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EVERY TUESDAY

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DETECTIVE STORY
MAGAZINE
EVERY TUESDAY

Vol. XXVIII November 25, 1919 No. 1

The Gray Phantom Goes It Alone

by Herman Landon

Author of "In Three Rounds," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE HERMIT OF AZURECREST.

THE black-bearded man, robed in a luxurious dressing gown of shimmering and softly-clinging silk, sat very still. His eyes, gray, soft, and luminous, which gave one the impression that they could sting and stab like rapiers if their owner were goaded to anger, darted swiftly over the apartment, the splendor of which might have aroused the envy of an Aladdin. His ears, which a famous specialist had once pronounced the most highly sensitized that had come under his observation, had detected a faint, fugitive sound.

It might have been a stealthy footfall, the opening or closing of a door, or merely a whisper trailing through the silence. It was so elusive and far-away that the black-bearded man could determine neither its nature nor its origin. His searching glance, exploring every nook and corner of the softly illuminated room, found no clew to the mysterious sound. He had been mistaken, perhaps. Or maybe the night wind, entering through an open window somewhere in the house, was playing pranks with his imagination. At any rate, it would be sheer folly to suppose that an intruder had contrived to enter the zealously guarded grounds of Azurecrest.

"No such luck," murmured the man, stretching his lean figure in the richly upholstered armchair. "Nothing ever breaks this abominable boredom of mine. A midnight encounter with a prowler might prove diverting, and there would be at least a mild thrill in

chasing down an unexplained sound. But nothing ever happens here—confound it! I might as well be dead as to be tucked away in this mausoleum, like some silly old thing laid away in lavender."

A humorous thought seemed to occur to him, for a faint smile revealed a hint of two rows of strong, flashingly white teeth. The gray eyes glimmered dreamily.

"I *am* dead," he told himself, chuckling softly. "All the world knows I am dead—or thinks it does, which amounts to almost the same thing."

He rose from the chair, stroking his glisteningly black beard, which merged well with the iron-gray at his temples, and listlessly began to pace the room. He glanced moodily at the superb tapestries and costly antiques, all pervaded by soothing harmonies and exquisite color combinations. There were knick-knacks and art objects gathered from the four corners of the earth which might have been coveted by a king or a maharajah, but the black-bearded man gave them only languid attention.

His eyes brightened, however, as he stopped before his latest acquisition, a gorgeously arabesqued Bahut cabinet with marble surface and legs of gilded bronze. His indefatigable New York agent had found and purchased it after long and tedious search, and it had only that day arrived at Azurecrest.

"Not bad," observed the black-bearded man, studying the handsome marquetry on the checkered wood. "Some months ago I would have gone into seven kinds of ecstasy over a thing like that. Now——"

His head went up like that of an animal sensing an ominous sound. For several moments his athletic figure was tense, while his narrowing eyes circled the room.

"Nothing but the wind," he muttered. "It *can't* be anything else—worse luck!"

But to make doubly sure, he walked slowly along the walls, unbroken by windows or doors. There being no visible exits, he might have been a prisoner in a gorgeous tomb. The air, faintly scented, entered the apartment through gratings deftly hidden in the decorations in the ceiling. Finding nothing of a suspicious nature, the black-bearded man opened a concealed passageway and entered the adjoining bedroom, also devoid of visible communications with the outside.

"As I thought," he told himself. "It was only the wind."

As he resumed his chair a soft, buzzing sound drew his gaze to a glass disk attached to the writing desk in front of him. Simultaneously with the buzzing sound, a luminous circle had appeared in the center of the disk, and inside the circle was the letter W, limned in black.

"What can Wade want at this hour," he wondered aloud, pressing a button. At his touch a narrow portion of the opposite wall swung inward, as if turning on an axis, and through the aperture stepped a fat, sleek-faced man carrying a newspaper. The black-bearded one motioned him to a chair.

"Wade," he observed whimsically, "the life of a gentleman of leisure doesn't agree with you. You are getting soft and flabby, and I suspect you are making entirely too many trips to my private wine cellar."

Wade's good-natured grin sent a series of ripples down his multiple chin. "Say the word, and I'll work the fat off in a jiffy. The soft and easy life is all right for a month or so, but after that it begins to pall. Anything doing, boss?"

"Nothing. I am bored to death. Hope you have come to tell me something interesting."

"Bored? You bored, with all these grand trappings around you?" Wade made a comprehensive gesture with his pudgy fist. "You're living like a great

mogul in the swellest palace this side of the pearly gates, and yet you say you're bored. I don't get you at all."

The black-bearded man smiled mirthlessly. "I thought I would enjoy this sort of life for a change, but I find I was mistaken. In the old days I used to dream about an idyllic, care-free existence in some far-away place where I could devote myself to my books and art treasures, and just dream away the rest of my years. Bah! Life is a sorry mess, Wade. By the time you have mounted the rainbow you find you no longer care for the pot of gold."

The other's expression showed that he did not quite comprehend. "What you need is a bit of excitement," he suggested. "We used to pull off some grand performances in the good old days. If you give me the signal I'll frame up something."

