon he had detected could have any relation whatever to his enterprise of burglary.

Baptistin rapped very softly on the door.

V

AFTER a hasty whispered, difficult parley the intruder went to work upon one more barrier. He soon had the heavy, barred door swinging wide. And, look—it was a veritable cell he had opened, a narrow room with a window sealed tight shut, little furniture, and the one gleaming electric bulb.

"Oh—*monsieur*—you have come to save me—"

Baptistin blinked. Unless he stripped off his gas mask he might frighten her to death. He did this, and had a better glimpse of a real beauty in only too obvious distress.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"They sent you to rescue me?" she repeated.

"They—"

"La Rouquine," said the blond one, starting hurriedly to dab at her radiant hair. "She would send some one, I knew—if she heard—"

Baptistin had heard from Jeff the story of the luckless Franz Borel, which, naturally, included the account of the liberating of Ernestine Herault.

"You must be Mlle. Herault."

She nodded.

"Why are you here, *mademoiselle?*" he asked.

"It is the notion of that filthy old beast." She fairly spat out the words while smoothing her rumpled woolen dress and collecting an article or two

to make up a small parcel in evident expectation of departure from her dungeon. "As you probably know, I was in France on a mission. I made no mistakes whatever, but somebody blundered, and I was easiest to blame. Rouquine and her gang saved me from that silly mousetrap at Thonon, or I should probably have been court-martialed and shot. But when I got back here to report to his excellency, what does he do but fly into a fearful rage, accusing me of selling out to the dirty French, of winning my own liberation at the expense of the Fatherland's system of espionage. The doddering old imbecile!

"If I had not had any one employed to rescue me, how would that have helped the Fatherland? My mission was, admittedly, a failure. I could not help it. I reported back as quickly as I could, and was even willing to try again—"

Baptistin stood listening attentively, wide-eyed. So he had chanced upon the punishment cell of the German secret service?

He had heard before this of stupid or ineffectual or untrustworthy agents being disciplined, and severely, at the hands of their own employers and chiefs.

"Come," Mlle. Herault now was urging. "I've been here more than three days. And it's been dreadful. That light is fixed so that the prisoner can't turn it off. It suggests eyes—eyes constantly peering in at you, enjoying your distress, reading your mind, gloating—"

She made an eloquent gesture; and Baptistin reasoned slyly, his own bewildered silence had made her tell more in haste than she might otherwise have done.

"Wait, *mademoiselle!*" he exclaimed. "I am not just sure the way is clear."

BUT detention and anxiety had made her very keen. Instantly she sensed he was withdrawing from the project of her second rescue. "Fool—you've come this far. Of course we can break through. Do you think I'd ever work for that dog again. I'll—I'll go over to the French—or better, the Italians. I know a man named Passini. You can come with me, you seem so clever," she invited.

"No," Baptistin objected, thinking fast. "You must wait here a while longer. I have to be absolutely certain we can slip away—"

"We'll go by whatever passage you used in breaking in."

"I came by way of the roof. You couldn't—"

"Fool—I can follow you anywhere. I'm desperate enough."

And then as he still wavered, searching for a better excuse to desert her, the woman saw in a flash of intuitive light, the true situation. He had not come to break out with her. La Rouquine's gang, indeed! The shifty, swarthy, agile looking rascal was a Frenchman, or some Latin mongrel. A burglar, of course, an expert! He had broken in to rob Von Richber's headquarters.

Blackmail comes naturally to the mind of the professional spy. Mlle. Herault, or whatever her name might really be, instantly offered Baptistin terms. If he took her with him in his flight, she would do nothing, not a scream, not a whimper, to prevent his pro-Ally achievement.

"I cannot—" he said.

"So—"

He stood blocking the doorway but she flung herself at him like a tornado

Just for an instant Baptistin was all but overwhelmed by her clawing, vicious rush. Then the acrobatic rascal was himself again. From his gamin days in Montmartre he had seen pugnacious ladies handled, by gendarmes, detectives, rejected suitors, or their own exasperated admirers. Baptistin polished the Herault vixen off with breath-taking relish and despatch—flung her back into the brilliantly lit cell and relocked the heavy door.

She recovered in a minute or two, and was pounding and yelling. It made but a dull, obscure commotion as he hurriedly started his retreat.

He reached the cellar room with the vault, and gathered up all that he needed. He moved on, again passed carefully between the taut wires, and reascended, burdened though he was, through the trap. Smoothly he restored the handsome rug over the trap-door. Only those wires he had had to sever could hint at the nature of the miracle. Everything else including that double-dealing hellcat, was being left exactly as he had found it.

Up to the second floor he went, to the vacant room he had entered by, from it to the roof and along that, crawling like a lizard, to the innocuous right wing of the mansion. He stripped off the clammy rubber gloves, and spat with glee upon his hands. He attached his rope to a chimney nearest the line of retreat he had chosen.

He had begun to climb down the rope and was half way to the ground when he realized with a start that it was now being firmly held from below.

VI

BAPTISTIN had no rule to apply to his precarious situation. On an ordinary crooked adventure he would, undoubtedly, have had a confederate placed to steady the rope and watch for the gendarmerie. But now he was certain that, after agreeing on their procedure, neither the two Italians, the lame American, nor the stolid Britisher had come near to the silent house to assist him.

If not any of them then somebody else—and, beyond doubt, an enemy. He glanced down and saw a dim form waiting at the lower end of the rope—some foe who would not cause his arrest as a burglar, but would take the Swiss law in his own two German hands.

Baptistin, the accomplished criminal, following a sure instinct for foul fighting, loosened his grip suddenly, and sliding, dropped like a rock in a well.

When he had picked himself up and taken a deep breath or two, he turned his attention to the man he had come down upon. A thick-set, one-eyed man in field gray, one of those discharged soldiers Erik Borel had mentioned! Baptistin noted the very awkward cant of the head, and made a swiftly expert examination.

Badly bent—neck broken, in fact! What good aim his had been, and while wearing only rubbed soled shoes.

When this latest feat became known they would stop calling him King of the Alibis; it would be the Arrow of Lead, or something even more imaginative.

Reflecting upon the plunge that had killed one man and given the killer a bruised back and painful leg, he suddenly grew aware of a shadow stealing toward him along the side of the sleeping house.

"*Qui vive!*" he hissed. And his answer, as he expected, was muffled and Teutonic.

"That one-armed veteran," Baptistin said to himself. Around in front

he heard a dog begin barking. And then he broke into a run.

Yet he ran lamely and painfully enough; and, to his intense chagrin, the shadow, after a guttural challenge, stole after him rapidly, keeping very close upon his heels. Baptistin tried to forget he had so recently fallen to earth.

He must be a comet again. He tried to leap and bound ahead, shake off his pursuer. But the shadow hung on fiercely, not gaining perceptibly, but not falling back.

Missing terribly the doorways and walls and alleys of a city, Baptistin began to dodge and zigzag as he pressed on across a perfectly straight expanse of lawn.

Bang!

His pursuer had paused to fire at him. Baptistin knew he had gained a good ten meters thereby—and no lead in the back.

Bang!

Tearing on, he felt the second bullet fan his cheek. God, what a marksman on such a night. His third shot might . . .

The fugitive burglar turned abruptly and dashed off to the left. After sprinting a little way he halted. The shadow no longer was close in back of him. "*Gott 'n Himmel!*" He caught the sound of shock and collision, and a desperate, murderous scuffle. He turned and ran back toward it, for this must mean his good friends, the Allies, had jumped in at the sound of the first shot.

PRESENTLY he located them, and found them seated more or less comfortably upon a burly prisoner who did lack one arm, but certainly not the ambition to strangle all of his foes.

"Titin? Are you hurt?" the Italian captain exclaimed when he saw the returning invader.

"Not a scratch," said Titan, whose back and legs now ached abominably. "All is serene, captain. Here are several little notebooks—in cipher, I think, but with many figures set in columns. I found them locked away most carefully, when all else seemed to have been left lying about—"

The prisoner grunted abusively at them.

Jeff and the others had taken the notebooks and were examining them with great eagerness under the beam of the torch Baptistin himself held steady for them.

"Meyer's handwriting, I swear it is!" Passini exclaimed. "I have reason to know it well enough."

"And this," said Cartwright, the Englishman, "is His Excellency Colonel von Richber's—"

"A magnificent scoop!" Baptistin informed them in his own behalf.

"Your kid brother is surely saved, Borel," Jeff told the Swiss electrician.

"But we had better slip away from here quickly—those shots—the police might be aroused," said Erik Borel.

"With a golden treasure such as this we can't leave Swiss territory fast enough to suit me," said Moreau.

"Speaking of gold," Baptistin put in, "there was none in the vault."

"Never mind. You'll not lose by it," Passini assured him.

"No, captain. For there was a bundle of notes—lire, Swiss francs, German marks and French francs."

"Keep them—you've earned them. You need make us no accounting—"

"About twenty thousand francs, the total of everything by my count, captain."

"And all yours, besides what we promised you—the bonus."

"What about your prisoner?" Borel queried diffidently. "Will you turn him loose after a while?"

"Stand him up, let's have a look at him."

"Get up!" the captain commanded in Italian and then in German. But really they lifted the soldier up, keeping a tight grip on him and returning his baleful glare in the dim torchlight.

"Listen!" Moreau exclaimed. "Those dogs howling! They'll be rousad and after us. We're still much too near the place."

"I suppose we will have to truss up this one and leave him to be found in the morning."

"Yes, leave him, though he has heard much," said Baptistin with a half incomplete but vivid gesture.

"Here's a belt then to fasten him—" Jeff began.

"*Gott!*" The prisoner's outcry surged into a rattling cough. He groaned, having lurched and thrown back his head. Then he sagged limply between his puzzled captors.

"Let him down," said Baptistin. "Gently—no more noise, I beg. He will sleep—or possibly he has died of wounds—"

His companions turned away, walking on toward the hidden motor car a little ahead of him. The criminal shrugged. Hadn't he read history? Napoleon at Acre had massacred hundreds of prisoners too dangerous to release and too numerous, too hungry to feed!

"Climb in, Erik," Passini was urging. "Hurry, Titin. Climb in!"

Speed and their counter-spying triumph exhilarated all. Yet very punctiliously as they bounced along Baptistin restored to Borel all the equipment provided for him.

"A very good kit," he praised the burglar tools. "And here is the torch, the rubber gloves and the revolver. The shoes I have on, of course. I couldn't take time to work the rope loose, though it is one of my best effects when I am leaving a job without a single trace.

"And also," he added significantly, "I am afraid I mislaid your knife."

Records of contacts with spies through recent payments made to them fell as a bomblike prize into the hands of the Allies' counter-espionage service. Franz Borel was not only spared from court-martial. He was privately returned to his brother's home.

Jeff Beauregard and Moreau were congratulated upon the exploit by their respective superiors. Baptistin Travail, lavishly rewarded, drifted away in company with Captain Passini.

However, in 1932 at the Paris Assizes, the King of the Alibis at last stood in the prisoner's dock, charged with a whole series of dangerous depredations. And he was not acquitted, an unprecedented circumstance! His sentence was a terrifying thing, vindictive, annihilating. He was sentenced to be transported to Cayenne and to suffer there twenty years' forced labor, ten of it in solitary confinement.

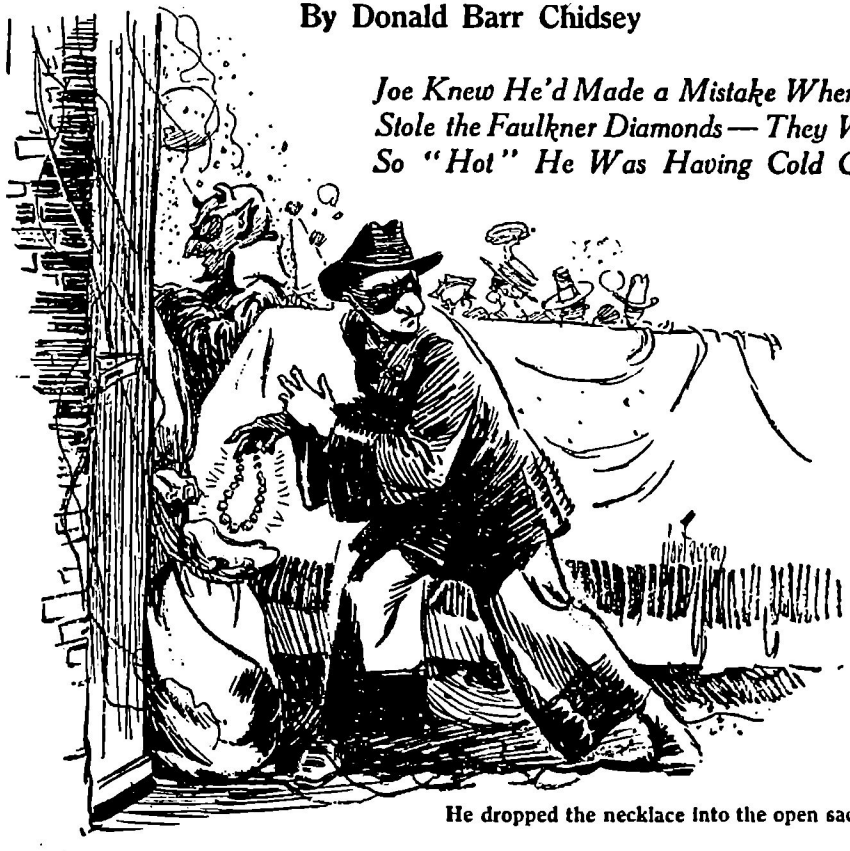
However, his war adventure was remembered by a military officer in Rome. Because of his uncommon and notable war-time service, Baptistin Travail received as a mark of favor to the government of Italy a full and unconditional pardon.

But on the day news of this wonder reached the gray walls of St. Martin-de-Ré the prisoner pardoned lay dead in the prison morgue. Baptistin Travail had given up hope. Poison had somehow been smuggled in to him.

Ring-Around-Robbery

By Donald Barr Chidsey

Joe Knew He'd Made a Mistake When He Stole the Faulkner Diamonds — They Were So "Hot" He Was Having Cold Chills



He dropped the necklace into the open sack

IT was almost too good to be true, and Joe Lefton was suspicious.

He had counted on the maid slipping out to watch the parades the moment Mrs. Faulkner departed. He had counted on all bell-hops and chambermaids and other hotel employees making their respective ways to doors and windows, to balconies and fire escapes, long before the first of the floats hove in sight. For he knew that even old-time New Orleanans were unable to resist the temptation to look down over St. Charles Street on Mardi Gras day.

He knew, too, that Mrs. Faulkner would bring the necklace with her for the purpose of wearing it at the Comus ball that night. She still had the soul of a salesgirl turned actress, in spite of the fact that for two years now she had been married to half the oil wells in Oklahoma; and certainly she would plan to show off at an event like the Comus ball as she had never shown off before.

He shook his head and clucked his tongue nervously as he worked with lean, swift fingers and a few less human tools at the lock of the jewel case. Opening the hotel door, of course, b[illegible]

been simple. Finding the jewel case had been almost as easy. Opening the case was going to prove a bit more difficult—but only a bit more.

So far as he could learn there was not a single big insurance dick in the city. It was Joe's business to know these men, and to seek them out no matter how they might lie. For two weeks he had been poking his long, thin nose into every corner of the city where such a man could possibly be concealed, examining particularly the St. Charles Hotel itself. He had taken pains to assure himself that he had never been trailed, in the streets or in the hotel. He had asked questions, and his eyes never had been still.

Yet here he was, opening the Faulkner jewel case without any trouble at all, hours earlier than he had planned.

The lock clicked angrily under Joe's expert handling, and the spring top flew open.

He knew diamonds. For years he had handled them, good diamonds and bad diamonds, all stolen, but all genuine. These—he knew at a glance—were the real thing.. And yet so suspicious was he that he permitted himself an extra instant of precious time, and taking a glass from his pocket he examined a few of the stones.

Then he smiled. He put the glass back into one pocket, the stones into another. No, these were *not* phonies.

He closed the jewel case and replaced it. He quit the room, locking the door behind him. He crossed the corridor and entered his own room, which he had engaged weeks in advance on inside information concerning the suite Mrs. Faulkner would reserve.

His costume was laid out on the bed—laid out in fireman-fashion, so that he could jump into it as swiftly as possible. It was not the costume he had planned. He would have preferred a harlequin, a pierrot, or something similarly common. But he had waited too long to hire such a costume. They went fast as Mardi Gras approached. And he had been obliged to take what he could get—a rather gaudy Oriental affair, red silk trousers and a bright green jacket.

Everything depended upon speed. He leaped into the gay trousers. Perhaps he leaped into them too fast, too eagerly. They had weathered many a Carnival season, and now the rotten silk ripped from bottom to hip.

JOE thought rapidly. It was still, after all, a costume, and nothing was too grotesque for the streets of New Orleans on a day like this. What if his trousers *did* show?

On the other hand, suppose he had been spotted? Suppose he was forced to wait for a train? He had in his memory the times of the departure of all the trains late in the afternoon and throughout the night, but because he had not expected an early break like this, he had not looked up the noon and early afternoon trains. It was scarcely likely that any railroad would be running a train *out* of New Orleans, anyway, in the very height of the parade excitement, which lasted for several hours.

The earliest train he knew about was the five fifty-seven, and it was only eleven fifty-six.

He had worn this suit every day that he had been in New Orleans, and if he had been spotted once in it he could be spotted again. It was the only suit he had with him, excepting some old dinner clothes he had intended to leave in the hotel room along with the shirts, underwear and collars, and the bag—

from all of which every possible mark of identification had been carefully removed. His own bag, his real bag, was checked at one of the railroad stations, and he had planned to get it immediately before taking a train.

Certainly the robbery would be discovered very soon, perhaps at any minute. And it might be that Joe would have hours in which to wait for a train —hours with no place to hide, for he could not risk lingering near the hotel or the station, and everything in the city was public this day, and every place was crowded.

Safety pins, even if he had possessed any, would not help the long tear in the trousers. The silk was so rotten that it fell away in his fingers as he examined it.

There was only one safe way to hide —one perfect way—and that was the way he had planned, in costume. He snatched up the suitcase, threw it on the bed, yanked out the old tuxedo and a dirty old dress shirt, and got into these with a speed any vaudeville actor would have admired. One end of the wing collar he left unbuttoned. The make-up bow tie he twisted into a position far from where any sober person would have it. He clapped a black fedora on his head and tilted it to an angle emphatically rakish. His false nose, fortunately, was scarlet, and above this he fastened a black mask.