"No, Wade." The black-bearded man shook his head sadly. "I don't like an anticlimax, and we could never eclipse, or even equal, that last performance of ours. If I went in for another of those stupendous adventures it would have to be something bigger than the last."

"Bigger? There can't be anything bigger than the last trick we pulled."

"Exactly." The other made an expressive gesture with his fine, blue-veined hands. "And that's just the reason, Wade, why I can't adopt your suggestion."

The fat man, confronted with a problem, seemed to be searching his mind for a solution. Presently a satisfied glimmer came into his small, lazy eyes. "You were never in love, boss?"

"No, never," with a low, melodious laugh. "I have played at love occasionally. Just nibbled at the apple, you understand. The real article never came my way."

"Then," and Wade seemed aglow with a happy inspiration, "what you need is a taste of the real stuff. I've heard tell that there's nothing like love to scare away the blue devils and lift a man out of the dumps. What you ought to do is to warm up to a wren, boss—one of those dimply and curvy things with big, black eyes, melting lips, and——"

"Help!" interrupted the black-bearded man. "You're waxing entirely too poetic, Wade. The sorry truth is that I have already drained every thrill and emotion out of life. There are nothing but husks and dregs left."

"And you're only forty, and still presentable."

"Forty-one. But if life is gauged by heartbeats I'm as ancient as Methuselah. It sounds queer to hear you speak of love, Wade. It is the only emotion I haven't tasted. Perhaps——" A smile, dreamy and wistful, parted the speaker's lips. "Perhaps, if the right woman came along, she would make my life endurable for a month or two. I am not sure your specifications would answer, though. She would have to be a real woman, Wade—not just giggles and soft curves. There's a picture of her in my mind. At times it flares up and teases my imagination. But of course she has no existence in reality. Things we dream of seldom have."

Wade shook his huge head despairingly. "I don't get you at all, boss."

"I didn't expect you would, you clod-hopping hippopotamus. Let's chuck the sentiment and talk about something worth while. I take it you are not intruding on my privacy at twelve-thirty in the morning just to give me a moonshiny lecture on love."

The fat man started as if he had just remembered something. He picked up the newspaper he had brought with him, a section of a Sunday supplement, and placed it on the writing desk, pointing a dumpy finger at an engraved heading:

HAS THE GRAY PHANTOM COME BACK?

The black-bearded man looked with a bored air at the sketches and photographs that accompanied the text. In the center, between black borders, was a chronological list of the sensational crimes directly or indirectly attributed to the Gray Phantom, and along the margins were pen sketches depicting the execution of some of his exploits.

"Rot!" declared the black-bearded man. "When newspaper writers are hard up for material they always fall back on some fool thing like this." His eyes twinkled amusedly. "The Gray Phantom is dead."

"Long live the Gray Phantom," replied Wade with a knowing wink. "Thought you'd like to see this, boss. It's different from the others."

"I'm hanged if I'm going to read such drivel. Tell me about it."

Wade helped himself to a cigar from the humidor on the desk. "Well, the guy that wrote this article says it was never fully proved that the Gray Phantom was killed in that explosion. He calls attention to the fact that only one man saw the blow-up, and that this man didn't see the Phantom get torn to pieces. He only heard a racket, and when the smoke cleared away the Phantom was gone."

"The article coincides with the facts so far, I believe," observed the black-bearded man, grinning. "But it is a plausible assumption that the Phantom was blown to bits, isn't it?"

Wade looked up and rolled his shrewd little eyes. "The fellow that wrote the article says the bits were never found. He thinks there would have been some scrap or remnant left if the Phantom had been killed."

"And from that he deduces that the Phantom is still alive?"

"He calls attention to several cases where men have been found alive long after they were supposed to be dead, and he argues that the Phantom may have come back to life in the same way. The Phantom, he says, had been leading some sort of charmed life, anyhow, and ordinary explosives wouldn't make much of a dent in him."

The black-bearded man grinned. "Too bad the writer chap didn't go a bit further in his speculations. He might have doped out a corking yarn about how the Phantom, tired of everything, and wishing to get out of the world for a while, purposely made everybody believe that the explosion killed him. The blow-up was caused by one of those infernal collars that the Phantom used on the Bostwick job, wasn't it? He had one around his own neck, and he told the man who witnessed his—er—demise, that he didn't know how to get it off. Had lost the combination, or something. Well, the writer chap might have doped it out that the Phantom was only pretending, and that he ran like blazes the moment the devilish collar was off."

"He might," agreed Wade, smiling knowingly.

"Is there anything else of interest in the article?"

Wade grinned with the air of one who has been leading up to a relishable climax. "There's a long and flowery account of the robbing of the Cosmopolitan Museum and——"

"The what?"

"I forgot that you haven't been reading the papers lately," said Wade apologetically. "The Cosmopolitan Museum in New York was looted from cellar to attic one night last week and about ten million dollars' worth of fancy rubbish carted away."

The black-bearded man was suddenly interested. "But a—a thing like that can't be done!"

Wade laughed heartily. "That's what people said when the Phantom and his crowd looted all the big banks and jewelry stores in Bostburg. They

said it couldn't be done, even after the Phantom had already gone and done it. Well, the Cosmopolitan Museum robbery was a big job, but it was handled in first-class shape. The fellow who pulled it off must have had a big gang to help him."

"How was it done?"

"It was last Wednesday night, I think, that it happened. It was a black, rainy night, and the museum is on a street where there isn't much traffic after midnight. It's supposed that the gang had an accomplice on the inside. Anyhow, every wire inside the building was cut, and all the watchmen were knocked out, bound, and gagged. While some of the gang were attending to the watchmen others were loading the swag into big vans that had pulled up at the entrances. Still others were plucking off the cops on the beat, and keeping chance pedestrians from interfering. The thing was handled so smoothly that the job must have been planned a long time ahead. By the time the station house began to wonder why the cops had suddenly stopped ringing in, the trucks had vamoosed, and they haven't been seen since. Two of the cops and one of the watchmen were handled so roughly that they never came to."

"A neat little enterprise," murmured the black-bearded man, a trace of envy in his voice. "All but the killing of the officers and the watchman. That was coarse work. Who engineered the job?"

The fat man grinned. "The writer of this article says the job was so big and so artistically handled that only one man could have put it over, and that man is the Gray Phantom."

"Oh!" murmured the other, thoughtfully kindling a cigarette.

"And so," proceeded Wade, "he has doped it out that the Phantom is still alive. Of course," with a sly rolling of the eyes, "you and I know that the Phantom didn't do the job."

"The Phantom never committed wanton murder."

"And, besides, he has an alibi as far as this stunt is concerned. I guess we can guess who the rascal is—eh, boss?"

The other nodded. "Who could it be but the Phantom's only rival in the field—the Duke?"

"The Duke, of course," echoed Wade. "The Duke is the only man that ever came within a hundred miles of doing the things the Phantom has done. Bet he is chuckling right now, enjoying the joke of the Phantom being blamed for something he did himself. The joke has its serious side, though, boss."

"It has," admitted the black-bearded man, his eyes gleaming metallically.

"The police may take this writer fellow seriously," elaborated Wade, "and start thinking. They may argue it's just possible the Phantom has fooled them all, and is still alive; and in that case—— What's the matter, boss?"

The black-bearded man had jerked himself erect, and now his steely eyes were roaming about the room as if trying to trace the origin of a mysterious sound.

"In that case," he said lightly, though his eyes and ears were infinitely alert, "life would be made more interesting for you and me. I am going to turn in now. We will have a further talk in the morning." He pressed a button.

A trifle reluctantly Wade passed through the opening formed by the revolving panel. For a few moments the black-bearded man remained seated, then rose and donned a soft hat and a light overcoat. A whimsical smile played about his lips as he thrust a short automatic into one of the pockets.

"Somebody is prowling around the house," he mumbled. "Is it possible that they are already on my trail? Well, we shall see."

CHAPTER II.

A NOCTURNAL PROWLER.

REACHING the end of the private passage connecting his living rooms with the Italian garden, the black-bearded man paused and listened. The repetition of faint and stealthy sounds had convinced him that some one must have scaled the high picket fence surrounding the grounds and was now trying to enter the house. It was the first time in the nine months of his occupancy of Azurecrest that an outsider had intruded on the privacy of his isolated retreat. Viewed in connection with the newspaper article which Wade had summarized, the circumstance seemed significant.

The house was situated on the apex of a high hill overlooking the Susquehanna River, and commanding a comprehensive view of the valleys and mountain ridges of the surrounding region. The residence, a pretentious pile of stone, tile, timber, and stucco, had sprung up almost overnight, and the inhabitants of the village at the base of the hill understood that it was owned by a leisurely and very wealthy gentleman named Clifford Wade, who for reasons of his own had chosen to spend his remaining years in solitude and ease on the desolate hilltop. Of the real owner of Azurecrest they knew nothing, and were not aware even that he existed, since he never permitted himself to be seen except by his most intimate associates.

The hill was so steep that the motor car which went to the village for supplies twice a week could not reach the apex by a direct route, but circled its way upward in spiral fashion. Its driver, a tight-lipped and secretive fellow, known as James, was the only member of the household with whom the villagers came in contact, but no one had ever thought it advisable to question him concerning his employer. Though consumed with curiosity concerning the mysterious occupant of Azurecrest, the townsfolk had never ventured near, guessing intuitively—and accurately—that they would not be welcome.

A misty sheen hung over the hilltop as the black-bearded man paused in the shadow of one of the transplanted Lombardy poplars that dotted the garden. The moon, shining through a vapory gauze, caused the white marble of the wall fountains, balustrades, and urns to stand out in fanciful relief. The wind had a keen edge, and the man buttoned his overcoat against its sting.

At first he saw nothing, but he knew that any one of the shrubs, trees, and fountains might conceal a lurking visitor. He clung to the sheltering poplar, knowing that if he ventured into the open he might afford a shining mark for a bullet fired from ambush, and he had nothing but contempt for the foolhardy bravado that inspires a man to throw his life away without giving himself a fighting chance.