Into one hip pocket he thrust half a million dollars worth of diamonds, into the other a few hundred dollars in cash and some time-tables he would look at as soon as he had a chance. Speed! *Speed!* He didn't even pause to glimpse himself in the mirror, but grabbed a water glass in his left hand, and after the briefest possible peek into the corridor to assure himself that nobody was in sight, stepped quickly out.

He passed the usual elevator, descended one flight of stairs, and went to an elevator shaft intended for guests on the opposite side of the building. He did not see anybody on the way.

The elevator boy grinned when he saw the costume. "Drunk, eh, sir? Ha, ha! Pretty clever, sir!"

Joe lurched into the car, managing an appropriate hiccough but making no other answer.

"There's some mighty clever costumes out there, sir. Yes, sir! I was watching them just a few minutes ago."

Tips were usually much better on Mardi Gras day because guests were so excited, and the elevator boy was trying hard. Joe would gladly have tipped him, but he knew there was nothing smaller than a five-dollar bill in his pocket, and that much would cause the boy to remember this particular passenger. So Joe staggered out of the car without a word, waving his water glass in salute to the world.

II

THE crowd on the main thoroughfares, along which the parades would pass, was too dense and too boisterous and playful. There was a chance that some real drunk might snatch off the false nose, or the domino, or both. Besides, Joe desired an opportunity to examine those time-tables, and along the parade route it would have been impossible for anybody to perform an operation requiring so much space.

But he found even the backways jammed. There were bands playing at every third or fourth street intersection. Arm in arm, singly, doubly, and in all sorts of groups, the maskers marched, singing, screaming with jo

Toreadors, black-and-white convicts, ballet girls, hobos, Gilbertian sailors, pirates, Persians, all pulled and pushed and jostled and shouted. Repeatedly Joe Lefton was slapped on the back or grabbed by the arm. Several times his false nose was threatened. Overhospitable revelers occasionally insisted that he step right into this doorway here and have a li'le nip from the ol' flask. He wormed his way in and out among them, a singularly unjoyful figure, in search of some place of comparative quiet.

Traffic lines were forgotten. The maskers on foot walked in the middle of the streets, while the maskers in cars not infrequently ran up on the sidewalks.

These cars—preposterous old things which had been denied the junk heap for months in order to make this one last, glorious ride—were steaming and straining pitifully, for even the most reckless driver could not get into high gear, and most of them could not even get into second.

Paper streamers twisted themselves around Joe Lefton's neck. Particolored confetti drifted down upon him from balconies. Horns were blown in his ears, and rattles were waved in front of his face. And all the time he was concerned with one thing and one thing only, and that was the problem of getting out of the city as soon as possible.

He had considered hiring an automobile, but he dismissed this thought. In the first place, it was unlikely that he could get one, for even taxicab drivers could not be expected to work on Mardi Gras day—nobody was working. Or, even if he did get an automobile, a man who asked to be driven out of the city at such an hour would be regarded as a lunatic or a crook. In any case, he would attract attention, and Joe couldn't afford to attract attention.

He came to one of the "dens"—enormous, windowless warehouses in which the floats for the various Carnival parades were constructed, amid great secrecy, months in advance. The crowd was thicker than usual at this place, for the Rex parade was preparing to move out. Excitement was intense, and cops were numerous, but Joe calculated that this was the best possible place for him because everybody was watching the slowly emerging floats. And as for the cops—mere uniformed men—he did not worry about them for an instant.

HE wriggled his way to a spot close to one of the huge "den" doors, which were open. The title float, bearing in monstrous pink and blue letters the words "Operas We Love," already was out on the street. So was the King's float, with Rex himself, the third great Lord of Misrule, a portly New Orleans bank president, ensconced magnificently upon his throne. In the doorway was the first opera float. Three members of the club, a Faust, a Mephistopheles and a male Marguerite, all of them drunk and all of them grand sights in their expensive costumes, were calling for a white-robed darky to bring them a ladder. Hanging from the left wrist of each was a large cotton bag filled with trinkets to be tossed to the commonality as the parade proceeded.

Joe backed himself against a corner of the doorway. He had a talent for making himself inconspicuous. He looked at a time-table. Then he looked at his watch, then at the time-table again. He could scarcely believe it—again this was too good to be true. For

there was an Atlanta express from the very station where he had checked his bag, in exactly twenty-seven minutes.

The station, in normal times, was not more than ten minutes' walk from this "den." And even to-day, Joe estimated, he could make it in twenty-seven minutes, if he hustled. He replaced the watch and the time table and looked up to see Nick Fisher.

It was the sheerest sort of coincidence, and it happened very quickly. A long, lanky cowboy had been elbowing his way through the crowd toward the place where Joe stood, ostensibly for the purpose of getting a better look at the Faust float. He had been within a dozen feet of Joe when something had happened to him—the very thing that Joe himself had all this while been fearing. A playful reveler, with a shout of "Take 'em off, Tom Mix! We know you!" had snatched away his mask. And there, just at the instant Joe Lefton had looked up, was Nick Fisher.

Now, there wasn't a better detective in the country than Nick Fisher; there wasn't another one half as good. At least, so Joe Lefton thought. Joe was frankly afraid of the man. Many a time he had dropped otherwise excellent plans only because of the presence of this quiet-mannered sleuth who was coming right at him now.

It would mean a life sentence, or practically that, if he were caught with the diamonds upon his person. Joe felt a cold chill creep over him. He should have known the Faulkner diamonds were too "hot" to touch.

He had to get rid of them—now! Joe was a quick thinker in an emergency—and this certainly was an emergency. He slipped the necklace from his pocket and dropped it into the cotton bag Mephistopheles was holding, half open, at his side.

III

ALL this, and all that followed immediately afterward, happened very quickly. The swift succession of events was entirely in pace with the Mardi Gras excitement.

A flying wedge of policemen hit the crowd near Joe. "Come on there, git back! Git away from those doors! Give 'em a chance to come out!"

Joe, crouching, stepped deeper into the doorway, losing himself in a shadow, escaping the terrible shove. He saw the cowboy hat, with long-legged Nick Fisher beneath, picked up and carried backward, away from the "den." Fisher was a strong man, but not so strong as half a dozen city cops on crowd duty. Besides, the momentum of the crowd, once the policemen had started it moving, was terrific. No man could be expected to withstand it.

The Faust float rumbled away. The three maskers, unable to locate a Negro with a ladder, had climbed aboard by means of the wheel spokes and were now straightening their gorgeous clothes and congratulating one another on their athletic prowess.

Joe Lefton watched them go, and the heart inside of him sank. For the necklace was going with them—nobody knew to what fate.

Joe had watched the Momus parade the previous week, and he had watched the parade of Proteus, the second Lord of Misrule, the previous night. He knew the formula they followed. The grand and glittering maskers, each of them in private life some staid citizen, probably middle-aged and certainly opulent, stood on lurching floats, with one hand holding to uprights for support, while with the other hand the

threw cheap pieces of imitation jewelry to the crowds. It was an old Carnival custom. Thousands of dollars' worth of five-and-ten-cent-store trinkets was hurled away in this manner every season. The crowd fought for the souvenirs, reaching, grabbing like eager children who grab at candy thrown by a Santa Claus.

Faust and Marguerite and Mephistopheles each had a bag of this stuff, purchased by the carload lot. And very soon each of them would begin distributing it, a piece here, a piece there, along the line of march. In each bag there was perhaps thirty or thirty-five dollars' worth of necklaces, lavallières, bracelets, bangles, rings, at wholesale prices. But in one bag, on this particular float, there was a rope of diamonds worth half a million. And nobody but Joe Lefton was aware of the fact.

Joe was frantic. It was bad enough that he himself should not get the Faulkner stones. It was even worse, a horrible thought, that they would go to come grabbing, gaping, uncomprehending fool who would be totally unable to appreciate them. For Joe Lefton, after all, loved diamonds—loved them for themselves, and not merely for the money they meant to him. He felt now as an artist might feel who sees a genuine old master being sold as a piece of wall paper, and who is unable to prevent the sale or ever to trace the purchaser.

He ducked into the crowd. Nick Fisher was already out of sight, pushed around a corner with his big Stetson. Joe Lefton was a man of medium height, but slim and slippery, quick, nervous, alert. Now, with no particular plan in mind, he wriggled and ducked and dodged, his head down, heedless of whom he hit, concerned only with catching that first picture float.

When he came alongside of it—on the opposite side from where Nick Fisher was, presumably, still struggling to make his way back to the "den"—Marguerite and Mephistopheles were emerging from a tiny plaster cave in the float, a cave evidently intended to represent a village inn. They were wiping their mouths under their masks. Undoubtedly they had just taken another pull from that bottle.

Mephistopheles moved to one front corner of the float, Marguerite to the other, while Faust remained in the back, holding desperately to his upright.

NOW that the entrance had been cleared of the curious, the other floats came out rapidly, and the parade was formed. It moved out to St. Charles Avenue, and up the avenue. It turned, after a trip of several miles, and started down the other side of the raised, grass-bordered trolley car tracks.

Throughout this slow, noisy progress Joe Lefton never was more than a few feet from the corner of the float where Mephistopheles stood. It would have been impossible, because of the wheel, to climb on the float and snatch the bag from the masker's wrist. It would have been useless anyway, for the crowd would have taken it away from him instantly. Joe could only keep near the masker himself, as near as possible, and watch what he threw. He was certain that he would recognize the Faulkner necklace when it appeared.

Other gewgaws galore came out of that bag, but not the one Joe sought. Mephistopheles had a habit of stirring the ornaments in the bag before he drew a handful for throwing purposes,

and undoubtedly it was this which caused the heavier, real jewels to go to the bottom.

So Joe struggled on. And it was a struggle! He was pulled and pushed and kicked and punched. He was yanked this way and that. Curses were yelled after him. Indignant men and women clutched at him, shook him, demanding to know what right he had to shove them back like that. Several times he was kicked so severely from behind that he fell asprawl on his hands and knees. Once a man punched him in the back of the head, knocking him full length upon the pavement. But on each of these occasions he scrambled up again, and, without even looking back to see his assailant, continued after the Faust float, his gaze always on the things the red fellow drew from that bag.

Sometimes Mephistopheles would cease his trinket-tossing for a short time, and just stand idly there watching the crowds. Occasionally he would retire, with Marguerite, to the plaster inn; and when this happened Joe had nothing to do but keep following the float and try to avoid the spectators and the cops.

The cops, however, were the easiest part of it. Continually he was thrust roughly back into the crowd where he belonged, but it was easy to pop out again and slip past the policemen. The poor cops had so much to contend with along the curbstones that they could not take the time to manhandle one slim, crouching fellow in dinner clothes, even though he was out of line.

There was a long pause when the King's float reached the reviewing stand in front of City Hall, and Rex had a drink of something suspiciously sparkling with the mayor, while the band played "If Ever I Cease to Love." This, too, was in the old tradition, the once popular ballad having been selected by a Russian archduke in honor of a celebrated actress of many years ago. But Joe Lefton didn't know about this, and wouldn't have cared if he had. All he knew was that the delay gave him a chance to pull his clothes together and look around for Nick Fisher.

Fisher was not in sight. And Joe's apparel had taken a sad mauling. The single coat button, and two of the four waistcoat buttons were missing. A side pocket had been ripped. The necktie was no longer around his neck, and the collar was flapping on a back collar-button alone. One stud was gone, and the shirt was badly torn at this place. The trousers were torn and very dirty at the knees. The fedora had been lost more than an hour previous. However, the mask and false nose were intact: Joe had held at least one hand over them most of the time.

IV

REX and the mayor finished their drinks and shook hands. The crowd roared, the cameras clicked, and the parade continued on its way. Down to Canal Street it went, down to the river, around and back up Canal Street to Rampart Street, around and down toward the river again.

Joe stuck to his task. Not an ornament came out of that bag he didn't at least glimpse. And not once did the piece he was seeking show itself.

Another man might have become discouraged, might have assumed that he had missed the real one, or that he had not put the necklace into this bag after all, but into another bag near it. But Joe Lefton had perfect confidence in his own eyesight and his own keen

wits. Quickly as he had acted when he threw away those diamonds, he had known exactly what he was doing and why he was doing it. There wasn't any doubt in his mind that he would be aware of the fact the instant Mephistopheles drew the Faulkner diamonds from that bag. He wouldn't even have to see them. He could *feel* the presence of stones like that.

It was when the parade made its second official halt, in front of the Boston Club, where Rex was to drink a toast with his Queen, that the necklace finally did flash into view. It came glittering, accompanied by an unusually large number of other baubles. Apparently this was the last handful in the bag, and Mephistopheles, tired of throwing, had decided to get rid of them all at once. He threw them far—far over poor Joe Lefton's head—back to those standing nearest the shop windows.

Joe stepped quickly off the curbstone and started to jump into the air. But an angry, overworked policeman grabbed his arm and thrust him back into the crowd. "I told yuh once tuh stay there! Now *stay there!*"

Joe did not stay there. He twisted instantly, head down, and wormed his way back into the crowd. He hadn't seen who'd caught the diamonds, but he had one hunch.

In that part of the crowd was an enormous Negro—a man fully head and shoulders taller than anybody near him. Such a one could easily have had his choice of the gifts Mephistopheles had been pleased to toss. Joe did not suppose that this Negro consciously picked the most valuable of the various articles, but he thought that instinct might have caused the man to snatch out of the air the largest and brightest of these.

The only thing he could do if this theory didn't work was start inquiring of everybody in the vicinity. This would arouse suspicion, and, besides, the crowd was shifting all the time.

He approached the big Negro casually. "Nice necklace you caught that time, Sam."

The giant drew the world-famous gems from a pocket—slowly, with one finger—and gazed dully at them. Joe, shocked to see such stones handled in this manner, exposed to the gaze of the unknowing, thought wildly of snatching them and dodging into the crowd, though such behavior was not at all in his customary manner. But before he could do anything, the Negro dropped the diamonds carelessly back into a side coat pocket. The Negro, however, put his hand on top of them, and kept that hand there.

"Give you a dollar for that necklace, Sam."

The Negro did not even look at him.

"I want it for a souvenir," Joe explained.

"Ain' goin' t' sell this necklace," the Negro said.

"Even if I offer you *three* dollars for it, eh?"

The Negro shook his head gloomily. "No, *suh!* Dis goes to th' li'l baby Ah got a date with."

JOE had smelled gin on the fellow's breath, but not until the Negro started to move away did he realize how very drunk he was. Big Sam could scarcely walk. Joe sprang to his side.

"Okay, big boy! Let's forget about that necklace, and come along and I'll buy you a drink, eh?"

The giant looked sidewise at him. Drunk though he was, and familiar though he was with the unconvention-

alities of Mardi Gras, it was a new experience for him to have a white man offer to buy him a drink. But he shook his head gravely.

"Ah got a date," he repeated. "Don' hol' me up." And he ambled on.

Obviously it would be impossible to get anything out of such a drunk, who was as stubborn as he was bulky. But Joe Lefton had not given up hope. Doggedly he followed the Negro, who because of his great size was an easy man to trail, even in such a crowd.

They walked along Canal Street to St. Charles Street, and turned right. Big Sam never looked behind him.

They halted at a side entrance of the St. Charles Hotel—the very entrance by which Joe had quit the hotel a few hours earlier, with the diamonds in his pocket. And there the "date" was encountered.

She was a pretty little wench, gayly dressed but not in costume; she was lighter of complexion than Big Sam, and smarter, more intelligent. She flashed him a big, gold-toothed smile, jangling her long earrings as she tossed her head.

"Come along, honey."

"Can't do it now, big boy. Got to get upstairs for a little while. The missus'll be comin' back any minute now, an' I'm supposed to be waitin' there for her."

Big Sam glowered. "Ah thought Ah had a date?"

"You *got* a date, big boy. I won't be long. Be back in ten-fifteen minutes. Then we step out—okay?"

"Okay, honey." Sam was all smiles again. He fished the glittering necklace from his pocket, and proffered it, dangling it on one dark finger. "Brought you somethin', honey, for you t' wear."

Her eyes danced with delight. She was, the watching Joe noted with approval, an avaricious little thing, and she grabbed the necklace with a haste not at all well mannered.

"Now ain't you the grand sugar daddy, though! Say, big boy, them's *pretty!* Them's real *pretty!*"

"'Cost me plenty, honey," Sam lied, "but they ain't nothin' too good fo' a gal like you."

She flashed her gold teeth again, and her bright, large eyes smiled at him.

"You an' me is goin' to have one swell bust to-night, big boy, an' that ain't no lie." She patted his arm. "But I got to get upstairs now. You wait right here, an' I'll be back in ten-fifteen minutes."

She scurried into the hotel, while Big Sam, who had not even seen Joe, lounged against a lamp-post, smiling inanely. Joe went in after the girl. At the head of the short flight of steps from the sidewalk he collided with a tall, long-legged man in cowboy costume. He stepped back quickly, turning his head. But Fisher had seen him.

V

FISHER blocked the doorway, and his hand was on the butt of an exposed pistol—part of his Wild West costume. He smiled grimly, and nodded.

"No funny stuff, Joe. This is a real gat here."

"*Me* pull funny stuff?" Joe was indignant. "Why should I pull any funny stuff?"

"You can't talk yourself out of it this time, Joe m'boy. Hand 'em over now, and take your medicine like a brave little man."

Now Joe grinned. "I haven't got them," he said frankly.

"Turn around."

Joe turned obediently, and Fisher's expert hands searched him thoroughly. Joe heard Fisher cursing softly, and he chuckled.

"Where are those rocks, Joe? Don't hold out on me."

"How should I know where they are?"

"You *do* know! You had them once, and you ditched them somewhere, and now you can't get them again. You wouldn't be back here if you were able to lay your hands on them; you'd be out of town by this time. And you wouldn't be dashing into this place like a man going to a fire, if you weren't after those rocks. Kick in, fella, kick in!"

"I'd like to help you, Fisher, but I haven't got 'em," Joe said, "and what's more, you haven't got anything on me."

Fisher lowered his tone, and came closer. His hand remained on the pistol butt.

"Listen, Joe, I came to New Orleans because I knew you would be around the sugar. I had you spotted and told that dame to keep her ice in the safe until she wore it. I didn't see how you'd have a chance at it until to-night. I planted my men and kidded the clerk about watching the safe. When he told me there was no need to because Mrs. Faulkner had taken the stuff upstairs, I darn near fainted. I knew she had gone out and had probably left them in her room, so I beat it up there and found the empty case. And was I scared when you slipped me in the lobby!"

"That's another thing I can't understand," Joe grinned.

"Well, there are two elevators and one stairway, and I had a man at each with a description of you and your regular suit and that Chinese outfit of yours. I'd gone through your stuff, of course."

"Of course."