Suddenly his body stiffened. A long, slender shadow was thrown athwart a section of the stone walk that zigzagged around the house. A moment later he saw a figure, scarcely distinguishable against the dark walls. It moved at intervals, but only a few feet at a time, and he would have been unable to trace the movements but for the shadow on the walk.

Darting swiftly across a narrow open space he took up a position beside another tree, and he could now watch the flitting shadow more closely. The prowler was moving from one window to another, evidently hoping to find an open one.

"The fool!" muttered the watcher. "Can't he guess that every window and door is wired?"

Until now he had entertained a vague suspicion that the fellow might be a

detective, but no detective would have gone about his task so clumsily. It must be a burglar, then, was his somewhat disappointing deduction, for he did not imagine that a man of such a type could offer him much excitement. He decided to cut the stupid proceeding short by demanding the man's business. As he stepped away from the sheltering tree a voice, clear and imperious, brought him up short:

"Don't move another step. I have you covered."

A curious sensation shot through his mind, and he peered sharply at the shadowy figure standing against the wall. About all he could see was the dull glow of a face and the shimmer of the barrel of a pistol.

"Oh, you're a woman!" he exclaimed, momentarily aghast. He groaned inwardly. A burglar was bad enough, but one of the feminine gender rendered the situation acutely embarrassing. A woman who was a burglar represented, in the black-bearded man's opinion, one of nature's misfits. A male intruder he would have seized by the scruff of the neck and treated to a sound thrashing, but a woman——

"Stop!" she commanded, emerging out of the shadows, as, unmindful of the threatening pistol, he advanced. He kept coming closer until only a few feet separated them. He could see that she was young, and that her features were white, tense, and determined.

"Not so loud, you little fool," he cautioned disgustedly. "Some of the people sleeping in the house might hear you, and then it would be awkward for you. This is a deuce of a mess! What am I going to do with you?"

He was so close to her now that he could hear her quick, sharp breathing. She was dressed in a long, dark cloak, and a cap sat jauntily on her head.

"Hold up your hands," she commanded hoarsely. "Quick, or I shoot!"

The man calmly thrust his hands into his pockets. "Fire away," he challenged coolly.

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Not a bit. You see, a particular kind of nerve is required to kill a person in cold blood. Few men and fewer women have it."

"Don't delude yourself," she said snappily. "I could kill you without a quiver of remorse. Don't forget that."

"Perhaps you could, but I still refuse to take fright. A pistol isn't much good as an implement of bluff and bluster as long as the fellow it's pointed at keeps cool. Put it down, you little fool."

"I'm neither bluffing nor blustering," she declared hotly, meanwhile scanning his face with great intentness, "and we shall soon see which one of us is the fool. If you think I won't shoot you are making a terrible mistake."

She spoke with fierce determination, and in a tone that hinted of a desperate resolve. The man found himself forced to pay a grudging compliment to her nerve and self-possession.

"Turn around and walk straight into the house," she directed curtly.

"Just what I was about to suggest," said the man with a laugh as he started to obey. "This delectable farce deserves a better setting than a dark garden spot. This way."

He sauntered leisurely to a door, led the way down an obscurely lighted passage, touched an invisible spring, and ushered the girl into the sumptuously furnished apartment in which his interview with Wade had been held. He felt a touch of pride at the gasp of admiration that escaped her as for an instant her eyes feasted on the magnificence contained within the four walls.

She was still pointing the pistol at him with a firm, cool hand. He noticed that her eyes were clear and strong, that the quivering nostrils betrayed an abundance of robust vitality, that the smooth oval of her face showed not the faintest trace of rouge or powder, and

that the hair coiled beneath the rim of the cap was a lustrous brown. Her figure was slender, and revealed the firm, graceful lines that come with healthful exercise in the open.

"Mind if I smoke?" asked the black-bearded man.

"Do," she said shortly, deliberately studying his face. The man produced a ruby-studded case that had been presented to him by a Sudanese governor, and lighted a monogrammed cigarette. He regarded her curiously through the fragrant haze. She had turned her eyes from him, and was now inspecting the furnishings, tapestries, and antiques with a coolly appraising eye.

"I hope my humble diggings meet with your approval," he murmured sarcastically. "What puzzles me is how you managed to get inside the grounds. The picket fence is high, and the points are sharp. Will you enlighten me?"

She shrugged, and by way of response cast a significant glance at the Bahut cabinet. The man stared at her with a puzzled expression.

"You don't mean—— No, that's impossible," he stammered. "You didn't come in—*that?*"

"But I did." The faintest of smiles parted her lips. "There was no other way. I know how jealously you guard your privacy, and what elaborate precautions you have taken to exclude intruders; and so I went to the warehouse, and, while the packers weren't looking, slipped inside the cabinet."

There was a glint of reluctant admiration in the man's gray eyes. "How did you know where it was going?" he demanded.

"That's my secret."

"And how did you escape smothering to death? It was several hours in transit."

"You are entirely too inquisitive," she declared coldly. "However, if you must know, the door may be opened from the inside. The cabinet was so tightly packed that I could open the door only a few inches, but I managed to poke a finger through the excelsior and establish an air hole. Perhaps you noticed that there was quite a little open space between the boards of the outer crating. After the cabinet arrived, and your men had unpacked it, I simply watched my chance and slipped out while the men's backs were turned, and—— Well, here I am."

"I see." The man peered at her incredulously. "What you tell me sounds preposterous, if you will pardon my frankness. However, I can't imagine any other method by which you could have slipped through the fence. It must be that you are telling me the truth. However that may be, won't you put down that pistol and tell me to what I owe the honor of this visit?"

The girl smiled frigidly, and the hand that held the pistol did not waver. "Can't you guess?"

"I suppose you are a burglar—a burglarette. I rather admire your nerve in tackling a place like this. Now that you are here, how do you propose to proceed? I have already demonstrated that your pistol doesn't terrify me. You might appropriate a few knickknacks, of course, but you wouldn't be able to leave the house without my assistance. Even if, by a mircle, you should succeed in doing so, there's the picket fence. One of my watchmen would halt you before you got very far. Don't you see that you have rushed into a nasty situation?"

He argued with her as one would with a headstrong and impulsive child, admiring her pluck and spirit even while he chided her for her recklessness. She cast furtive glances about the room, and a faint pucker appeared between her eyes, as if she had just discovered that there were no visible exits.

"As you perceive, I have taken certain precautions against surprise at-

tacks," he observed with a chuckle. "This is an interior suite, surrounded on all sides by impregnable walls. I doubt whether you would be able to find the spring that controls the hidden doors."

Her fingers tightened around the handle of the weapon. The corners of her mouth twitched a trifle, but there was no trace of fear in the depths of her eyes. Her coat was unbuttoned, and the V at her throat revealed a swift and rhythmic undulation.

"Perhaps I have walked into a trap," she declared steadily. "It makes no difference. Unless I get what I came for one of us is going to die."

"I like that," murmured the black-bearded man, smiling approvingly. "Hang it if you aren't different from most of the brainless dolls that embellish the earth! Most of them would have required smelling salts at this stage of the game. But you are very mysterious. What did you come for?"

She regarded him narrowly for several moments. "I wonder," she said at length, the wraith of a mischievous smile fluttering about her lips, "if a shave wouldn't alter your appearance a lot."

The man stiffened, his face suddenly grave. Her eyes slanted downward to where Wade had carelessly tossed the supplement containing the article about the supposed reappearance of the Gray Phantom. She flattened the paper with a trigly-shod foot, bringing into clear view the photographs and sketches that adorned the page.

"Do you suppose it's true the Gray Phantom is alive?" she asked tensely.

"Anything is possible in this day and age," granted the man guardedly.

"His name was Vanardy—Cuthbert Vanardy, wasn't it? As I remember, he kept his identity concealed for a long time, but it came out after the looting of the Bostburg banks. It would be very strange if he should be alive."

"Very," dryly.

Her eyes went to the writing desk, on which lay the ornate cigarette case. With a swift and agile movement she darted forward and snatched it up. For a moment she studied the monogram on its face, traced in blood-red rubies.

"Just as I thought—it's a C and a V," she declared, a catch in her tones. Then, triumphantly: "You are Cuthbert Vanardy—and Cuthbert Vanardy is the Gray Phantom. I guessed right."

CHAPTER III.

WORTH TEN MILLIONS.

THE man stood erect, his face dark and foreboding, his narrow-lidded eyes glittering ominously. For a moment the woman seemed to be forgotten, and he saw only a dangerous adversary, one whose designs he must frustrate by any available means.

"Careless of me," he muttered, scowling at the cigarette case.

"Oh, I would have guessed without that," she told him. "The monogram was merely the final proof. Don't you think you had better surrender, Mr. Phantom?"

"Surrender? Bah! The Gray Phantom never surrenders. Put down that fool pistol. You won't? Well——"

With a coolness and a daring that overawed her he strode across the narrow space between them, roughly wrenched the weapon from her hand, and tossed it into a drawer of the desk. She gave a low, quavering gasp of dismay.

"Now, my pretty lady, we'll talk," he declared grimly. "At first, before I could see you clearly, I thought you were a man, and I hoped you would amuse me for a while. Later, discovering you were a woman, I jumped to the conclusion that you had come to rob the place." He laughed disdainfully.

"I suppose what you really are is a lady detective."

She faltered for an instant beneath his gaze of contempt.

"Aren't you afraid?" he demanded.

"No. What should I be afraid of? The Gray Phantom never kills."

"So, that's it." There was withering scorn in his voice. "I was mistaken in you, after all. You are like the rest of the sex. You would take advantage of a man's chivalry. Besides," indicating the paper at his feet, "you must have read that article. It makes out a pretty fair case proving that the Cosmopolitan Museum robbery was committed by the Gray Phantom. If that's so, then the Gray Phantom is responsible for the deaths of those three men."

"Perhaps he couldn't help it. It might have been accidental. The Phantom has a big organization, and it must be difficult to control so many men."

He turned from her with a sneer and strode around the room, his hands clasped at his back. Suddenly he stopped and fixed her with a metallically flashing gaze.

"You guessed correctly," he announced shortly. "I am the Gray Phantom. What are you going to do about it?"

She met his piercing scrutiny bravely for a moment, then her glance fell.