"But these were young fellows, and green, because I couldn't risk a regular man on this job for fear you'd spot him. I had all I could do to keep away from you myself for several days there. Anyway, I had a man at each place, and I kept moving from one to the other. But it wasn't until the last minute that I suddenly remembered those dress clothes of yours. I rushed from one man to the other, telling them about this new outfit, and one of them reported seeing a guy in a tux, dressed like a drunk, going out just a few minutes before. I beat it up to your room, and sure enough—the tux was gone and the rest of the stuff was still there.

"Was I wild! I sent one man to each of the three railroad stations. Two I sent out to make the rounds of the taxi men and car-hiring outfits. Then I made for the place where the biggest parade was just about to begin, figuring maybe I could squeeze into one of those floats in a place nobody could see me and I could watch the crowd on both sides. Then I find you and lose you, but now I've got you and you'll never get away with it now. So come clean, Joe."

SO Joe Lefton told him the whole story. He told it grimly, bitterly, but he couldn't help grinning a bit, in spite of himself.

"A fine pair of guys we are, Nick," he finished. "The best crook and the best detective in the world, and all we do is fool each other and get nowhere."

But Fisher was less concerned with the irony of the situation than with the recovery of the gems themselves.

"And where's this colored girl now?" he asked.

"Upstairs somewhere. I was just going after her when I bumped into you. But she'll be back here any minute now. That's the boy friend right out there—the big guy leaning against the lamp-post."

Even while he was speaking the girl came hurrying across the lobby. She was no longer gay; there was anxiety, something close to panic, in her big bright eyes, and she almost fainted when Nick Fisher accosted her, flashing a badge.

"I ain't done nothin'! I ain't done a thing! You can't say I done nothin'!"

"Where's that necklace?"

"I ain't got it."

"You haven't *got* it?"

The girl was telling the truth: there could be no doubt of that. She was too frightened to lie. Fisher shook her.

"I ain't stole nothin'."

"Nobody said you did. What did you do with that necklace?"

"I put it in a box. I was supposed to stay in the room all afternoon, but I stepped out to see the parade, and when I got back, jus' a few minutes ago, I saw the missus's swell necklace was gone. So I stuck that necklace Sam gave me into the box. It looked like the regular one, and I figured maybe the missus wouldn't notice the difference right away, so I'd get a chance to beat it."

Nick Fisher asked slowly, softly: "Do you work for Mrs. Harrison T. Faulkner?"

"Yes, suh. For Mrs. Faulkner."

"Blow along, sister," said Fisher.

Nick Fisher and Joe Lefton stared silently, for some time, at the milling crowd outside the doorway. The Druids' parade had gone, and the Rex parade, and the Zulu parade. But the maskers were as dense and as boisterous as ever; the confetti flew unabated, and the bands played, and the dancers whirled without pause, screaming, shouting in delight.

"As I see it," said Nick Fisher at last, "Mrs. Faulkner has recovered a necklace she never knew she lost. You swiped a necklace you haven't got. I did a swell job of detecting and catch a guy I can't hold. The great ring-around-robbery, eh? With both of us getting the run-around in the end. Nobody wins—nobody loses. Must be the Mardi Gras spirit—you know, I'd like to come down here some year and watch it when I didn't have to work."

"Same here," said Joe Lefton.

Nick Fisher jerked his head in the direction of the gay crowd. "You got nothing to do now, Joe, and I got nothing to do either but trail along with you for the rest of the day and to-night.

"We got costumes on, too, like all the rest of them. What do you say we step out and do a little celebrating ourselves?"

"Suits me," said Joe Lefton. He took Nick Fisher's arm. "Lead the way, kid."

"Dandy Jim"

A True Story

By Charles Somerville

"With some flat stones we shoveled the earth away"

"Get Nannery or Kill Him on Sight!"— That Was the Order When This Vicious Gashouse Rat Was Running Riot in New York City

"Bring Nannery in dead or alive. There is a handsome promotion for the man who gets Nannery or kills him on sight."—An order issued by Grover Whalen in 1929 when Police Commissioner of New York.

"Paste these pictures in your hat—stamp the faces on your memory. These fourteen men now at large are the most dangerous criminals in the country. I want them taken on sight—dead or alive."—An order sent out in 1925 to all detectives, other officers and men of the New York City Police Department by Inspector Lahey, chief of the Detective Bureau.

JIMMY NANNERY, not quite twenty years old, who was named among the fourteen, was one of "the most dangerous criminals in the country" while still a boy, at a time when he was known to Boscoe Lynch's Gashouse Gang of New York City as "Babe" Nannery.

Since then he has done his best to justify Lahey's classification, and in a career that has been a tempest of crimes of violence—holdups, bank robberies, murders, pistol battles with police, prison escapes—has most fully succeeded.

His crimes have been dramatic. His elusiveness has been astonishing; when caught, his strategies to escape punishment extraordinarily successful. With charges of highway robberies, burglaries, bank stick-ups and murders a mile long against Nannery, only thrice have his captors been able to make their accusations stick.

From the day Lahey gave him his ranking among the most fearsome fourteen law-breakers of the land, Nannery became a duke of the underworld. Its yeggs and molls dubbed him "Dandy Jim," "Candy Jim" and "Jimmy, the Duke" Nannery.

He moved among them, a trim figure of a fellow. Of middle height, he was slender but muscular; complexion, rosy; hair, fair; eyes of icy blue. The other features of his countenance were small and delicate of mold. He dressed well, rivaling the debonair, deadly Link Mitchell, and surpassing the less tutored flashiness of Legs Diamond's Broadway finery. Only in manner of speech was there a betrayal of his origin in the Gashouse, an East Side purlieu of the Big Town.

Whenever he went about among the noisy, expensive Broadway resorts of his liking, it was always well in funds. He was a head waiter's hero and scarce a moll there was who wouldn't have followed the beckoning of his thumb. But, as is curiously true of other really hard men of his ilk, his life was singularly free of serious entanglements with women. He knew them and liked them, but not any one of them for long.

Yet now, for all his nerve and shrewdness and the sudden accessions of riches from his crimes, which must have been dazzling to one who had trod with patches in the seat of his breeches in the grime of the Gashouse, Nannery at twenty-six, in the first full flush of manhood, appears to have come drastically and witheringly to the end of his tether. It would seem that he has finally been thoroughly and lastingly caged. He has a stretch of twenty-five years' imprisonment ahead with more to come—probably ten years.

Assuming that he lives it through, it will be no Dandy Jim of trim, muscular body and rosy complexion emerging from Sing Sing's gates, but a creature with pallid, wrinkled face, hair gone gray, shoulders bent, blue eyes faded—an old, worn-out crook.

A stiff price to pay for those ten years of gilt-edged deviltry!

All this, that is, if Sing Sing can hold him. He escaped once—an adventure that will cost him that other ten years' imprisonment—and was at large for nearly three years before a "hick cop" in Dover, New Jersey, sunk the muzzle of a resolutely held pistol into the midriff of the ruthless desperado and made him surrender.

As for holding him, Sing Sing appears to be out to do its very best. It has Nannery caged in the little brick death house that is completely segregated from all other prison buildings, and where the guard maintained is extra zealous. Corridor lamps keep the death house cells alight at all times. A man may not breathe in his sleep unseen by a keeper.

This action is the highest "testimonial" to a prisoner's desperateness of character, underground prison finesse and ingenuity against locks and keys, prison walls and armed guards. Only two other inmates of the historic man-warren, outside of those waiting execution, have ever been placed in the little house of the men who are doomed to die.

JIMMY NANNERY was a known crook long before the down on his chin turned to bristle. He was a typical gamin of the grim, sordid Gashouse slum along the river on the upper East Side of New York City. From earliest teens he proved a spirited but rebellious young devil whom schools, reform and otherwise, could not control nor the home strap subdue; nor yet the heft of a big policeman's fist.

He had begun by treading the reeking dumps of the vicinity for waste articles of metal that junk dealers

would buy. The few cents thus garnered made the only spending money he had ever up to that time known. But this was laborious work, so he turned to the tricks of some older boys he knew, fellows who could play in crap games where small silver jangled about from hand to hand in sums so large as to be dazzling to Nannery.

These lads were package snatchers from passing wagons, dope runners between pushers (sellers) and junkies (addicts), and they carried wrenches of tempered steel which served the double purpose of a weapon or a tool with which one could yank free lead pipe and brass trimmings from empty apartments and unguarded cellars, to be sold to junkmen for a fixed price the pound. Jimmy took up that "lay" briskly. He always tried to snatch the biggest package, and was bolder than the others invading buildings, looking for lead pipe and brass loot.

But he wasn't fooling the law any. At sixteen, headquarters had him tabled as an habitual juvenile thief. His last stretch was for several months. He came out of it disdaining the sort of crimes that had put him there. It was "piker stuff." He was getting to be a man. It was time for him to make a try to step in among the "big shots," the fellows who went after pay rolls, bank safes, held up mail wagons and night clubs.

So he began trying to win the notice of "Boscoe" Lynch. Shyly for a tough boy—foot scraping, grinning, that sort of thing.

Boscoe Lynch, you see, had young Nannery's deepest respect, pitiably misconceived. It was as a chorus boy might regard the male star of the show. Boscoe Lynch was a great man to the vicious in the vicinity. He was chieftain, no less, of the Gashouse gang. And the Gashouse mob was the "real thing"—crack burglars, gun toters who used the guns, killers, stick-up men who had whisked off with many a fat pay roll leaving messengers bleeding, sometimes dying, behind. Most of them, Jimmy had heard, kept swell apartments over near Broadway, had janes "dead stuck" on them, owned cars, and wore the swellest clothes money could buy.

They never brought their janes or swell cars over to Boscoe Lynch's headquarters. Now and then they wore their nifty clothes. But usually when seeking the Gashouse rendezvous they came in taxis which they dismissed two or three blocks away from the dumps, and were roughly, sometimes, shabbily attired.

It was on the dumps that Boscoe Lynch held court. Upon the reeking mounds of refuse which made up the dumps were a number of tumbledown shanties out of which sanitation officers had long before routed unkempt, wretched families of squatters.

But these same officers made no efforts to evict Boscoe and his crook settlement. Nor did the police relish the sporadic efforts they made to raid the shacks and drive the Gashouse mob from undercover, though knowing well it was there the dangerous plots were hatched and from there, in the dead of night, the crime sorties started.

Boscoe had with flagrant insolence put up signs warning the police to "Keep the hell out of here!" Every once in a while a precinct captain would deem it his duty to give the Gashouse mob a roughing, and hand-to-hand battles between police and crooks took place, often punctuated with the sounds of pistol shots. The police never made arrests, or called ambulances to attend the wounded, except of

their own force. The Gashouse warriors were left to the care of their pals for bandaging.

II

THE boy, Nannery, was forever skirting about the shanty that served Boscoe for headquarters, hoping to be noticed. Now and then he would show the temerity to ask Boscoe if there were any errands he would like to have run. Or would he like the shanty swept up a little?

Now, it is to be said for Boscoe Lynch that he was no Fagin. He encouraged no organization of petty, juvenile thieves to form in the dumps or bring to him their plunder.

That sort of game was held in contempt by Boscoe. To be sure his gang was largely composed of very young men, only a few past twenty-five years of age. But he wasn't out to train kids. One must have earned a reputation for criminal adroitness and bravado before aspiring to enroll in his camp.

Still, hero worship is flattering, and Boscoe could not help but see it in Nannery's crafty, calculating, but still boyishly impressionable eyes. So Boscoe "fell" for young Nannery and made him a sort of factotum, or, rather, lobbiegow, which means errand runner, one who makes himself generally useful to a "big shot."

The full-fledged young members of the gang, vain of their newly acquired maturity and criminal notoriety, patronized the boy crook and gave him a nickname—"Babe." Whilst Boscoe, his vanity tickled—and all criminals are vain to the verge of insanity and frequently beyond—felt well enough toward the youth to cut him off now and then a small slice of the swag from a job.

The Babe began to high-hat the package snatchers and lead pipe swipers and their small-change crap games. In the back rooms of neighborhood cigar stores, especially on Saturday, the pay night, he often rolled dice where green money was at stake, and quickly learned how to make "funny passes" with "the bones."

He knew that in becoming a half-fledged member of the Gashouse gang he was touching "high society." And, much to the amusement of his elders, began to dress the part. For with the aid of the chief's occasional benefactions and those funny passes with the bones he had learned to make with a sleight-of-hand that defied detection, Babe Nannery had begun to know an affluence of which he had never remotely dreamed in his tatterdemalion package-snatching days.

As one charmed, he would sit watching and listening to Boscoe and his principal aids. There was big, blond "Killer" Cunniffe, a bad man of rare achievement, recently imported from the Hudson Dusters of the West Side, fast becoming Bosoe's right-hand man. There was blond "Ice-Wagon" Crowley, also of great underworld renown, a little piqued and surly over the importance Killer Cunniffe was being given, but willing to admit the other's possession of the sharpest wits. The future had it that Cunniffe was to put Boscoe into second place, as a mere adviser, and lead a gang of his own making. Also that Ice-Wagon was to murder the Killer and the sweetheart that he envied him, himself to be slain a little while afterward in a police battle.

And there was Bum Rodgers, adjudged by Boscoe to be "daring if dumb," who is now a lifer in the same prison that is taking such pains to keep Nannery himself behind its bars. And

there was laughing Red McKenna and his dour brother—er—Red who tried to escape the electric chair by shooting his way out of the Tombs with two other men. They killed the warden and a keeper, but, finding themselves hopelessly beleagured in the prison yard and their ammunition all but gone, shot themselves to death against the prison wall they had hoped to scale. These were the top-notchers, but there were a double score more of henchmen offering Boscoe Lynch blind obedience. As other boys have listened to old sailors' yarns of clean adventure, Babe Nannery drank in with bated breath talk of criminal outrages, wild risks, fat gains, narrow squeaks, killings, stories of queer, nutty inmates encountered in "stir."

A STOOL pigeon told a detective friend of mine of the manner in which Babe Nannery completely won his spurs in the Gashouse gang.

The police had made one of their sporadic 'swoops on the dumps. The fight had been long and fierce. Gashouse casualties were many. A big flap of the scalp of Boscoe himself had been lifted by a whanging night stick.

Boscoe was abed in his old-fashioned East Side rooms, well away from the dumps, the following night. His head was bandaged. Both eyes were encircled by purple, discolored flesh. He was feeling savagely bitter against the "bulls."

"Lead is what we will be giving them if they don't let us alone," he snarled to the several men who had come to comfort him.

Just then Ice-Wagon Crowley guffawed and Boscoe growled:

"Hey, what the hell do you find to be laughing at?"

"I'm thinkin' of that kid of yours—what I seen him get away with in the mix-up."

"The Babe?"

"Sure."

"What?"

"I seen it by one of the flash lights the cops played around. Nothin' suits the Babe but he has to go pick the biggest dinny in the mix-up, the biggest flat-foot on the force, I might as well say. I seen 'em at it. The dinny's whaling a big night stick, the Babe's got a little blackjack against it. An' he's so little and the cop's so big the dinny is missin' his swipes with the long stick. It's a pipe for the kid to duck under the swings. But when the spotlight flashes on them and shows the Babe the size of the cop I figure the Babe will scram."

"He don't?"

"Nah. Instead he jumps in on the flatty and jolts him that jack from the toes. I hears somethin' crack. It was the cop's jaw—take it from me. The big wolf goes down for keeps. I seen 'em carryin' him away. And so does the Babe. The kid's got a cut on his head that's drippin' blood into his eye. But that don't mean nothin' to him."

"Yeh? What do you know?" said Boscoe Lynch. And Babe Nannery got his spurs next day. A kid receiving his diploma at West Point or Annapolis couldn't have felt prouder than did young Nannery—according to his lights.

Readers, I hope, will draw no inference I am painting either Boscoe Lynch or young Nannery in heroic tints. These incidents are recorded because they strikingly illustrate the similar workings of two recklessly savage criminal dispositions, two birds of a feather, exposing the overweening egotism of the crook which makes him fatuously believe he can successfully

war against organized, normal, human society. Being as vicious as a rat himself made of Boscoe Lynch a hero in Nannery's eyes. His battle in the dark with the police was in emulation of Boscoe's wide reputation as a "cop fighter" — a trait that had gained Lynch his first prestige among the "tough boys" of the New York gangs.

The first thing Lynch did was to have the lad taught expert motor car driving, and thereafter he acted as chauffeur for Boscoe when the leader went out personally to direct the execution of jobs, Nannery remaining at the wheel as "look-out."

This was a part of the game which didn't please him. He was always faithful to the rôle on Boscoe's orders, but to show this gang chief what he had in him, Nannery, the story goes, went out on his own and in as many nights effects three holdups of men going home from gambling clubs—heavy winners with pockets stuffed with cash.

The performance had the desired effect. He was lifted from the menial post of lookout. Gun in hand, he began working shoulder to shoulder with Cunniffe, Crowley, McKenna, "Bum" Rodgers and the other toffs of the mob.

THEN came his first hard set back. It was during an attempted holdup of a cashier's office for a big pay roll. Police response to the pressure of a burglar alarm button on the floor of the cashier's cage was so prompt that the Gashouse mob took to flight. Babe slipped on a curbstone and turned an ankle so badly he couldn't even hobble. The shock of the fall knocked his pistol from his hand halfway across the street. With the cops throwing bullets at him, he flung up his hand in sign of surrender.

He then proceeded to qualify for all time with Boscoe Lynch. For though they grilled young Nannery relentlessly in headquarters—kept it up for a week—the detectives couldn't get him to "squeal" the identities of his companions in the crime.

He was only eighteen, but he wasn't sent to Elmira Reformatory. Already a long list of unproven crimes was registered against him. And when at his preliminary hearing a full half dozen persons appeared not afraid to swear that he was one of the stick-up men, the high-priced lawyer engaged by the gang advised the ill-starred youth that a plea of guilty was his best way out, would mean a lighter sentence than if he gave the law a fight because the law "had it on him and had it on him good."

A sentence to Sing Sing for three years was meted Babe Nannery. The judge figured Elmira would be much better off without a youth already so experienced and hardened in criminal ways. Sing Sing it was. But his youth served him and he was paroled before he was twenty.

Only twenty, but the boy was all out of him when he left Sing Sing. His icy blue eyes were colder than ever, his mouth had the tight set of the merciless. His voice had gone deeper. He was a matured criminal, a ripened, heartless, confirmed criminal.

He rejoined the Gashouse gang. They dropped his old nickname of Babe and took to calling him "Jimmy, the Dude," because of his fastidiously fine raiment. He swung back feverishly into action.

When Killer Cunniffe's shrewdness and general prowess in crimes of violence put him at the head of the mob with Boscoe Lynch reduced to a consultant, Nannery worked under Cun-

niffe, but his allegiance remained with Boscoe. It was only because Boscoe told him the new arrangement was for the best that he tipped a salute to the Killer. Nor did he ever work completely under Cunniffe's orders. Every little while he organized a small coterie and "pulled a job" of his own. But he never withheld a percentage of the profits from the gang's general treasury, hoarded as "fall money," and Killer Cunniffe evaded an open break with so valuable a man. ("Fall money" means money saved to take care of legal expenses and "prison expenses" if a crook is caught; no underworld expert ever leaves himself without it.)

Then came the series of holdups by the Cunniffe gang of the different depots of the Re[illegible] Ice Cream Company, one of them attended by murder. This was on a job led by Killer Cunniffe in West One Hundred and Forty-First Street. Cunniffe, Crowley, the McKennas, Candy Jim Nannery, and a lesser light, Peter Powers, were subsequently identified as the robbers. They got away with twelve thousand dollars from a safe on the second floor of the building, which they compelled an employee caught alone in the room to open and then beat him savagely for not doing it more quickly.

The sound of the scuffling brought the office manager to the scene. He was seized, choked, gagged, bound and thumped and kicked into unconsciousness. As the gang descended the flight of steps leading to the street, Carl Lindstrom, a driver and collector in the company's employ, started up the stairs to report at the office. He saw the drawn guns in the hands of the men and a money bag in the left hand of Cunniffe. Lindstrom was a stalwart fellow and recklessly brave. He flung himself between the legs of Killer Cunniffe and felled him. Pistols flared, and Lindstrom fell away from Cunniffe's legs, limp and dying. All of the gang escaped. The underworld scored the slaying up to Killer Cunniffe. But others said Red McKenna had done the murder.

III

IT was immediately after this that Inspector Lahey issued his order for the arrest of the fourteen "most dangerous criminals in the country" to be taken on sight "dead or alive." All the stars of the Gashouse mob were named, Nannery among them.

With their pictures posted up in every police station and in the hands of every policeman in the city, they brazenly continued their daylight robberies of the Reid depots.

There were four in as many weeks, without one of the murderous crew having been captured. On the fourth job, committed in East Forty-Fifth Street and Lexington Avenue, the mob, in effecting their escape, used three automobiles. Nannery was at the wheel of one of them with Powers and a crook named Gordon as mates. He shot the car at mad speed up one street and down another in order to confuse pursuers. But as he whizzed the car around the corner into Third Avenue from Forty-Seventh Street, it sideswiped an iron pillar of the elevated railroad with sufficient force to wreck the car and hurl the three men out of it. Their wounds were, however, only slight. But they were greatly shaken and dazed.

Two policemen just off duty witnessed the accident and ran up to give first aid wholly unsuspecting the character of the men tossed out of the car. Nannery, Powers and Gordon,

thinking that the officers were in pursuit of them, opened fire with their pistols and then took to their heels.

Powers was captured. He couldn't stand the gaff at headquarters. He squealed. He gave the names of all the crooks who had participated in the Reid raids that had netted the mob many thousands of dollars, and of the robbery of a bank in Long Island of six thousand dollars wherein another murder was committed—a young bond salesman who had resented being held up and who was "shot to bits," according to the Long Island coroner's report. Powers put the Lindstrom murder up to McKenna, and the Long Island bank murder to Killer, Ice-Wagon, and Jimmy, the Dude, Nannery.

In the heat of the hunt for them, Cunniffe and Crowley fled to New Jersey and began a series of robberies and murders there that produced the worst crime wave that State ever experienced. And the largest man hunt ever organized, though it came to naught.

Nannery cut himself free of Cunniffe. He laid low for a while, working as a drink mixer in a New York night club. He grew a mustache that came forth red, but which he dyed black and his hair the same color. Despite his blue eyes and fair, rosy skin, he got away with the disguise. Detectives keyed to keen eagerness to capture the now notorious outlaw, yet overlooked him as he passed through the city streets.

During this time he organized a small "mob" of his own—four others besides himself. And no sooner did the hot hunt of the police caused by the Reid robberies show signs of relaxing than Nannery began a series of swift operations in burglary which threw Broadway into a turmoil.

One right after another the robberies occurred, in the heart of the White Light district. Ordinarily a criminal is as reckless with his money as he is of his liberty. He will not take on another job till the spoils from the previous crime have been strewn through his fingers.

But Nannery, still in large degree with the mind of a child, had become enormously vain of his reputation as New York's most dangerous crook. That day was a dull and disappointing one to him which didn't see his name and photographs in flashing display in the tabloids. So he struck again and again with only brief intervals between his deeds of brazenry. Yet the police could not catch up with him.

HE and his four aids invaded Reuben's Broadway restaurant at a late hour one night, pistols leveled. The loot of the sensational holdup, including what the safe contained, was not less than forty thousand dollars.

Within two weeks Nannery struck again, despite the fact that the uniformed police guard in Broadway had been doubled and a score of extra detectives sent out to pick up his trail. This time it was a burglary of the Hofbrau House, another celebrated Broadway restaurant. The safe was blown and eight thousand dollars in cash taken. The effrontery shown in the performance of this crime was trebled when a few weeks later the robbery of Reuben's restaurant was repeated. It was effected in the hours just before dawn, the safe being the sole object of attack.

Two of the mob had calmly occupied a table in the restaurant which they had robbed in full sight only a few weeks before. One of them was Dandy

Jim. After a sumptuous meal they had paid their check and then, unobserved, had gone to the washroom, where they had concealed themselves and remained long after the restaurant closed.

The night watchman entered the washroom in the darkness. He was choked, bound and gagged, and left sprawling on a table in a rear room while through a doorway in the rear Nannery admitted three other men, two of them safe experts.

But they had difficulty cracking the big steel box and were still at work on it when dawn threatened to break.

At this time a scrubwoman arrived. She went to the rear door, as was her wont, and knocked. There being no reply from the watchman as expected, she went to the front door and banged on the plate glass panel and jiggled the door handle. But still no watchman appeared. On an opposite corner stood a policeman. She beckoned to him. He came over and she told him her troubles.

Nannery was watching her movements through a clear patch in the stained glass window. He saw her and the policeman move down the alley toward the rear door.

His brain clicked fast to meet the emergency. When again the scrubwoman knocked on the rear door, it was promptly opened—opened by Nannery, who, however, kept from sight.

"Oho!" laughed the scrubwoman, with a nod to the policeman, "everything's O. K. It seems I woke him up at last!"

She entered as the policeman turned and departed. Hard, merciless fingers gripped her throat, cut off her outcry. She was gagged, bound, and thus trussed laid on the table beside the watchman.

The safe, finally yielding, gave up seventy-five hundred dollars in cash. One by one, as the policeman paced elsewhere on his beat, the crooks sifted out of the rear door and away.

It was during this time, with the police hunt picking up against him again, that Jimmy (the Dude) Nannery achieved his crowning feat of daring, the most brazen, heavily manned holdups of which there is police record in the country, albeit it was such a fiasco that the underworld was stunned as to whether it should deride or applaud.

Nannery captained a force of full twenty burglars, gunmen all. The brazenry of it may be appreciated when the objective of the crime is named. It was nothing less than a holdup of the United States Navy Supply Depot at the Navy Yard in Brooklyn—a holdup to be effected with an army of military police and sailors on shore duty within call.

Nannery's "pathfinder" had reported a delivery to the depot of eighty-six thousand dollars in cash for pay roll purposes. It was in a safe in the building and, however zealous and heavy the guard might prove to be around it, Dandy Jim was resolved to acquire that big, fat wad of cash.

THEY toured over to Brooklyn about one o'clock in the morning in three big motor cars from the Gashouse dumps, slipping over the Manhattan Bridge into Williamsburgh, Brooklyn, and thence the short distance to the Navy Yard. They abandoned the cars in dark spots on deserted streets not far from the place and a picked four led by Nannery stole up to the building, stalking the lone watchman who they knew would be guarding the gate.

They found him sitting in a little

shanty in front of the gate whiffing at his pipe. They plunged at him, had him by the throat before he could make an outcry, gagged him expertly with tape, and bound him with thin, strong ropes which cut into the flesh if one struggled. An expert with a jimmy opened the entrance door to the depot.

"No burglar alarm," he cheerily reported. This the pathfinder had positively asserted. And why a burglar alarm for a place in which nightly reposed fully a dozen brawny young men? Entrance effected, a signal was sent back to the other crooks. All of them had on "soft shoes." The twenty entered the building unseen, unheard. Nannery disposed of them at windows and doors throughout the entire building. Orders were that none of the inmates was to get past, even if murder had to be done to hold him inside.

The plan of the building being clearly in Nannery's mind, he led two of his mob to the living quarters of Lieutenant Clinton Thro, officer of the day. Thro awakened with a gag in his mouth and three pistol muzzles pushing at his ribs. Soon he was bound as securely as the watchman. They brought the watchman in from his little shanty and laid him on the floor in the helpless lieutenant's room.

The safe with its eighty-six thousand dollars cash contents was located, and the task of opening it begun. Blankets there were aplenty, in a storeroom, in which to wrap the steel box to deaden the sound of explosions when the safe was blown open. Sufficient nitroglycerin was brought forward to blow up a battleship. Braces and bits and files were broken out.

But one thing proved to be missing. It was a most vital thing. What was needed, what the gang had come to the place without, was some one who knew the business of blowing a safe—an expert cracker!

It is hardly conceivable, with all the other preparations, that this most important one was overlooked. Nannery was afterward to expostulate to fellow crooks that three of his party had taken oath that blowing a safe was to them as easy as slicing a cheese. But when the test came they turned out to be small-time house burglars. Jimmying doors, window sashes and bureau drawers formed the summit of their achievements. The others of the twenty proved to be stick-up men all! Not a cracksman among them!

One squad after another sweated and toiled over the safe. Some one suggested that the entire safe be stolen. But Nannery spat at the man who offered it. The steel box was far too bulky to transport aboard in anything but a huge lorry. There was the eighty-six thousand dollars in rich loot inside the steel compartment. Get it!

IV

THEY worked all of five hours trying to—held the depot that long completely in their control. At five in the morning Sergeant Arthur Holton went to Lieutenant Thro's room to awaken him and receive orders for the day. Holton was promptly overpowered, his lips taped and his limbs bound. Sergeant Murphy then came along to see what had happened to Holton, and he promptly found out, for it happened also to him.

John Gronen, a civilian watchman, arrived from the outside where he had been unable to find the watchman he had come to relieve. He got the same treatment.

In the rear of the building, down a short flight of outside steps, two men

entered the cellar. One was Orvin Carson, the engineer of the building, the other Emilio Lopez, the fireman.

A young fellow wearing aslant his brow the uniform cap of Watchman Gronen appeared in the engine room, gave the engineer a gay salute and said:

"The Admiral wants to see you right away."

"Admiral?" demanded the astounded engineer. "Do you mean Admiral Jewett?" (Then in charge of the Navy Yard.)

"Sure."

"I can't understand such an order," said Carson. "I reported here this morning with orders to remain until I was relieved. Those are the orders I must obey until I am relieved. Report to the Admiral that I will report to him as soon as I am."

"Oh, I'll get relief for you," said the young man with the jauntily set cap, grinning widely. He made a signal with his hand, and four men leaped into the room and made captives of Carson and the fireman, taping their mouths, binding their arms and legs.

Meanwhile the safe resisted. And the air was blue around Nannery as he gave the order:

"Youse bums get the hell out of here! Scram!"

And they scrammed, not a cent the richer for the night's risky adventure, for executing one of the largest scale holdups on record!

It took Jimmy Nannery a month or more to come out of the gloom caused by the bursting of that roseate bubble. Then he began to figure that banks were always juicy, and commissioned his pathfinder to select one. The pick was made of the Bronx National Bank, and Nannery and his special four schemed to pop in with pistols drawn just at the moment when the clerks opened the vaults in the morning. But here again Nannery was to meet failure, and more serious than before.

Perhaps the bank roll was getting low, making Jimmy overeager. Anyway, the holdup car arrived and halted near the bank fully three-quarters of an hour before the institution was scheduled to open its doors for business. Two of Nannery's men left the car and took several strolls up and down in front of the bank, reconnoitering. Nannery sat at the wheel, with two companions in the rear, and awaited the report of the skirmishers.

A policeman sauntered by. He did not appear to take special notice of the men in front of the bank, or the three in the car. But he did, and recognized Nannery. He decided it would be foolhardy to go against five dangerous men single-handed. So he went to a police signal box out of sight of Nannery and his men, and asked for assistance.

It came in a hurry. A dozen policemen in two cars swooped upon the five crooks, each policeman with his pistol out, ready for business. The two men in the street were instantly seized. One thrust a pistol against his captor's stomach and pressed the trigger, but the weapon missed fire. Another policeman laid him low with the butt of a revolver, a blow which nearly tore the crook's scalp completely off. The other man on the sidewalk was knocked out by the blow of a fist to the jaw.

Nannery started his car. It leaped ahead for half a block with a rain of bullets behind. Then the engine stalled. Nannery's two companions leaped from the car and ran for it. Nannery delayed in a final effort to start the car. By that time the cops were on

him. To have attempted to draw a weapon would have meant instant death. Of this he was well aware. Up went his hands.

Another of the fourteen men wanted "dead or alive" had been taken alive. Three others had already been captured.

PETER POWERS was in the Tombs. And so was Red McKenna. Both charged with robbery and murder in the Lindstrom affair. The chair wouldn't get Powers, for he had turned State's evidence. But it was a certainty that Red McKenna was doomed to it. Under these circumstances, Dandy Jim Nannery figured the jig was up for him, too. Since he was involved in a robbery wherein a murder had been committed, he was inexorably booked for the death penalty along with McKenna.

Thinking thus, to the surprise of the police, he talked freely.

"Oh, I suppose I may as well come across," said he nonchalantly. "I am going to burn anyway. But I didn't shoot Lindstrom. It was Red McKenna. One of the mob said, 'Give it to him, Mac,' as we were going out, and Mac gave it to him. I didn't see Killer Cunniffe or Ice-Wagon Crowley shoot at him. Only McKenna."

Then he confessed the various holdups in which he had engaged after the Lindstrom affair—laughingly reciting the incident of the scrubwoman and the cop.

While he was awaiting trial, Red McKenna and two pals made the mad effort to shoot their way out of the Tombs with pistols supplied them from the outside, an attempt ending with all three killing themselves with the last bullets left in their weapons, after murdering Warden Fallon, a keeper, and wounding several other keepers and policemen.

With the death of McKenna the State dropped its charge of murder against Nannery, but on burglary charges he found himself at the age of twenty-three—in 1927—listening to a judge sentence him to a prison term of not less than twelve and a half years nor more than twenty-five.

That's what the judge said. But only eleven months later Nannery was free. He had most mysteriously eeled his way out of Sing Sing and taken with him "Snakes" Ryan, an old-time criminal boy buddy of the Gashouse dumps.

Both had been sent to Sing Sing on the same day for the same nature of offense, and had been given the same sentence. This was late in July, 1927. On July 15, 1928, the two disappeared from Sing Sing. And the Sing Sing authorities couldn't figure how it had been done. For a week they clung to the belief that the men had not succeeded in getting over the prison walls, that they were still hidden somewhere in the buildings. Three times, under orders of the warden, every nook and cranny of the prison was searched. But the hunt came to naught, for the excellent reason that Nannery and Ryan had left the prison the first day of their disappearance.

ALTHOUGH rated wily, dangerous men, they had, nevertheless, been given a job which afforded an opportunity Nannery was quick to perceive. They had been tolled off for duty on the morning kitchen squad. Sixty men were released from their cells by a special guard at five o'clock in the morning to help prepare breakfast for the other prisoners, whose cells were not opened till six. In the kitchen was a small door, barred and locked.

It would be unlocked from time to time by a keeper to allow a prisoner to pass out with refuse. But another keeper was always with such a prisoner.

The breakfast squad was under a guard of twenty men. But somehow Nannery and Ryan had managed to slip away unseen. Nor was their absence noted till all the prisoners were lined up for nose counting at half past six o'clock.

As I have said, Warden Lawes was at first certain the men had been unable to leave the prison. But when it became only too evident they must have succeeded, he conducted an investigation. Evidence was forthcoming which convinced him that the keeper in charge of the little door leading into the yard had been remiss in vigilance, and had at some time on the morning of July 15, left the door open for a brief space, during which Nannery and Ryan slipped out. The keeper, protesting he had not neglected the door, was, nevertheless later dismissed. At five o'clock in the morning the heavy night guard on the prison walls are withdrawn and the activities center inside the prison buildings. It was figured that the day guard had not yet taken their places, whereas the night guard had withdrawn, an opportunity for which the two convicts had patiently waited many mornings for many weeks.

But it wasn't till Nannery himself recently told how the thing had been done that the mystery of the escape was really cleared. He absolved the doorkeeper by his story. He said that over the door was a small square ventilator opening which wasn't barred, but merely screened. Only a slim man could squeeze through.

"We had for weeks worked in the kitchens with fine steel rope wound around our bodies, and I was hiding also a long, very slender steel hook. We managed to hide the ropes in our cells or prison lockers and get them out each morning without being detected. We were waiting for a morning when the day guard would be a little late in mounting the wall.

"The morning came. I passed a signal to some other prisoners in the kitchen squad, who had promised to help us, and they started what sounded like a riot in another room. That drew all the keepers there, and while they were gone Snakes boosted me to the little ventilator window and then I turned back and helped drag him up till he got a good hold. I slipped out of the window. He pulled himself all the way up and slipped out after me. We worked our steel rope and got over the wall in no time. There wasn't a guard for just that minute in sight. I purposely pulled the rope down after me in the hope they'd think we were still inside the walls when they would come to miss us at the half past six assembly.

"We ran for the river, sank the steel rope there, and then dived in. We hugged the shore as closely as we could and swam for about a mile. At a certain place on the shore I knew a complete outfit of clothing had been left for us in a trunk buried about half a foot underground.

"With some flat stones from the river bank we shoveled the earth away in no time, shed our wet prison clothes, and got into spick and span light summer suits, silk shirts, and neckties and socks and tan shoes and Panama hats.

"We knew better than to try to make New York by train. But while the prison siren was screeching its alarm for us, we hailed a good-natured looking fellow coming along in a car, and

he took us quite a way toward New York and we caught other hitch-hikes till we came to where we could hire taxis. Sure—there was money in the clothes, too."