"Why don't you slap the handcuffs on my wrists? I am about the biggest catch in the country. Some of the greatest detectives in the world would cheerfully swear away their souls for the sake of capturing the Gray Phantom. If you succeed you will be the most famous woman in the United States. It should be both easy and safe, for you know the Phantom never kills wantonly. Ha, ha! All you have to do to win imperishable fame is to take advantage of a man's silly scruples against laying hands on a woman."

As if the contemptuous tirade had stung and bruised her inner being, a touch of red appeared in each of her cheeks, and her eyes blazed with fury and indignation.

"You are mistaken," she declared in throbbing tones. "I am not a detective, and I did not come here to win fame."

The man smiled derisively. "Not a detective? Not a seeker after fame? Then who are you, my very amazing young lady?"

She caught her breath sharply. "I am Miss Helen Hardwick."

"Indeed? Not a bad name, as names go among members of our respective professions." He chuckled grittily. "However, if you will pardon my rudeness, that particular name means absolutely nothing to me."

She raised her eyes and regarded him steadily. "Did you never hear of Martin Hardwick, curator of the Cosmopolitan Museum?"

"Eh?" The man gave a little start, then picked up the paper and ran his eyes up and down the printed columns. "Sure enough! Here's his name, with most of the alphabet tacked on to it by way of titles. Let's see. Curator of the Cosmopolitan Museum since eighteen hundred and eighty-two. Spent twenty years gathering the famous Assyrian collection which is a part of the permanent exhibit, in which work, during more recent years, he was assisted by his daughter, Miss Helen Hardwick, one of the most enterprising and adventurous members of the younger social set. Well, I'll be——"

The paper dropped from his hands, and he regarded the young woman with eager interest. The sneer left his lips, and a look of unstinting admiration came into his eyes.

"I understand now," he said gravely. "I think I know now why you came here. Provided, of course, that you are the person you say you are."

"You will find my photograph beside father's," she told him.

"I hadn't noticed it. Ah, yes, here it is. A striking resemblance, too. Well, this alters the situation, but——" His accents trailed off into an indistinct murmur.

"Father is getting old," explained the girl. "The Assyrian collection, which was taken away along with the rest, represents his life work, and he is heart-broken over its loss. I fear it will kill him unless the collection is recovered. That's why——" Her voice broke, and she daubed her eyes with a bit of lace.

"I see," said the Phantom gently, his eyes again filled with admiration. "And so you started out to recover it. You are a brave girl. But didn't you know that you were attacking an almost hopeless task? Even if you could locate it, you surely didn't except to carry the stuff away in your—your coat pockets?"

"No-o," hesitantly. "But the police were making a great ado about the robbery without seeming to get anywhere. I read the article in *The Sphere* and it made a strong impression upon me. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the Gray Phantom was the only man who could handle an enterprise of such magnitude. I suggested it to a detective, but he laughed at me and said the article was nothing but 'dope.' In spite of that, the more I thought about it, the stronger became my conviction that the Phantom was alive, and that the collection was in his possession. In the meantime father was worrying himself sick, and——"

"And so you decided to take a hand in the game?"

Miss Hardwick nodded. "I was handicapped from the start. The first step, I decided, was to find the Phantom, but I didn't know where to look for him. I supposed he was hiding in some out-of-the-way corner under an assumed name. Then I recalled that he had always been a great collector of curios, rare furniture, and such things, and I made the rounds of the shops inquiring whether they had any customers in remote and secluded places."

"Immense!" murmured the Phantom admiringly.

"At last I found a man who was shipping a Bahut cabinet to a village on the Susquehanna. I inquired the name of the purchaser, and was told that it was Clifford Wade."

"Wade is my storm shield," said the man, laughing. "I usually communicate with the outside world through him."

"Well, the circumstances seemed significant. The Bahut cabinet was exactly the kind of thing the Phantom might buy, and it was going to a place where usually there is no demand for such articles. I decided to take a chance. I told father I was going to visit an aunt in Boston. Then—but I have already told you the rest." She lowered her voice and gazed at him appealingly. "What is the Cosmopolitan collection to you? Surely you don't intend to sell it, for you already have more money than you need. Remember that an old man's heart is breaking. Won't you do the generous thing and return it?"

The Phantom regarded her long and thoughtfully. "Do you know," he murmured, "that you are far more irresistible now than when you were pointing that pistol at me? Did you really hope to force me to surrender the collection by such fool heroics?"

"Not exactly. My first step was to find you. After that I meant to make sure whether the collection was in your possession, and, if I discovered that it was, to send for help. I suppose I acted recklessly, but I didn't think at the time. Now," with a dejected look about her, "I am in your power and you can do with me as you please."

The Phantom stroked his neatly trimmed beard. "The deuce of it is

that I don't dare let you go. If I did I should have to tear up and move, and I hate that. Yet you ask me to do the generous thing. Listen." He stepped close to her, and their glances met. "They used to say that the Gray Phantom was one of the greatest criminals in the history of the world. I suppose they were almost right. In spite of that, will you believe me if I tell you something?"

She looked at him long and searchingly. "Yes," she declared.