V

IT has been told here of how, when Nannery was captured before he and his quartet of yeggs had time to attempt a holdup of the Bronx National Bank, one of the crooks tried to shoot a policeman and had his scalp half torn off by a blow from the butt of another policeman's pistol. This man, Jack Gormley, was so badly injured he was taken to Fordham Hospital, where he remained in the police ward for a long time before being transferred to the Tombs and from there sent away to serve a long sentence.

For many years the same grizzled policeman had been on duty in the Fordham Hospital prison ward—Jerry Brosnan.

Three months after the escape of Nannery and Snakes Ryan from Sing Sing, three well-dressed young men entered the emergency ward of Fordham Hospital. One asked to have his hand dressed. He put out a right hand smeared with iodine. The orderly in attendance looked at it and said that he did not see that it needed dressing.

"Oh, all right. It was pretty badly hurt a little time back and I thought it might."

The would-be patient turned, and with the other two passed out of the emergency ward. But they paused in the corridor, and the man with the sore hand came back and said:

"Say, I don't think you know what you're talking about. I want a doctor to see this hand—get me? Fetch one."

"I'll telephone," said the orderly.

"All right," replied the other. "I'll wait outside with my friends."

He returned to the corridor. Not far away, at the door of the police ward, grizzled Jerry Brosnan was reclining on a stretcher, dozing. There was only one police case and that was a fellow with both legs broken, the result of an effort to escape arrest. He was not likely to make a dash for it again right away . . .

The orderly at the telephone leaped to his feet. Two shots rang through the quiet of the hospital corridor. When he gained the hallway, the three young men were gone, and Jerry Brosnan was lying dead on the stretcher, bullets in his brain.

The orderly later picked out of the Rogues' Gallery the photographs of Nannery and Ryan as being two of the men in the murder trio. Nannery, he said, was the truculent young fellow with the iodine-stained hand.

What the motive for the especially cowardly crime might be, detectives could not guess, save that some treatment of Gormley when he was confined to the hospital by Brosnan had stirred the deadly umbrage of Dandy Jim Nannery.

IT was at this time that Grover Whalen, then commissioner of police, issued a demand for the capture of Nannery, even more drastic than had been that of Inspector Lahey. His proclamation had to do with Nannery alone.

"Bring Nannery in dead or alive. There is a handsome promotion for the man who gets Nannery or kills him on sight."

Not many months after the Sing Sing escape Snakes Ryan was retaken in tame fashion in a West Side speakeasy and returned to the prison.

It is believed that Nannery planned, from the outside, the attempted "break" for Snakes that resulted in the death of one man. Nannery was undoubtedly the one who engineered the smuggling of four pistols and plenty of ammunition into Sing Sing. He must also have had automobiles ready outside the walls to speed Snakes away to safety.

But the scheme failed because of the forethought of one of the Sing Sing guards.

Ryan, with four other prisoners, named Gordon, Joseph (Babe) Pioli, murderer of the pugilist, Bill Brennan; Herbert Davis, and William Lapere, all-round crooks, suddenly one day produced their revolvers on four keepers and compelled them to yield the key opening a door to the prison yard. Then they gagged the keepers by taping their mouths, locked them in a room, and made off. But the eldest keeper had frequently thought of such a situation arising. He produced an extra key to the door, opened it and an alarm was sounded before the prisoners were fairly on their way. They managed, with the aid of a steel rope and hook, to scale the prison wall under fire of the guards and succeeded in making a flight over twenty-three acres of prison territory before being overtaken and driven to surrender. Gordon turned his pistol on himself and died. The other men, including Ryan, were only slightly wounded in the battle.

ON top of this, Nannery soon thereafter fed New York another thrill. It came through the morning newspapers, which told what had happened at one o'clock past midnight at a banquet in honor of Magistrate Vitale. Suddenly among the guests arose four men exposing revolvers. They were so stationed that their pistols commanded range of the entire room and could especially be centered on the table of the guests of honor. At this table a headquarters detective was seated. His revolver was taken from him.

The guests were unloaded of valuables in cash and jewelry to the tune of about thirty thousand dollars. Nannery was identified as the leader of the holdup. Not only through a Rogues' Gallery picture, but by guests at the dinner who knew him by sight! Either the holdup was motivated by a sheer desire on Nannery's part for the notoriety of it, or the selection of that particular banquet was a mistake. At any rate, the guests who had suffered robbery had their valuables mysteriously returned through polite messengers unknown to them. Ironically, with equal politeness, his pistol was sent back to the headquarters detective.

Out of the curious holdup arose a scandal and Magistrate Vitale was removed from the bench.

But still the order to take Nannery, to "kill him on sight" if need be, went unfulfilled.

But the strain of his situation wore him down. Too many dicks knew him. Henceforth he eschewed New York. He made his lair in New Jersey. And odd sidelights regarding him are reflected from the places where the desperate Sing Sing fugitive chose to live—Boonton and the tiny settlement of Whitehouse. Toward his neighbors in both places Nannery and the young woman who passed as his wife displayed a neighborly amiability which was fully returned. The guise he selected was fully accepted—that of a young New York business man somewhat broken in nerves and health generally who had sought the quiet of

living in small places as his surest cure. It accounted for the semiluxury of his manner of living, his possession of an expensive car, sometimes two. In Boonton and Whitehouse he was "Mr. John Burke." His rôle of invalid young business man also accounted for his days at a time spent away from his home. Business affairs, he explained, made occasional visits to the near-by metropolis imperative.

Utterly astounded were his neighbors in both places when they came to learn they had unwittingly entertained one of America's most notorious criminals.

In Boonton it is now recalled with a grin that he once approached a neighbor with a request that he put a sick dog out of its misery by chloroforming or shooting it.

"I'd do it myself," said the desperado, "but I am an awful softy when it comes to killing anything. I simply can't do it."

In little Whitehouse a lunch wagon is the social rendezvous of the males. Nannery frequented it, always jocular and pleasant, and was voted an entertaining addition to the group. He left behind there also a legend for tenderheartedness. An aged, lone woman occupying a small cottage found it increasingly difficult because of rheumatism to go daily to a distant store for her milk. Nannery, hearing of this, appointed himself "the milkman," and daily used his expensive car to leave a bottle on the old woman's doorstep.

Yet all the while Nannery and his quartet of fellow crooks were out for prey and taking it. From time to time the bank rolls had to be replenished. So he went out and robbed.

The State police and the authorities of several New Jersey cities had what they declared to be "open and shut" cases against him for burglary and were loath to turn him back to the New York police when finally Dandy Jim was taken.

FOR taken he was, and for one so vainglorious of his reputation as a "bad man" and master crook he was captured in a manner to make him shrink in humiliation and chagrin.

He had moved from Boonton rather suddenly. This act followed the visits of several men at his Boonton residence. It is believed now that they were New York crooks and unwelcome, because Nannery feared their movements might have been traced to his New Jersey hiding place. Or he might have suspected the presence of a stool pigeon among them. To his Boonton neighbors he gave a reasonable explanation for his departure. It was that he sought an even more secluded rural retreat. He had found one, he said, but it was later recalled he did not say where.

New Jersey police, meanwhile, knew that Nannery was active in the State. Identification of him in connection with various burglaries and a holdup had been positive from photographs.

And though "Mr. Burke" of Boonton, and later of Whitehouse, had never been matched up with the pictures of Jimmy Nannery, the police headquarters of communities everywhere in New Jersey had long been placarded with photographs and descriptions of the notorious Jim Nannery.

By this means primarily was accomplished what the most experienced and expert hunters of New York headquarters had failed at—the capture of the deadly criminal.

It was effected by a quiet, modest young policeman—"hick cop," the

New York newspaper headline writers termed him—in Dover, New Jersey.

Policeman Ripley had never encountered in his work any of the "big shots" of crime. He had been keenly interested in the pictures and descriptions of Nannery from the day they were first posted up in Dover headquarters. He had studied closely the rather clean-cut, good-looking countenance of this young man whose career had been so vicious that the orders were to kill him on sight.

Ripley was on post in the public square of Dover one Sunday night recently when a shining new sedan halted and parked there. A bright arc light overhead fell squarely on the countenance of the man at the wheel, and the heart of Policeman Ripley gave a quick thump. His eye and memory worked alertly. There was nothing accidental in what the young policeman achieved.

He watched and saw a pretty, well-dressed young woman alight from the sedan and enter a drug store at one side of the square.

Ripley, the brass buttons and badge of his uniform shining brightly under the arc light as he approached Nannery's automobile, called in a loud but good-natured voice:

"Hey, there, buddy, that won't do! You can't park there! Stranger, ain't you?"

The man in the car nodded brusquely.

"Well, of course you can't be expected to know all the local traffic rules," said Ripley, closing in on the roadster with a smile. "Over there's the right place for you to park—see?"

He waved with his left hand. Nannery's glance followed the hand. When Nannery looked back Ripley's pistol was digging into his stomach.

"Hands up—quick," said Ripley.

"O K," replied the celebrated Dandy Jim Nannery, humbly though grimly, and promptly stuck 'em up.

Then Ripley relieved him of a .45 automatic and a tear gas pistol and handcuffed him.

Nannery was angry, humiliated to the verge of tears.

"If I'd been wise for a second that you was wise to me I'd have shot it out with you, big boy," he said bitterly.

"I don't doubt you would," said Ripley.

He closed the door of the car and started to march Nannery away. As he did so the young woman emerged from the drug store. She seemed to take in the situation at a glance and jumped into the car.

Ripley called to her, but her foot went to the clutch and away went the sedan. They caught her and the car four miles away. The car was an arsenal. It contained machine guns, pistols, a big quantity of ammunition, many pistols and a can of nitroglycerin and burglars' tools.

The woman was brought back to Dover. She called herself Mrs. Georgia Pearl Smith, and affected complete innocence of the contents of the car and the character of her escort. But Captain Sands, of the New Jersey State police, will not have it that she is an innocent acquaintance of the notorious Nannery. He says she is otherwise known as Helen Lorraine and that he believes her to be the master mind of a coterie of crooks of which Nannery was the star.

Still, it doesn't sound like Jimmy Nannery—to be working under a woman's orders. If her connection with the desperado's deeds are to be established it will probably be found that she acted merely as his pathfinder—pointed out to him from her

local knowledge where rich loot might be obtained.

Dover rightly made a hero of its intelligent and nervy young policeman. The town gave him a banquet and a medal. And a considerable sum of money made up of rewards offered for Nannery's capture has enriched him.

Both of the same age, Ripley stands in striking contrast to Nannery. There's a sermon in it. Young Ripley, winning honor, esteem, promotion and financial gain working on the right side of the law. Nannery, bloody of hand, reeking of conscience, if he has any, being shunted away to rot in prison for what is practically the remainder of his life. Ignominiously finished at twenty-six!

"Cheaters"

THE racket has entered the professional field with the "cheaters" game. The cheaters salesman wearing a frock coat, appears at the front door and exhibits a chart on which are many symbols and figures. The cheater racketeer starts off with, "Good morning, I am Professor So-and-So. I am making a tour of this section examining eyes, and of course I don't make a charge of any kind unless you need new glasses."

The farmer or suburban dweller replies, "My eyes seem to be troubling me a bit lately, and so do mother's. Seems to me our glasses don't suit."

"Guess that's it," replies the "professor," and without further ado walks in, sets up a sort of portable easel, then asks the person to whom he is talking to pull down the blinds. Then comes a little hocus-pocus, and the next thing is a request from the "professor" to have a look at the glasses the man is now wearing. After a squint or two he exclaims: "It's a wonder you're not blind. Why, man, these glasses are away off focus."

"Guess that's why my eyes hurt me so much, also why I can't see to read without the print running together."

"Sure, that's it," is the reply. "And I will make you a new pair of lenses and it will be all right again."

The "professor" asks permission to "test" again the glasses of the wearer, and with sundry shakes of his head states, "I'll have to take your lenses and frames back to town and grind a pair to suit your eyes. I'll have them done day after tomorrow, and the charge will be only fifteen dollars."

The victim does not for a minute suspect the soft speaking, professional looking chap. He hands over his glasses, and in due time the "professor" again calls with a new case, in which repose the spectacles, and collects his fifteen dollars. The victim wears the glasses a few days, and discovers the new glasses are no better than the old and the print still "runs together." And no wonder, for the "professor" has simply polished the frames and returned to him the very glasses he took away. The "professor" takes good care not to leave his address, and if he did leave a card, the address is a fake like his clothing, title, frock coat, and Van Dyke beard.

The Flaw

By Brandon Fleming

"I killed you twenty minutes ago," Crewson said

Crewson's Murder Scheme Was So Good He Even Told It to His Victim, and Invited Him to Find a Flaw—if He Could!

"YOU see the point?" said Crewson.

Millway, sitting in the armchair opposite to him, nodded.

"Well?"

Crewson paused a moment to tap his cigar over an ash tray.

"Suppose, for instance, I were to commit a murder to-night . . ."

He paused again, settling himself more comfortably in his chair.

"Suppose, let us say, I were to murder *you*—"

Millway started slightly.

"My dear fellow—"

Crewson smiled.

"Let us suppose so, for the sake of example. Now you see the force of my argument. If I were to kill you here in this room to-night, I would be prepared to bet every penny I have in the world that the truth would never be discovered."

Millway sipped his drink.

"'The best laid schemes—'" he quoted.

"Look at the circumstances," Crewson went on. "No one has seen us together to-night. There was not a soul about when I picked you up at the corner of Berkeley Street. We ran straight out here. My wife is away in the country, staying with friends. The servants are on holiday. I only sleep here. The house stands alone, well back from the road. Nobody could possibly have seen you get out of the car and come in with me. So far so good, eh?"

Millway agreed. Crewson reached for the whisky decanter.

"Now for the part where the brains come in. If I had made up my mind to murder you I should have selected a night when I knew that you intended to dine at your club and had no engagement afterward, such as to-night. You remember telling me that on the phone yesterday?"

"Go on," said Millway. "There'll be the one little flaw somewhere."

"We'll see," Crewson boasted. "I should have booked a seat by telephone at a theatre, say the Strand. I should have left my car round the corner at the back, where I could slip away without being noticed, and I should have gone to the theatre without a hat or overcoat. You see the point of that?"

MILLWAY shook his head.

"Not yet . . ."

"You will in a minute. I should have given a little trouble at the box office about the position of my seat when I paid for it. Perhaps I should have changed it. At any rate, I should have done something to make myself remembered. I should have given up my ticket to the ticket taker and retained my stub. I should have gone into the theatre, got a program, tipped the girl, then discovered it was too early to sit down, and gone back to the crowded lobby. Then I should have quietly slipped out, and gone round to my car.

"No one would have seen me go out, and no one would notice that I did not come back. O. K.?"

"Apparently," Millway admitted.

"Then I should have driven straight to St. James's Street, stopped the car on the far side opposite your club, and waited in it until you came out."

"How would you know I *should* be coming out at that time?" Millway asked.

Crewson smiled again.

"That was another one of the things you told me on the telephone yesterday. Don't you remember saying you would not be at the club after nine o'clock, as you were going back to your rooms to read over some papers?"

Millway was silent. For a moment he had seemed to be on the point of speaking, but checked himself, and drained his glass.

"Then," Crewson continued, "I should have followed you in the car—knowing which way you were going—and hailed you quietly, say at the corner of Berkeley Street as I did to-night. I should have had some good reason ready for asking you to run back with me here for an hour—as a matter of fact, I don't think I could have thought of a better reason than the one I *did* give you. You are always ready to give an opinion on a tangled legal question. Now let us suppose that we have come to the present moment. Having got you here . . ."

He paused. "Pretty sound up to this, isn't it?"

"Pretty well," Millway acknowledged. "But the real snags have all to come. Having got me here, how would you have proposed to kill me?"

"In the pleasantest possible way," Crewson declared. "And with a minimum of disturbance. I think . . . I would have poisoned your whisky."

"I see," said Millway. "A sound old-fashioned method."

"In a minute," Crewson went on, "you will see that the actual manner of killing you would not be a matter of particular importance. There are poisons which act with a narcotic effect, producing a gradual sinking into death. I happen to know of one which would have been excellent if I had really had any such intention. I should

certainly have tried to spare you all possible discomfort."

"Considerate of you," Millway returned. "Go on."

"When you were dead I should run back again into town. I should get to the Savoy at about eleven, the time I should have got there if I had just left the theatre. I should have some supper in the grill room, talk to any people I knew—there are always some—discuss the play I should say I had seen, put in an appearance at my club afterwards, perhaps play a little bridge, and come back here. Any criticism?"

"Nothing," Millway confessed, "except the remote possibility that a burglar might break in while you were away, and find the body."

"I should be ready to take the chance of that," returned the other. "It would be much too unlikely to be considered seriously. Anything else?"

"I am waiting to hear how you would dispose of my unworthy remains."

II

CREWSON crushed the stump of his cigar into the ash tray, and leant back in his chair.

"Right! Now for the remains. When I got back here I should take advantage of the darkness to put your body on the back seat of the car, cover it with a rug, and put the car into the garage. I should then go to bed and have a good night's sleep.

"In the morning I should drive down to the bungalow at Southaven. There would be no one there except our old housekeeper, as we always take a couple of the servants down from here when we go."

"Unlucky to get into an accident on the way down, and have your 'baggage' discovered," Millway suggested.

Crewson waved his hand.

"Another chance I should be prepared to take. I'm a pretty good driver, and if I wanted to be particularly careful I think I could steer clear of accidents. After lunch I should transfer your erstwhile self to the motor boat which is moored at my private, and quite secluded, landing stage, I'd add some heavy lead weights I happen to have in the garage down there, explain to the housekeeper that I was going to try out some new gadgets for the boat, and set off on a pleasant little trip. About ten miles out I should attach the weights to your body in such a way that they could not possibly become detached, and commit it, with due solemnity, to the deep. It would certainly remain there—long enough."

He stopped and helping himself to another cigar from the box, lit it with unhurried deliberation.

"That is, I venture to think, pretty nearly a perfect crime. I would be prepared, as I said just now, to bet every penny I have that your disappearance would never be solved. If the slightest suspicion ever fell on me as being concerned in it, I could give an unshakable account of myself. To-night—the theatre, the Savoy, the club. To-morrow and the next day—alone at the bungalow. So far as the theatre is concerned—why, I even have the program and the stub in my pocket!"

HE rose and taking the program from his pocket, threw it on the table. Millway, suddenly rigid, stared at it with eyes into which a curious change was coming . . .

"You—you really went . . .?" His voice was strained. His hands had tightened round the arms of his chair.

Crewson went on in the same tone, without answering the question:

"And against all that—what could be suggested? Only motive."

"M o t i v e?" Millway repeated sharply.

"That's all. And it would be very difficult to prove that I knew you had persuaded my wife to run away abroad with you." Millway started violently. Crewson's voice had not altered, and his expression was unchanged. Millway tried to steady himself.

"What do you mean?" he said slowly.

Crewson glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"And of course no one can be hanged on motive only, even at its strongest. There has to be a good deal more than that. The body, or at least some part of it, must be found before any charge can be made."

When he paused this time he looked at the other man steadily. "And it really isn't likely, Millway, that your body would ever be found. The weights would be too heavy, and the fastenings too secure."

Millway got up from his chair heavily. He was breathing quickly, and his hands were unsteady. Over his face had come the strain of a sickening terror.

"I don't know what you're talking about." His voice was hoarse and thick. "I've had enough of this nonsense . . ."

"Sit down, Millway," said Crewson quietly.

He had glanced again at the clock. The change he had been looking for had begun to show itself through Millway's fear.

"I won't sit down!" Millway almost shouted. "I won't—" He swayed, and clutched at the edge of the table dizzily. His voice dropped nearly to a whisper. "What have you done to me?" he muttered.

"Sit down," repeated Crewson gently.

Millway fell back into his chair. Crewson remained standing. For a moment he was silent, looking down into the face of the man in the chair.

"You didn't know I knew, Millway. You thought you'd been very clever—but there were too many flaws in your plans. There isn't one in mine."

Millway's breath seemed to catch in his throat. He almost choked.

"You can't kill me," he shuddered. "It would be cold-blooded murder. You *can't* . . ."

Crewson laughed. His face had suddenly hardened. There was cold hate in his eyes.

"Can't kill you? My dear fellow, I killed you twenty minutes ago."

III

A SHARP cry came from Millway. He tried to get up, but seemed to have lost the use of his limbs.

"Your drink," said Crewson calmly. "I told you."

"You've poisoned me . . ." Millway gasped.

"You have been dying," Crewson told him, "all the time we have been talking. I said it would be as pleasant as possible. It's a native poison from the Amazon. I tried it first on my business partner in Montevideo. He had become a little inquisitive regarding my financial methods. There is no pain—only that gradual sinking. In another five minutes you will be dead."

He sat down on the arm of his chair, smoking evenly.

"And you really thought, Millway, that you could deprive me of my dear wife as easily as that? It can't be done, my friend. Monica is too valuable to lose. So I have a close but discreet watch kept on her by a private agent

who knows his job. That was why your otherwise excellent plans failed."

Millway struggled forward in his chair. His eyes were fixed and staring. He spoke with a great effort, in a voice that was hardly above a whisper.

"You never cared a damn for her. You only married her for her money . . ." His voice trailed off, but he roused himself with another effort. "Treated her abominably . . . Spent her money . . . other women . . ."

Crewson's face darkened with rage.

"You told her that. She'd never have known if you hadn't."

He stopped. Millway had staggered to his feet, his hands clawing the air. The words that came from his lips were so faint that Crewson could scarcely hear them.

"There's a flaw. You haven't seen it. A flaw—"

Then he pitched forward on to the floor, gave a long shuddering sigh, and lay still.

IV

CREWSON mixed himself another drink, and drained his glass. A murderer . . . The thought did not distress him in the least, for, as he had admitted to Millway a few minutes before, it was not the first time he had resorted to such means. Millway had been a fool. He should have realized the danger of attempting to cross the path of a man like James Crewson. Others had discovered that to their cost.

He looked round. Behind the couch would be the best place. Bending down, he raised the body under the arms, and dragged it across the room to the back of the big divan. Then he went out to the hall, and, returning with a heavy auto rug, threw it over the body. For a moment he stood still, looking down at it. A flaw? No.

He took the whisky and siphons back to the dining room, emptied the ash trays, and, taking the two glasses to the kitchen, washed them carefully. He was perfectly cool and undisturbed. He put on his hat and coat, switched off the lights, and went out to the car.

He drove from Hampstead to the Savoy in a little over quarter of an hour, and began to carry out his program to the letter. In the grill room he joined a party of people he knew, and, mentioning the theatre he had been to, referred approvingly to the play. He was in excellent spirits, and contributed his full share to the hilarity of the supper table. Afterward he went on to his club and played bridge for a couple of hours with his usual skill and good fortune. He stayed another half hour, then drove home.

Leaving the car outside the front door, he let himself into the house and, opening the library door, turned on the light. He looked over the back of the couch. Yes . . . . it was there, under the rug, untouched. Somehow he was conscious of a certain relief. He even turned up the edge of the rug to make sure. Then, exerting all his strength, he lifted it up in the rug and carried it out to the car. He put it on the back seat, and bringing out Millway's hat, overcoat and stick from the hall, placed them on the floor of the car. It would be easy to find a way of destroying them at the bungalow. He drove the car round to the garage at the side of the house and locked it up.

He went to bed and slept soundly.

V

AT nine o'clock the next morning he was dressed and ready to start. While the servants had been away he had been breakfasting at his club, but this morning he got himself

something to eat, and hurriedly packed a suitcase. It was a lovely day, and as he opened the garage doors he was smiling grimly in anticipation of the strangest journey he had ever started upon. He glanced back, as he got into the car, at the dreadful burden on the seat and lit a cigarette before he started up the motor.

He took things leisurely on the road, driving with unusual care. It was a run of about eighty miles to Southaven, and he knew every inch of the way. There was little traffic in either direction. Ordinarily it never took him more than two hours, but to-day he was allowing himself an additional half hour for extra caution.

He wondered what was happening at Millway's apartment in Bury Street. They would have taken in his breakfast and found that his bed had not been slept in. He had been a man of regular habits, and would certainly have told them if he had intended to be away for the night, or have telephoned if he had been unexpectedly detained anywhere. Probably they would ring up the police and the hospitals, but no doubt his disappearance would not be treated seriously for at least another day—and by that time . . .

When he reached the bungalow he drove the car straight into the garage. His nerves were steady, but he was glad the journey was over. There could be no danger now.

The housekeeper, an old servant of his wife's family, stared at him in astonishment.

"You didn't send word you was coming, sir."

He shook her hand kindly.

"I'm afraid I didn't, Mrs. Mamby. Madam's still away in Devonshire, and I didn't know I could get down until the last moment. I want to fit a few new gadgets to the motor boat. Telephone to the stores for whatever you want, and don't put yourself to too much trouble."

He didn't hurry himself. After a comfortable lunch he went out to the little covered boat house and started the motor boat engine. While it was warming up he fetched some heavy lead weights and chains from the garage, and some special split rings he had brought with him from town. Finally he got the stiffened body out of the car and placed it, still in the rug, well forward in the boat. He decided to wait until he was safely out at sea before attaching the leads. Putting on his oilskins, he lit his pipe and cast off.

THERE was a fairly choppy sea running, but the boat was a powerful one, and cut through the waves in exhilarating fashion. Crewson laughed. There was no possible risk now. Everything had gone according to his plans. The perfect crime . . . He had told Millway last night when he had first led up to the subject that no murderer worth his salt should ever be discovered. Only fools were hanged. And Millway had said there was always the one little flaw . . . with his dying breath he had declared there *was* a flaw. Well, if there was he would be willing to pay the penalty.

He went on until he calculated that he must be at least fifteen miles out. He searched the sea with his glasses, but there was no other craft of any sort within sight. Throttling the engine down just sufficiently to keep her nose into the wind, he knelt down in the stern and began to arrange the weights and rings. With the chains in his hands he got up—then staggered back with a shout of terror.

Millway was sitting astride the engine housing, smiling at him.

VI

"EXCUSE my moving, Crewson. There was a little too much spray."

Crewson was deathly white, and shaking. He had dropped the chains and clutched with both hands at the wheel. The shock seemed to have half paralysed him. Millway stretched himself.

"Nothing like a breath of sea air for reviving a good corpse."

Crewson was speechless. After that one cry of horror he had been unable to utter a sound. Millway took out his case and lit a cigarette.

"I couldn't have held out much longer. Your methods of slaughter are most humane, but you don't handle the lifeless clay any too gently. I'm as stiff as a poker."

Still Crewson could not speak. The boat forged on slowly through the choppy sea. Millway remained smiling on his uncomfortable seat.

"I told you there was a flaw, Crewson."

He reached down for the rug and put it round his shoulders, keeping his eyes warily on the other.

"It was a first-rate scheme, but, like all the people who think their plans are perfect, you made the little mistake that upsets the whole. Even now you don't know what it was. If you were offered a thousand pounds I don't think you could spot it."

No sound came from Crewson. Still holding the wheel mechanically he had dropped back on to the seat, his eyes fixed on Millway's face with a dreadful stare.

"You remember saying you didn't think you could have thought of a better reason for asking me to go out to your house last night—that I was always ready to give an opinion on a legal puzzle? And then you proceeded to lay before me point for point, as a matter which concerned you personally, a problem which had formed the subject of a magazine story I had read a few days before. Reading that story saved my life. I knew that you must have some other motive for getting me there than asking my opinion on a fictitious case that meant nothing to you—so I'm afraid I was a little suspicious. And when I'm suspicious, Crewson, I become really clever."

Crewson muttered something unintelligible. Millway continued in the same easy tone.

"You see, I happened to know that in one way and another you were a pretty black scoundrel, so I kept my eyes open. When you got out the drinks I noticed that you poured out the whisky yourself, and then handed me the glass to put in my own soda. Perhaps you recollect my asking for one of those special Turkish cigarettes of yours? When you turned away to get them from the cupboard, I neatly poured the whisky into the flower vase on the table. I kept the glass in my hand afterward so that you shouldn't see there was only plain sodawater in it. Not bad, eh? But the best is to come."

HE paused to laugh.

"You told me yourself the kind of poison you'd used, and how it would work! It was really a most amusing situation. And so, being a fairly good amateur actor, I was able to produce the proper symptoms, and die in the right way. It never occurred to you that I had not taken the poison, so you didn't think about making sure I was

really dead. While you were out carrying on your excellent plan, I telephoned to my rooms to say I was at a friend's house on urgent business and should probably stay the night, and then paid a visit to your larder and hid some food in the garage.

"It was quite easy to remember the exact position you had left me in, and as you very kindly kept the rug over me the whole time all I had to do was to make myself stiff. The only thing that wasn't easy was to keep my mouth shut while you were bumping me about with no more reverence than if I'd been a sack of potatoes. It was lucky I didn't have to sneeze!"

Crewson made a great effort to pull himself together, but he failed most miserably.

"Why did you do it?" he said dully. "You could have walked out of the house last night. What was the good of carrying it on as far as this?"

The smile disappeared from Millway's face. It grew hard and merciless.

"Because, Crewson, one of the most interesting features of your perfect plan—and one which you entirely failed to realize—was that everything you were doing to shield yourself from suspicion if I disappeared would be equally effective to shield *me* from suspicion if *you* disappeared."

"What do you mean?" demanded Crewson hoarsely.

"It would work out perfectly," said Millway evenly. "I should take the boat back to that lonely little creek a mile higher up the coast that you showed me once when I was down for a week-end. I should wade out, turn her round, and send her straight out to sea at full throttle. Then I should walk along to your bungalow, slip into the garage, get my hat, coat and stick and have a brisk ten-mile walk to Barham station. I should be in town again by six o'clock.

"Your housekeeper would give the alarm some time this evening when you didn't return; some passing steamer would pick up the derelict motor boat, and it would be assumed that you had in some way fallen out of the boat and been drowned. It's your turn to find a flaw—but I don't think there is one."

He slipped off his seat as Crewson started up and threw away his cigarette.

"I shouldn't have much compunction, Crewson. You're a pretty rotten piece of work. You confessed last night to the murder of your partner in South America, and I daresay there have been other things not much better. You've made hell of the life of one of the sweetest girls in the world, your wife. You wouldn't be any very great loss, would you?"

With a furious oath Crewson sprang at him, but Millway had not relaxed his vigilance for a moment. He lunged forward and drove his fist with all his strength to the point of Crewson's jaw. It was a knock-out blow. Crewson sagged back, and, toppling limply over the side, disappeared.

White and tense, Millway did not move for some minutes. Then he went down into the stern and threw the weights and chains overboard. Seating himself at the wheel, he brought the boat round and headed for the shore.

Reward

By J. Allan Dunn

"Don't be silly, Moore," the gangster warned

Larry Thought His Past Was Buried, Until the Mob Found Him Again. But There Were Others with Pasts, Too

LARRY MOORE expanded his chest, stretching his muscles before he went back to work on the car he was overhauling. It was a broiling day and Larry was wet with sweat, but feeling fit and fine.

Things were going well, getting better steadily. He was going to swing it all right and the past was buried, almost forgotten. It seemed like a bad dream at times, a nightmare, something that had never really happened.

He watched the car he had refueled and reoiled disappear down the shadeless road, and then he saw a limping figure trailing along, sticking to a tired and halting gait with a steadiness unusual in the average road bum.

The tramper was short but sturdy looking, trudging on with a curious air of independence. He did not look like a hitch-hiker, neither did he look like a typical tramp. His face was reddened, not browned by the sun. City clothes, no bag or bundle. Dust flung from passing cars floured him like a miller's assistant. His features were streaked with it where the sweat had runneled down.

He glanced towards Larry without slackening up, passing on, as he must have passed many other garages, like a thirsty, footsore hound that knows he will get scant welcome, but Larry hailed him. He was feeling good, anyway, and he had a certain fellow feeling towards outcasts and wanderers. He might have been one himself if the breaks had gone the other way—if it had not been for Alice. He had come

mighty close to it, but he had pulled out—for her.

"Want a drink, 'bo?" he called.

The man checked his limping stride, swung in, his pale blue eyes incredulous, suspicious that he might be kidded.

"You said a drink?" he whispered, his throat dry, his voice husky.

Larry grinned. It was the kind of grin that won him friends and even tempered enmity. A grin that proclaimed its owner on the level.

"Soft drink."

"*Any* drink, fella," said the other hoarsely. "I don't want no hard stuff this weather, on these bullyvards. You ain't kiddin' me?"

Larry shook his head. Under that mask of dust there was something about the rover's face that made him glad of his impulse. Happy-go-lucky, but not surly. The light blue eyes now showed friendliness, almost gratitude as the walker drifted into the cool shadow of the garage interior and stood in shabby suit and shoes, both too well worn, the tip of his dry tongue showing between lips that had cracked from sun blisters.

"You're the first human bein' I've seen this side of Newark," he said as Larry went into the lunch room and brought back a cold soda and three of the sandwiches Alice's sister, Kitty, made fresh every day and kept fresh in the special showcase. Larry put the cash for these in the register. Kitty was particular about her accounts and he would say he had sold them. He tended the counter as a rule this time of day when business was slack, although he was now without an assistant. His helper had gone to the hospital with appendicitis three days ago. And Kitty did not like tramps, nor did Alice. They would have classified this chap as a bum.

"Lettuce and tomato. Cheese. Cold roast beef. How about it, bo?" asked Larry. "No charge. I snitched 'em," he added, grinning.

"Don't you own this dump?"

"My wife's got an interest in it," said Larry. "So's her sister, in the refreshment end of it. Hop to it."

The man looked at him again and then bolted the food wolfishly. He finished the soda and took the cigarette Larry handed him, to smoke it lingeringly, with deep inhalations like one who wants to make the most of something infrequent.

"Just why, fella?" he asked.

"You looked like you might need it. I've been up against it myself."

WITH the timeworn phrase there flashed into Larry's mind a brief vision of that forgotten, buried past, a resurrection, a phantom, like a flashback on a film. He saw himself once again fleeing, fearful of being overtaken or halted by word flashed ahead, traveling through fields and woods by night, hungry, thirsty, footsore and shabby; farmers' dogs winding him and baying him on.

He had "been up against it" all right.

"Yeah?" said the other. "You seem to be settin' pritty now. I sure needed that scoff, pal. How do I git even? Got a car to wash?"

"You know how to wash cars?"

"I sure do. And I ain't a bad mechanic, either. If I worked steady I might have a dump like this, sometime, but I git the road fever off an' on. I go haywire if I stay long in one place. Wake up some mornin' an' feel like I'm tired an' got to git loose. How about that car? I ain't just a roadlouse."

"How about a job?" asked Larry. "Till you get road fever again. You

might like this one better. I need a helper. Mine is in the hospital and, when he gets out, there's work for two of you, the way things are going. You can sleep in the office—there's a cot there. Four bucks a day and grub. What do you say?"

"What would *you* say," said the other slowly, "if I told you I just come out of the Big House, out of stir?"

"I'm figuring you'd be on the level with me," answered Larry. "There ain't much here you could get away with, anyhow. I'm up against it for a man. This time of year everyone's in the fields or orchards. You'd be doing me a favor."

The other grinned for the first time. It was a friendly grin, at that.

"I don't look like much of an advertisement for your place," he said and smote two clouds of dust out of his clothes.

"Overalls are cheap. What's the name?"

"Smith. Johnny Smith. I wasn't lookin' for a job to-day, but it looks like I'd landed one."

II

THE man who called himself Johnny Smith was a fair workman and a busy one. There was plenty to do. Moore's "Garage, Repair Station, Storage and Refreshment and Rest Rooms" was on a main highway traveling east and west across New Jersey. It was near the Pennsylvania line, among the hills. His house was on a wooded bank above the garage. Alice, her sister Kitty, and Junior—eighteen months old—made up the rest of the happy household, which was beginning to become prosperous. Larry looked forward to an agency. He sold a secondhand car now and then that he had reconditioned. His reputation and importance were growing. He was meeting his notes, the bank treated him as a valued client.

It was swell, living out where the air was clean and sweet, eating home-cooked meals, getting a stake, becoming a solid citizen. Away from the racket.

Alice had little use for Smith, and her sister agreed with her.

"He's nothing but a tramp and a crook," said Alice. "We're liable to wake up with our throats cut."

Larry did not say that people with their throats cut were not likely to wake up, much less realize their condition. Alice was nervous and it was natural enough, seeing that Junior might have a brother before very long, unless it turned out to be a sister.

"He's likely to rob you, or set the garage on fire, smoking in there nights with the oil and gas around," said Kitty.

"He probably won't stay long," said Larry mildly. "Right now he's useful, and I need him. You shouldn't call him a crook, Alice, just because you don't know him well. I might have been one myself, before I met you."

"Yes? You think I wouldn't have known it? Larry, I wish you'd get rid of him."

"I offered him the job and it's his, so long as he sticks to it."

Larry could be firm. His two womenfolk liked him for it, even if they grumbled. And Smith, listening in the darkness, grinned. He had been to the village and come back by a short cut over the hill that brought him close to the house. He heard his name mentioned and he was not scrupulous about listening. You got tipped off to a lot of things that way.

"That guy's got nerve," he said to himself with a quiet chuckle. "He runs

his janes. But calling a guy a crook don't make him one, lady," he thought, "and if he is one it ain't likely to make him quit. I suppose she thinks a crook ain't human."