"Thank you. Miss Hardwick, I give you my word of honor that I had nothing to do with the Cosmopolitan robbery."

She started, her face expressing disappointment and surprise.

"To verify my statement," he added, "you are at liberty to search this house from top to bottom."

"It isn't necessary," she said dejectedly. "I believe you. Something tells me that, whatever else you may do, you would not lie to me."

"Cheer up," he said, touched by her grief. The next moment a wistful twinkle came into his eyes. Chuckling to himself he walked twice around the room, and she noticed that a strange change was coming over him. He seemed younger, more spirited than before, and his air of boredom had disappeared. Suddenly he stopped in front of her. "Listen, Miss Hardwick. While I had nothing to do with the Cosmopolitan job, I think I know who did it. If the Gray Phantom's luck holds I shall lay the collection at your feet one week from to-night."

"What! You mean you are going to——"

"Yes, I mean just that," he interrupted, laughing. His eyes, strangely soft, tender, and dreamy, were upon her. "But I don't intend to make you a gift of it. The collection is supposed to be worth about ten millions, isn't it? I will sell it to you."

"Oh, but——"

"For a kiss," added the Gray Phantom. "I am offering you ten millions for a kiss. Do you accept my terms?"

"I don't understand," she murmured, frowning prettily. "You are strong, and I am absolutely in your power. You could steal one, you know."

"And you fail to understand why a man capable of looting a whole city refrains from stealing a kiss from a defenseless woman?"

She considered the question for several moments, her eyes exploring his face as if trying to read his soul. Then a smile, faint and wistful, parted her lips.

"I think I understand," she declared.

He nodded gayly. "And that substantiates my impression that you are one woman in a million. I shall expect payment when I deliver the goods. In the meantime you are to be a guest under my roof. My housekeeper is a motherly old soul, and she will take good care of you. We will make arrangements so that your relatives will not be worried. Now let me see."

He started to pace the floor again, his head hanging low, a maze of wrinkles on his forehead.

"I suppose the police were given a list of the stolen articles?" he inquired presently.

She gave him a puzzled look. "They were."

"Was the list itemized?"

"Not entirely. In some instances several articles were grouped under a single item."

"Good. You will find pen and paper on the desk. I want you to give me a description of some one article, preferably a unique and valuable one, of which no specific mention was made in the list furnished the police."

Still puzzled, she sat down and took up one of the ornate pens, and after a little hesitation began to write. When she had finished she handed the paper

to the Phantom, who glanced at it and put it in his pocket.

"You have a plan?" she inquired.

"Something of a plan. I'm going to ring for the housekeeper now. I shall probably be on my way before daylight." He pressed a button beside the annunciator.

She stood before him, blushing, radiant, and with a strange light in her eyes.

"Good luck, Mr. Phantom!" she murmured, extending a hand.

For a long time after the housekeeper had led her away the Phantom remained standing beside the desk, a dreamy look in his gray, feverishly active eyes.

"An hour ago," he mumbled, "I thought I had drained every thrill out of existence. I was mistaken. Life isn't such a sordid affair after all."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIVE-LEGGED BULL.

WADE, arrayed in a flowery bath robe and with feet encased in slippers that plopped as he walked, opened his eyes wide when, half an hour later, he entered the room in response to the Phantom's ring.

"Smoking snakes!" he exclaimed, slapping his barrellike stomach. "Going away?"

The Phantom nodded. In the interim he had changed into a business suit of dull gray, his favorite color. "I am running into New York for a day or two, Wade. Matter of business."

The fat man stared. "Are you crazy?" he demanded.

"To tell the truth, I am not sure. I suppose an alienist would diagnose my condition as a form of lunacy."

Wade sank into a chair, regarding his master blinkingly. "If you've made up your mind to go a million mules couldn't stop you. Are you sure you won't be recognized? That beard is a pretty good disguise, but——"

"Calm yourself, Wade. I have an advantage in the fact that nearly everybody is convinced I am dead. Nobody is looking for me, and therein lies my safety. I had a visitor tonight." He related his encounter with the girl, and what had followed. The fat man listened with breathless interest.

"Blazing cats!" he exclaimed when the Phantom had finished. "Say, that girl certainly has pluck. Don't blame you for falling for her. But what's the idea?"

"I am adopting your suggestion, and going in for a little adventure. Two hours ago I didn't see how I could possibly equal our Bostburg achievement, but I've had an inspiration in the meantime. I intend to call on the Duke and try to persuade him to hand the Cosmopolitan collection over to me."

Wade sat speechless for several moments. His lips twitched, and he rubbed his eyes as if making sure he was awake.

"I know now you've gone plumb crazy," he declared emphatically. "But all right. I'm right with you. I'll scrape together as many of the old gang as I can, and——"

The Phantom held up his hand, a thin smile curling his lips. "I'm going it alone this time, Wade. I propose to tackle the Duke single-handed. If I took a crowd along and swooped down on him in force it would be a tame proceeding in comparison with our Bostburg performance. The only way I can eclipse that accomplishment is by tackling the job unassisted. Besides, I am not sure but that a case like this can be better handled by one man than by a score."