GARAGE and lunch counter were closed. It was ten o'clock. The gas pumps were locked. Smith had a key to the garage. There was a bench in front and he sat upon it, smoking. His frame of mind was curious, most might think, for a man who had served a term in Sing Sing—two, as a matter of fact. He had money in his pocket and he was getting the road fever again. It was not as a hobo this time, though, to join the junglemen that he wanted to go, but to travel. He wanted to see city streets and pavements, to get a shot of the real McCoy, not the stuff they peddled in the neighborhood. He wanted to get into a stuss game or roll the dice. It wasn't far to Easton, nor from there to Philly. He knew a gang in Philly who would give him a glad hand.

The urge was continuous, insistent as an ulcerated tooth. But he did not want to leave Larry Moore in the lurch. The helper had developed further trouble in the hospital; would not be out for two or three weeks, and would be weak then. Smith groaned at the thought of sticking it out.

"He's one swell gee," he told himself. "I can taste that cold soda and them sandwiches now. I can't scram without some good excuse. That's a swell kid he's got, too, and his wife ain't so bad, for a jane, at that. Nor the sister, even if they *did* think I was slitting throats in the night."

There was not much traffic on the road at this hour. Most of the cars that passed were tourists or natives, most of the trucks got in as early as they could, save for the regular nighthawks, making chain-store deliveries, and the early morning ones with market produce.

Some of these night trucks, Smith knew well enough, were in the B and A racket. There were plenty of stills in the hills. Some of the label alky was landed at spots along Barnegat Bay, the "white" was a home product. These trucks were mostly bound for New York state, for Albany and Troy and other centers. They swung north beyond Moore's garage. The beer came mostly from the big brewery in the heart of New York, brought through the Hudson Tunnels to New Jersey.

It was a great racket, but Smith was not strong for it. He liked to pull off any job that he did solo. There was too much scrapping between the gangs in the B and A game, too many splits. In a vague way Smith had the idea of aquiring a place like Moore's, even marrying a straight jane and carrying on. He didn't know if he could settle down, but he liked to dream about it. Moore's kid had got under his hide, and, funny as it was, Smith liked flowers. He could have flowers if he was out in the country like this. He had tended the warden's flower beds on his last stretch. But it would take a stake, and where was he to get one? He might pull a job, would have to, if he quit here, for he knew well enough he would only work for two people—Moore and himself.

He heard cars coming, up the hill. They swung and he saw them coming on. A truck first, going fifty or better. Then a long, closed car trailing. An alky truck with the guards in the car to prevent hijacking from a hist outfit. Cinch!

The truck passed but slowed down, stopped twenty yards beyond the garage. No one got down. There would

be the driver and his helper, not armed. The car stopped, gasping. It was out of gas.

"That's *their* hard luck," thought Smith. They might get nasty about it, but he was not tender himself. The dump was closed.

III

TWO men got out of the back seat, stretched themselves. A third came from beside the driver, who stayed in the car.

The first two lit cigarettes, sitting on the running board. The third man came towards Smith, who was little better than a shadow on the bench, with the moon on the far side of the building. But the man spotted him. He came on purposefully, his eyes shining in the faint light that came from the garage, in the office, where Smith was going to bed presently. They were small eyes, close together, cold, hard eyes. Smith knew the type. Not a Big Shot, but a boss torpedoman. A hard gee.

"You own this dump?" the man asked in a voice as chilly as if his tongue was an icicle.

"Nope," answered Smith laconically. "Anyway, it's closed for the night."

"Yeah? Then it's goin' to open up. I'm out of gas, see? I got a leak in my tank I want fixed. I got a long ways to go yet and I don't like to travel daytimes, buddy. They tell me a guy named Moore owns this place and lives here. Where is he?"

"Gone to bed, likely."

"Get him up. I'll pay plenty, see, but we want service."

His tone was sinister, ominous. The two men had risen and were coming in. Smith knew they all had rods on them, outside of what arsenal was in the car. Also they meant to get what they wanted, one way or another. He wondered about that leak in the tank. But it was better to go easy than have to take it hard. They'd pay well. No question of that. And no sense in bucking B and A men. No sense at all.

"I'll see the boss," said Smith. "I work here, but I ain't got the keys, fella."

"Rush it. He won't lose by it."

Moore came unwillingly, but he saw the sense of Smith's argument. His wife protested, though she had not heard what Smith said.

"You make rules, why don't you stick to them?"

"The man's broken down, honey. It won't do me any harm to help him out. We can use the money."

"And I suppose he'll want a lunch."

"There's stuff left over," said Kitty. She was pretty, but she was practical. "I'll sell that to him at double price, if he wants it, and welcome. There's plenty of coffee to heat up. You can ask him if he wants any, Larry."

MOORE opened up the garage.

"You'd better push her in if you want the tank fixed," he said.

"I was going to," the man answered drily. "Roll her in, boys." There was a quality to his words that made Larry, like Smith, wonder what kind of a leak had emptied the tank.

He found it with his trouble-lamp. A round hole, deflecting downwards, cleanly made. He looked up to see the man surveying him sardonically.

It was a bullet hole. No doubt of that.

"Something must have hit it," said the man. "Can you fix it?"

"I can patch it," said Larry. He didn't like this sort of thing. It was too

close to the old life. He didn't mind furnishing gas and oil to the A and B racket, but this plugging bullet holes was different. He had seen them before, in the nightmare days he had quit. Quit!

"Take half an hour or so," he heard himself saying. He knew the racket. No sense in crossing these gees. Smithy was right.

"How about some chow?" asked the man. "Coffee and sandwiches. I figured on eating at Port Jarvis, but so long as we're hung up—there's six of us altogether. You can raise the schedule. We'll put it on the swindle sheet."

He was affable, almost friendly. Larry thought of what Kitty had said. He looked round for Smith, but he had disappeared. Probably chatting with the men. He didn't have to work overtime. Larry pressed the buzzer to the house to bring Kitty down.

"My sister-in-law 'll give you what she can," he said. "Nothing hot, though, outside the coffee."

"Okay with me," said the man and strolled out. Larry rolled the car by himself over the pit. He could cold-solder a patch easily enough. The garage was full of shadows. The lighting was irregular. He himself had been in shadow most of the time, looking for the leak, busy on finding it. He had not observed the man closely, but he was vaguely troubled. The voice seemed familiar and Moore had been afraid to try and recognize it, to raise the phantom of the past.

He was not happy as he worked. He heard the men talking in the lunch room, heard Kitty's voice, and Smith's. Smith was helping her, standing by. A good scout, Smith, if the women did misappraise him.

The patch was simple. He was through inside the time he had set. The men went outside. He heard the cash register ring up, sure sign that the meal was over. Then the back door to the lunch counter slammed. Kitty was going back to the house. Larry felt relieved. They wouldn't start anything like that, of course, but he was glad Kitty was through with them. Smith had gone out with the rest.

ONE man came through the side door from lunch counter to garage.

"Good grub," he said. "How about it. All set? Fine, we'll fill her up and roll. How much do I owe . . ."

He had left the side door open. Kitty had not switched off the lights, leaving that to Larry. They shone full on his face, but not on that of the man whose voice had seemed familiar. The latter, his sentence unfinished, began to laugh.

"They told me a guy named Moore owned this place," he said, "but I didn't think it was *you*, Lefty."

Moore was not so much left handed as ambidexterous. Just now he held a tool in his left hand and wished, for one savage moment, that he had a gun in his right.

The vaguely reminiscent voice was now revealed with the identity of its owner.

Chi' Logan! Top torpedo man for Harlem Quinn!

Harlem Quinn!

Red thoughts ran riot through the brain of Larry Moore. It was like a film run backwards.

Logan was still laughing, but he stopped.

"I guess I don't owe you anything, Lefty," he said. "But I'll slip you the jack just the same, seeing it ain't mine. So this is where you landed? Pretty

soft. Married, eh? *And* a kid. And a swell sister-in-law who runs the lunch counter. She looked good to me. I guess we'll have to get acquainted."

Moore faced him, his wrench in his left hand.

"You'll lay off her," he said. "Or . . ."

"Or what?"

Logan's hand slipped inside his coat. A rod flashed out.

"Don't be sill', Moore," he warned. "If I was to slip the word where you were hiding out, to the 'Cuter, or to the Big Shot, you know what would happen to you. The same thing that happened to Shorty Walker. He tried to stool . . ."

"I'm no stoolie," said Moore.

"That ain't the point," said Logan. "Your trouble is you know too much. You might not spill it, but you might. You were indicted, with the rest of us, account of the killing."

"I had nothing to do with that," said Moore. "I was driving the truck."

"One of the Poole gang, just the same."

"I took the job because I was hard up. I didn't pack a rod, neither did Burke, my helper."

"One of the mob, though. The D. A. got your name, with the rest of us, from Walker. We thought it was a hist gang tried to hold up the convoy. It turned out to be federals. Two of 'em got shot . . ."

"Not by me," said Moore. "You handled that Tommy-gun. I saw you myself when you got out the far side of the car and turned loose . . ."

"You saw too much, Lefty. But that deal is over, unless you want to be nasty. We all lammed. Our mouthpiece got the case appealed. When it came up again Shorty was missing. I'll grant you that it's died down, but we can use you, and this garage. The Big Shot hangs out in Newark. We're running by here on schedule. You'll kick in or else the Big Shot might think you're in the way. Get me? Don't be a sap. This is my first run up here. It won't be my last. You with your wife and kid and whatnot. What do you amount to? Making five or six grand a year. Kick in and you can make twenty, thirty, fifty. Or—get kicked out. Then where does your wife come in, as your widow, or your kid, as an orphan?"

"I'm out of the racket, for keeps," said Moore.

"The hell you are! Once in, you're always in."

MOORE had no way of knowing whether Logan was lying or not. He did not know that he had been indicted. In those two weeks of frantic flight before he got a garage job, even as he had given one to Smithy, he had not seen a paper, had not dared look at one.

All he knew was that Logan had found him, that he seemed due to pay the wages of crime. The Big Shot had transferred to New Jersey.

"Think it over," said Logan. "I'll be coming back from Albany in a couple of days, driving back alone—what's that?"

He whirled. Moore had not heard the slight noise, but Logan's quick ears had detected something. It turned out to be Smith, advancing with two handfuls of waste from the rear.

"All okay, boss?" asked Smith.

"Where did you come from?" demanded Logan.

"Me? I been out chinning with your lads. Thought the boss was through, maybe."

"Get out," ordered Logan, and Smith went to the front.

Two of the men appeared in the open doors, rolled out the car to the pump, where the repaired tank was filled. The engine was started. The truck went ahead and the car followed. Moore stood with his head bowed. Smith came up to him.

"'I'll close up," he said. "That was an alky outfit. Kind of tough. Say, was that chief guy's name Logan?"

"Chi' Logan," said Moore.

Smith repeated the name under his breath. His eyes glistened, but Moore did not see them. He saw only the wreck of his own hopes, the ghoulish uprising of his past when he had driven for the gang and got involved in the killing. He had thought it died down. It was, from the police standpoint, but not from that of the mob.

"Close up," he said. "Thanks, Smith."

Then he was gone. Back to his wife and kid, to Kitty. A poor protector, though he might be a good provider.

Smith—Johnny Smith—grinned. He had listened in, according to his habit. Chi' Logan! Well, well. It was a small world after all. And Chi' Logan was coming back alone in a couple of days, from Albany!

Smith smoked a couple of cigarettes, outside, adjusting things in his own mind. He owed this and he might have to pay that. But he adjusted all. In the office, sitting on the edge of his cot in his underwear, he went through a lot of clippings in a worn wallet and finally found the one he wanted.

IV

IT was three days, not two, when Logan reappeared, this time in a roadster. He had a standing order from the Big Shot to select places where new stills might be set up, or depots established. Lefty Moore looked to him like a big bet. And Lefty's sister-in-law had attractions.

The squat figure of Smith fronted him when he braked his car and asked for Moore.

"He expected you yesterday," said Smith. "They've gone to Buryfield today, to the fair."

He did not say how he had helped convince Moore that it was good business to go to Buryfield—which it actually was. The two women had wanted to go. They had even been kindly towards Smith in their desire for the fun of the fair. And Moore had given in, hoping that Logan, a day late, would not show, not daring to tell the truth.

"Yeah? How far is Buryfield?" asked Logan.

Smith lied cheerfully.

"Seventy miles, over these roads."

"How do you get there?" asked Logan.

"It's one of these back country fairs," said Smith. "Hard to give directions from here. I could drive you there myself, but . . ."

"Why not?" asked Logan. "Not much business going on, is there? I'll pay you more than you'd take in, and fix it with your boss."

"I'm not worrying about the pay," said Smith.

And Logan erred in not wondering why Smith did not worry.

"I'll drive," he said. "You come with me."

"Suits me fine," said Johnny Smith. "I'd like a ride."

It was half an hour later when Logan objected to their direction.

"This fair ain't in Pennsylvania, is it?" he asked.

"What's the difference?"

Logan, both hands on the wheel,

looked at Smith with a side snarl. So far he had considered him a garage helper, a punk. Now—

"I don't want to go into Pennsylvania," he said.

"Well, you're going there."

Smith was transformed from a squat subordinate to some one in authority. A round circle of steel pressed against Logan's ribs. He knew what it was.

"Keep driving, pal, as you are," said Smith. "I got your number. The minute things don't go to suit me it's going to be too bad for you. You're good, delivered in Pennsylvania, dead or alive, for ten thousand berries—and I sure can use 'em. My monicker is Buck Folsom. You gave my pal, Gimpy Wells, a medal. The double cross. It's been six years now, but they'll still be glad to see you in Philly, Chi'. Soon as we cross the line and see a state cop, I'll turn you over."

Logan, as he was now called, swung the wheel hard to spill the roadster into the ditch. It hit the hollow, tipped, turned over. There was the sound of a gun deadened by the crash of the wreck. Presently Buck Folsom, bruised and bleeding, crawled out of the tangle and sat on the edge of the ditch, smoking a somewhat damaged cigarette.

"I fooled him, at that," he said to himself. "We've been in Pennsylvania for the last ten minutes. Makes it easy to collect. Lucky I once lived in Philly. They've got no use for this stiff there, the way he snitched on his mob. It's a small world, after all."

He hailed a passing car that slowed up at sight of the wreck.

"Get me a state cop," he said. "I'm okay, but there's a dead guy in the ditch."

The car drove on hastily. Smith chuckled.

"Funny how some folks duck from a stiff," he said.

LARRY MOORE read the evening edition from New York. His pipe went out as he saw where Chi' Logan had been turned in by a man named Buck Folsom. Folsom he did not know. But the news of Logan's death gave him an infinite relief. Alice and Kitty knew nothing of it all. Never would, now. Logan was a deliberate murderer, but he would kill no more. The man Folsom had claimed the reward for a dead body.

A boy rode up on a bicycle. He had a yellow envelope in his hand. Moore took the telegram, paid the messenger fee and opened the envelope dubiously. Telegrams were rare things with him. He read it and tore it into little pieces as the boy rode off, but the message was scored on his brain.

SORRY QUITTING BUT BUYING GARAGE OF MY OWN HOPE YOU AND I STAND EVEN REGARDS TO YOUR FOLKS THEY DIDN'T LIKE ME MUCH BUT I AM STRONG FOR YOU AND YOUR WHOLE OUTFIT I GOT A BREAK WILL WRITE YOU LATER COME INTO UNEXPECTED MONEY.

JOHNNY SMITH.

Next week, another *Señor Lobo* novelette. In "Barking Dogs," by Erle Stanley Gardner, *Señor Lobo* meets some men who are his match with firearms. Watch for this bullet-fast yarn!

DO YOU READ THE ARGOSY?

Devil's Payment

Was it the devil himself or Lance Blackstarr's priceless Twin Sapphires that had turned this family reunion into a thing of horror?

Dropping his automatic back into the holster under his coat, Lance looked at the hole in his hat

By THEODORE ROSCOE

CHAPTER I.

UNIDENTIFIED STRANGER.

LANCE BLACKSTARR had enjoyed the drive up from New York, but evening in the mountains found him suddenly depressed. For the last nine miles, there hadn't been a single solitary passenger along the highway. He wouldn't have come if he hadn't been in a tight jam for money—so tight, in fact, that he even planned to sell his Twin Sapphires.

At that moment a flash of fire burst from a pine tree ahead of him; and his hat went spinning into the road.

Smash! Smash! His hand whipped out of his coat; his automatic let go with such speed that the two shots echoed up the wooded mountain slope as one single thunderclap. Lance Blackstarr came scrambling out of the car, gun ready, to watch a dead man come acrobating down through tree limbs.

Pocketing his automatic, Lance looked at the hole in his hat.

"Confound it," he said aloud, "I didn't mean to kill him, but he almost got me. Who *is* the fool?"

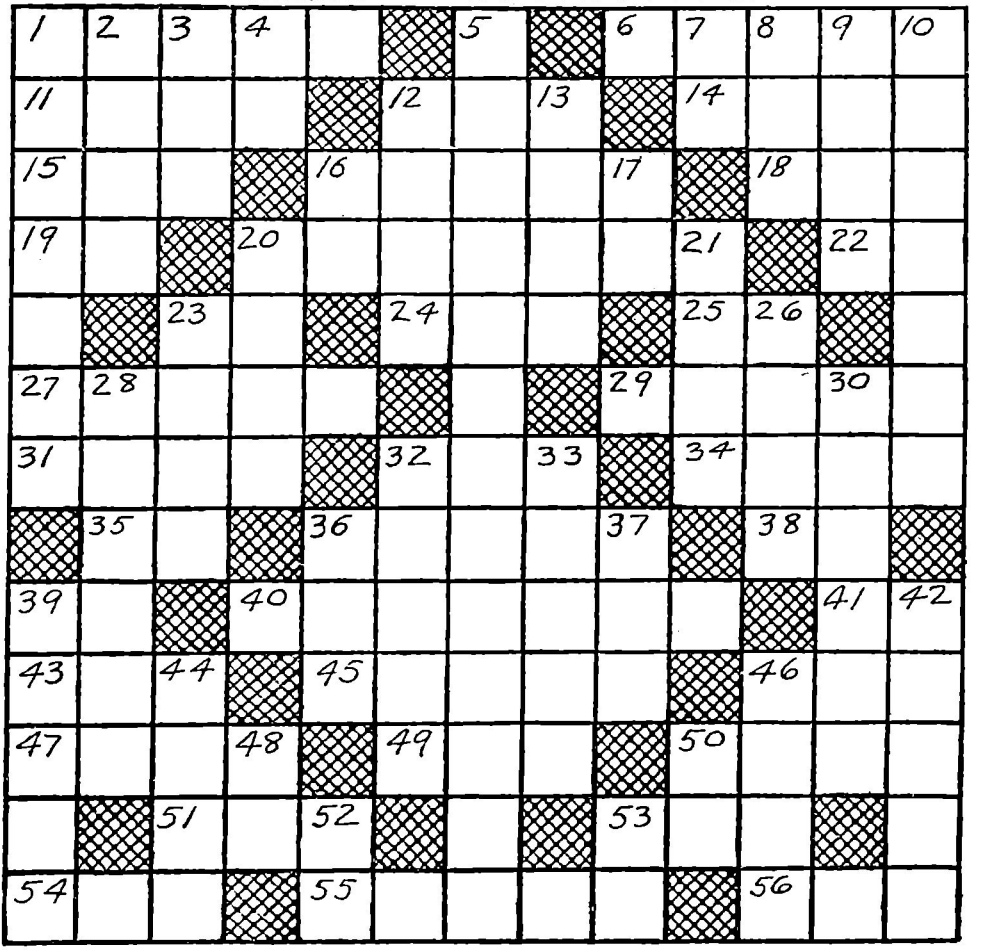
Your guess is as good as Lance Blackstarr's.—But the real answer is contained in next week's ARGOSY.

Narrative Cross-Word Puzzle

THE BOASTFUL SERGEANT DOESN'T MAKE GOOD

By Richard Hoadley Tingley

PUZZLE NUMBER FIFTY-FIVE



A—ACROSS

Sergeant Edward Duffy was
A 34 seated at the desk in his .....
D 37 private ..... at Police Head-
D 30 quarters one cold ..... day
D 44 D 4 (abbr.) during . ... in 1939, ...
He had just returned from
A 47 church, where he had .....
D 16 with his ....., and was in a

D—DOWN

A 25 peaceful frame ..... mind.
Business was dull at the office.
There were no troublesome
A 20 A 11 ..... on ..... to beset his
D 12 ..... As the bright fire in the
A 27 grate ..... an agreeable
warmth he gazes out of the win-
A 22 dow ..... the snow-covered

D 17 ..... on which the building stands, he congratulates himself
D 48 that he is ..... longer a patrolman tramping the icy sidewalks
D 46 as he has done so ..... times before the previous incumbent
D 13 so conveniently ....., and his promotion followed.

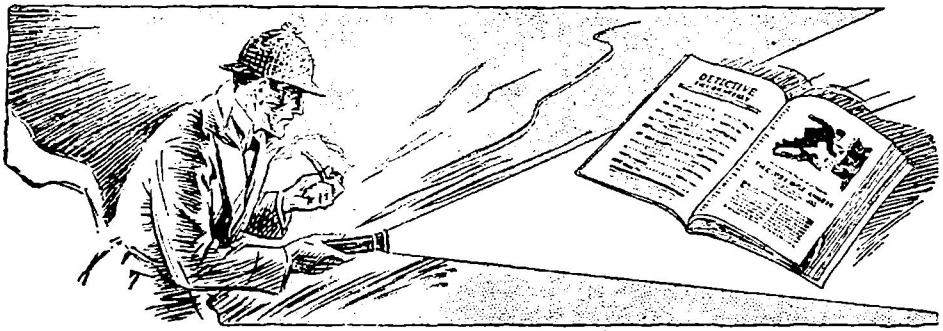
"I'll show the chief what a
D 50 real sergeant can ....," boastfully declared he to himself. Genially affected by the heat,
A 49 and regardless of the ..... of the traffic as it roared past, he
D 33 ..... to nod sleepily when he was sharply aroused by his chief,
D 23 ..... Muldoon, who burst in
A 38 ..... his solitude.

"Wake up, you sluggard!" cried the chief. "Here's work.
D 21 Just the ..... you say you
A 35 want. Nothing half ..... interesting has occurred in an
A 53 ..... You know that so-called
D 28 A 56 ..... men gang? .....? This
D 39 ..... of racketeers is busy
A 54 again and is making a ..... of
D 5 trouble. I suspect them of .....
A 1 in the raid of that .....easy
D 26 and ..... layout down at the
D 3 ..... of Spring Street last night.
A 43 They took ..... the cash they
D 10 could lay their hands on, ...
A 39 (Roman numbers) them ..... and fifty
D 7 dollars ..... more, and they
A 40 ..... the place almost beyond
A 45 recognition. ..... himself could not have done a better job.
A 55 That joint is ..... by my friend Casey and deserves protection. He runs the squarest
D 9 house in the whole ..... under
A 36 my jurisdiction. I had ..... to give him better service, as it
A 31 is my ..... to take care of my
D 36 friends, and he ..... come across like a man every time.
A 32 The ..... of the matter is jealousy between rival bootleggers over patronage. They
A 6 tell me, too, there's a ..... in that gang. Maybe you know her:
A 16 the famous ..... Cronin.
A 24 They have all probably .....
A 51 themselves by ..... to wait till the excitement dies down. Do
A 50 you ..... tackle the job? It
D 8 A 29 ..... be a long .....-out affair, but it's your opportunity to make good, and I would like to
D 20 A 41 .....out dire punishment ..... that crew."
A 14 "It sure is a ..... chance. The
A 18 best I've had .....!" exclaimed the sergeant. "And you may
A 23 take it from ....., chief, that
D 52 it will be ..... to that bunch of crooks when I get through with them. I'll take a couple
A 46 of ..... with me—a couple of
D 42 ....., and I'll do the trick in a
D 1 ..... time than you think."
D 53 But ..... reckoned without his host. Instead of hiding together, the gang separated, each
D 32 leading the life of a ..... by himself or herself. Two weeks
D 2 later, ..., wan and
D 53 disheartened, Sergeant ..... was obliged to report failure, and the chief promptly demoted him,
A 19 (prefix) and .....-assigned him to his
A 15 A 12 ..... job wearily to ..... the pavements.

— —

ANSWER TO LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE

R	I	B	■	R	I	F	L	E	■	B	A	D
A	N	■	M	O	T	I	O	N	S	■	M	E
N	■	S	A	D	■	N	■	D	I	D	■	T
S	P	I	N	■	A	G	E	■	R	I	S	E
A	R	T	■	A	R	E	N	T	■	P	E	R
C	O	■	S	H	O	R	T	E	R	■	E	M
K	■	S	■	A	S	P	E	N	■	H	■	I
E	V	E	R	■	E	R	R	■	M	O	A	N
D	A	V	I	D	■	I	■	H	E	N	C	E
■	L	E	D	■	O	N	E	■	N	O	T	■
S	O	N	■	O	■	T	■	B	■	R	E	D
O	R	■	E	N	T	E	R	E	D	■	D	O
L	■	O	H	■	O	D	D	■	I	F	■	N



FLASHES FROM READERS

Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

COLONEL GIVENS, who wrote "Snatch Money" in this week's DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, has been everything from a professional gambler to a machine gunner in the war. Here's his own brief story of it:

"It is only by a miracle that I am not a fat, complacent small-town lawyer, playing politics in a small-town lawyer's way, worrying about who is to be elected constable at Frog Level and who Justice of the Peace at College Hill. I was born for that rôle. But Fate stepped in.

"You see, I was born in Dayton, Tennessee, the little Monkey Town, where the fortunate Scopes became a martyr and was miraculously catapulted from a county high school room into a great university.

"My father was a lawyer—and a good one, too, until he retired a few years ago. And it was all mapped out for me that I would step into his shoes, take over his practice — and from thenceforth and thereafter become a staid, stolid, solid member of the Rhea County Bar, practicing law in the little brick courthouse in Dayton where the great William Jennings Bryan fought his last great fight.

"Instead, I am a scribbler; a fictioneer who tells tales for his meat and bread. And there are many, many of my good homefolks who shake their heads and wonder why a boy who came from such good, solid people should go so far wrong. And I also wonder.

"I sign my stories 'Colonel Givens.' I am not an official Colonel. I picked the 'Colonel' up as a sort of tribute to my father, Colonel William L. Givens, who taught me what little I know about writing. 'Colonel' had also been one of my nicknames, so I use it as a sort of writing pseudonym. My real name is Charles G. Givens.

"I left home when I was sixteen. Since that time I have been a wheat harvest hand, a lumberjack, a professional gambler in New Orleans, a member of the black gang on the old St. Paul (sunk by a submarine during the war); a machine gunner in France (I was a line sergeant in Company C, 114th Machine Gun Battalion, which saw service in the front lines); a bill clerk; and an ordinary tramp.

"Since the war I have been a rough-

and-tumble newspaperman. I have worked as reporter, copy reader, rewrite man on the following papers: Chattanooga (Tenn.) *Times*, Knoxville (Tenn.) *Journal* and *Tribune*, Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, Memphis *News Scimitar*, Oklahoma City *Oklahoman*, Kansas City *Journal*, Chicago *American*, Chicago *Journal*, Detroit *Free Press*, New York *Morning Telegraph*, Boston *Advertiser*.

"I'm thirty-five years old. Fat and very lazy. And I'd rather dig graves or milk goats than write short stories. I think anybody who has an ambition to write is crazy."

A MISTAKE AND NOW A FAVORITE

DEAR EDITOR:

Inclosed are ten coupons for your artist's illustration. I've been a constant reader of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY ever since a year ago when I was given a copy of it instead of the usual book I read at that time. I don't read any other now.

My favorite characters are *Lester Leith, Sidney Zoom, Jimmy Wentworth, Porky Neale.* I don't care for continued stories, but did enjoy "Passport to Perdition."

Have no use for the true stories. Get quite a kick out of the ciphers and cross-word puzzle and to those pages I turn first.

Here's to continued success for DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Sincerely,
MRS. A. W. THOMAS,
Bronx, N. Y.

OFF COLOR

DEAR SIR:

Just a word of congratulation on Fred MacIsaac's serial, "The Vicious City," recently concluded. I assume that Mr. MacIsaac took his cue from events happening in Los Angeles last year, which closely resemble the story. He is one of your best contributors. Let's hear from him again.

Riordan and *Captain Brady* are there with a bang in this week's issue! The good thing about this stuff is that it's true to life; that's the way it's done.

I note one of your correspondents mentions a railroad story of some months back, "The Lokane Cut Off." Well, it might suit some who were never very close to a railroad, but I worked several years for a railroad (in train operation) and its local color was off to me.

"The Sobranoff Emeralds" was O. K., as is all this author's stuff.

Very truly yours,
C. STITES,
Omaha, Neb.

TWO GOOD COMPANIONS

DEAR EDITOR:

The best story lately, to my mind, is "The Spider Lake Mystery," by Leslie McFarlane. I've been reading DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for about two years, off and on, and along with ARGOSY as a companion they are the incomparable pair.

Keep up the good work, but listen, what happened to *Manning* and the *Griffin*, and where did *Señor Lobo* go?

Thanks for a good magazine,
A. W. HOFFMAN,
Huntington Park, Calif.

Send us coupon from ten different issues of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY and get an artist's illustration.

Send only ten coupons, because only one picture can be given to any reader at one time. Then save for another.

"HERE'S MY VOTE"

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.....
6.....
7.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

(This coupon not good after June 18.)
(Only one picture given at a time to reader in the United States only.)

3 19

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, *are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used* x *to represent* e, x *will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clews. For instance, affixes* -ing, -ion, -ally *are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first puzzle each week is the easiest.*

M. E. OHAVER

CLEWS to this week's long division puzzle, by Gustav T. Anderson, are provided by the multiplications G times G, and G times B, if due attention is paid to their products. With G and B known, the value of L may be found from the first multiplication; and so on. A ten-letter key word has been used, with letters numbered from *1* to *0* in regular order.

No. 66—Cryptic Division. By Gustav T. Anderson.

```
H B R I G) H I O L I I R N ( L G B
           H N N H Y B
           -----------
           E B G E O R
           E E O I I B
           -----------
             I B L G E N
             I G N Y Y G
             -----------
                 E R G N O
```

Dizzy's prize cryptogram, No. 303 of last December 26, netted 110 correct solutions! And it was a difficult task to select the winners! However, we finally decided that the souvenirs should go to Margaret Cosby, Newport News, Va., Leroy F. Kelley, Pittsfield, Mass., and W. P. Sinclair, New York City. Everybody enjoyed Dizzy's cipher immensely! "*Waikiki*," with its peculiar pattern, and the context suggesting a Hawaiian proper name, was the weak spot for most solvers.

Letters used in the final positions afforded entry to last week's No. 65, by Ekh-Do-Tin. Symbol O, of high frequency, occurring several times both as a final and next-to-last letter, was favorable material for *e*. Symbol G, also of high frequency, and used three times as a final—twice preceded by the supposed *e*—was similarly characteristic of *s*.

Occurrence only as a final indicated *y* for the symbol E, so that the twice-used termination -BE would suggest *-ly*, the commonest suffix ending in this letter. Arrived thus far, HUBE (*--ly*) and UHK (low-frequency K) would upon comparison quickly yield *only* and *now*, with HIGHBORO (*o-solc-e*) following immediately after as *obsolete;* and so on.

Or, trying various vowels for symbol Y (*i* is the best guess for a repeated vowel as in patterns of this type), PYGYIBO (*-isi-le*) would at once suggest *visible*. POLYMBOG (*ve-i-les*) would then become *vehicles*, leading to MLJYGO (*ch-ise*), evidently *chaise*. And the rest would be plain sailing. The answer in full is given on page 143.

This week's crypts start off with an interesting concoction by D. Isnow. Note the three symbols used alone in this cryptogram, two of them occurring nowhere else. Comparison of UKH and HK, following up with HQF and BFHHFD, should break the ice. Next, substitute in MKBK, LMF, MQKLBÇ, and CKFM, and supply the missing letters.

Key Pitt Dark's four-line poem has quite a kick in it! Guess the two words in the phrase YJCV VJG from the letters in common, comparing with YG. Proceed then with VYQ, QP, CPF, etc. The short words SU and MS, and the affixes USU- and -MGSU provide entry to Magi's crypt, leading to words 23, 12, and 11. The asterisks here and elsewhere precede proper names.

You might try for the proper name *VLUXRVLU in Jay Abie's cryptogram, first identifying the ending -UVUR (high-frequency and doubled V), and using the termination -LXR as a check. The current Inner Circle entry is by Rover, old-time contributor to this department. Try your skill at this well-knit problem. A solution of Rover's cipher will be given next week.

No. 67—An Explanation. By D. Isnow.

HQF ODFMFUH YKDC MFRLFUPF CKFM UKH LMF ZKYFBM "E" KD "A" GLH "MKBK"; SDFRLFUPN KS BFHHFD "F" MQKLBC MLOOBN QFBOSLB PBFY HK ODKGBFW.

No. 68—Fore and Aft. By Key Pitt Dark.

QP OWNGU YG HKPF VYQ NGIU DGJKPF,
CPF VYQ YG HKPF DGHQTG;
YG UVCPF DGJKPF, DGHQTG YG HKPF
YJCV VJG VYQ DGJKPF DG HQTI

No. 69—The Man Pays! By Magi.

ABC *DBC EBGH LCMOB MBC SU JGZ BC ZJGEDLUM YJLU USUTJBABUM BTMGSU TBXZLH TXZMSDZ HXMK DBU MS DBVL ZLTSUH ZLBOTJ. NGUL NGCLH BM ZGC TLUMZ LBTJ.

No. 70—Distinguished Visitor. By Jay Abie.

*ZYXYWVUY TSVVRX "*QVSS *ZSPO-VXXPS." *YNMVSR *VLUXRVLU, ZSP-KLUVUR *ZSJXXLYU ZQHXLGLXR, YSSLFVW YMPYSW KPRPS XQLZ "*ZPSRNYUW."

No. 71—Secret Service. By Rover.

OCVTVSX PVZVECS. *HECJYPF ASNVK FVTQP NYHUT OTUSP; VLHUYS MVC-RYLTK; MVCBUCQ QVREDASHP. PELZVYS SVDYSUT MVCAYXS POK TYPH. BUSH OCVDOH URHYVS.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

61—Entrance to the park was gained through a pavilion decorated with friezes, ornamented with arabesques, with pediments crowning pilasters.

62—One way you can save time: use "X" for "ten," "U" for "you," "R" for "are," etc.; (for "no" do not use "yes"!). Ex.—"I C U R MT."

63—Advisability of ascertaining the divisibility of bananas into atoms is questioned, although Chicago bombers have blown "pineapples" to atoms.

64—Lecoq, famous criminologist, unravels tantalizing trails leading to decamped felons' haunt above aquarium.

65—Obsolete vehicles, hardly visible now except in museums: brougham, buggy, chaise, gig, stanhope, sulky, surrey, victoria; only cabriolet survives in taxicab.

Send us your answers to any of this week's puzzles and be enrolled in the March Cipher Solvers' Club. Answers will be published next week.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

TWO BIG NOVELETTES!

Alias the Mongoose

By Johnston McCulley

LIKE a man on the verge of a physical and mental breakdown, Stephen Wazer was pacing his office. He read again the penciled scrawl:

Stephen Wazer!—The time has come for you to pay! Prepare to suffer for your sins! The transgressor must be punished!

That was all. It might be a joke, but it looked decidedly like a serious threat. And Wazer, who well knew his past contained more than one "transgression," was in a frenzy of worry and fear.

Who was threatening him? What particular sin was coming back to haunt him? Wazer did not know—until he saw the kite that flew close to his windows, a huge advertising banner floating from it that said:

REMEMBER CRATCH!

Cratch! That was it—ten years ago—that sign was meant for him!

And then came the sinister message from the man who called himself the Mongoose. Don't miss this breathless story of mystery and danger.

Barking Dogs

By Erle Stanley Gardner

TO the average, uneducated ear there is a confusing similarity between the sound of gunfire and the noise made by a backfiring truck.

But the Señor Arnaz de Lobo had no difficulty in distinguishing the two sounds, so that Señor Lobo knew the sounds for gunshots as soon as he heard them, notwithstanding they were more than a block away.

And so rapid was the Señor Lobo in acting on what he knew that he and his grizzled companion, El Mono Viejo, were on the spot even while a man with two bullet holes in his chest was being stretched out on the sidewalk.

Señor Lobo knew nothing of the man, but he did know that those two bullet holes represented highly accurate shooting. And accurate shooting interested the *señor* so much that this dead man and the two shots fired into him were to lead Señor Lobo into a swift and deadly conflict.

This new *Señor Lobo* novelette will hold you on the edge of your chair from the first word to the last.

Also stories by RICHARD W. ROWAN, GARNETT RADCLIFFE, JACK ALLMAN, ROBERT E. PINKERTON and others, next week

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