Wade shook his head and sank back against the chair, utterly dazed. His lips twitched, but for a long time no words came. "The Duke will give you a hot reception," he finally managed to

say. "He's got from fifty to a hundred men, some of them the sharpest crooks in this country. They're ugly rascals, too, most of 'em. The Duke doesn't bother about a code of honor the way you do. You'll never get back alive."

"Perhaps not," assented the Phantom, shrugging carelessly.

"Besides," Wade went on, his tongue gradually gathering momentum, "nobody but his own men ever saw the Duke. You don't know what he looks like, and you don't know where to look for him. His headquarters isn't on the map."

"I realize there are some difficulties in the way, but they can be removed. My first task is to locate the Duke, and I expect to do that by advertising."

"Adver—advertising?" gasped the fat man.

"Exactly. With Miss Hardwick's assistance I prepared the advertisement, which I shall have inserted in all the New York papers, just before you came in. Care to see it?"

With a flabbergasted look at his chief Wade took the paper the latter handed him and read haltingly:

WANTED—A FIVE-LEGGED BULL.—A gentleman who wishes to remain anonymous wishes to purchase a miniature statue of a five-legged bull which was made in Assyria during the reign of Samas Rimmon II. No copies or imitations will be considered, but advertiser stands ready to pay generously for the original, which was in the British Museum until 1904, when it was brought to this country. All communications will be treated confidentially.

Wade mopped his forehead after he had finished reading the advertisement, which concluded with a blind address. "That makes everything absolutely clear, of course," he commented sarcastically. "All you've got to do in order to locate the Duke is to advertise for a five-legged bull. A child might have thought of it."

The Phantom chuckled good-humoredly. "You are waxing satirical. Permit me to explain that the old Assyrian sculptors usually equipped their animals with five legs because they thought it necessary that four should be visible from every point of view. The description in the advertisement fits a piece of sculpture which was included in the loot the Duke hauled away from the Cosmopolitan Museum."

"I am listening."

"This particular item was not, however, given in the list furnished the police and the newspapers after the robbery. All the list shows is that eleven pieces of Assyrian sculpture were among the stolen articles. Consequently no one but the curator is supposed to know that this particular piece disappeared."

A look of intelligence struggled with the bewilderment in Wade's face.

"Now let's go back to the Duke," continued the Phantom. "Having no eye for beauty or art, the collection is merely so much junk on his hands. He knows, however, that some misguided souls are willing to pay good money for that kind of rubbish. Being greedy, he is naturally anxious to sell, but for good and sufficient reasons he cannot offer the stuff in the open market, and he cannot trust the ordinary 'fences' in a matter of such magnitude. Consequently the best he can hope for is to unload one piece at a time."

"Now you're beginning to talk sense," observed Wade.

"The Duke will see my advertisement," the Phantom went on. "He will probably suspect a trap, but he will also realize that the advertisement may be a bona fide one. He will reason that it's just possible that it has been inserted by a genuine collector who may be induced to purchase other articles in addition to the five-legged bull. At any rate the Duke cannot afford to pass up the chance. He will get in touch with the advertiser through a representative

whom he will instruct to ascertain whether the advertisement was inserted in good faith, and, if not, why it was inserted at all."

Wade sat erect, looking at the Phantom in open-mouthed astonishment. "Corking idea!" he applauded. "I thought you were kidding me when you sprung that stuff about the five-legged bull. I get it now. You'll get in touch with the Duke by having him send around a representative of his to look you up."

"Precisely. My first aim is to establish connection with the Duke. I shall cross the other bridges when I get to them. If possible I'll drop you a line from time to time to let you know how I'm getting on."

Wade regarded him dubiously. "You'll be careful, boss? The Duke is a bad actor."

"I'll watch my step," promised the Phantom, an eager gleam in his eyes. "Well, I must be on my way. It's going to be a gray, misty morning, Wade—regular Phantom weather."

CHAPTER V.

THE DUKE'S ENVOY.

FOR the seventh time that evening—or was it the fourteenth?—the Gray Phantom was vaguely aware of stealthy espionage. Conveying a morsel of luscious squab to his lips, he let his eyes wander for an instant over the resplendent dining room. None in the gayly chattering throng seemed to notice him, and yet a sixth sense told him that a pair of prying eyes had but a moment ago looked in his direction.

Now that he came to think of it the impression that he was being watched had haunted him all evening, though it had been too dim and elusive to impinge on his consciousness. Once he had been almost certain that some one had been spying on him from behind the curtained window of a lemon-colored limousine. Later, during his journeys between newspaper offices and his subsequent stroll up Fifth Avenue, the same intangible impression had come to him, though at the time he had ascribed it to a too vivid imagination.

On the whole he rather enjoyed the sensation, for it afforded him a piquancy that had been sadly lacking in his humdrum life at Azurecrest. Too, it was pleasant to rub elbows with the world again after nine months of seclusion on a hilltop. It was also a somewhat hazardous venture, considering that his black beard would prove a very thin disguise if it should become known that the Phantom was still alive; but the risk only spiced his enjoyment.

The only thing that worried him was that, after three days spent in New York, he was no nearer the goal of his quest than on the dull and misty morning when he had left Azurecrest. His advertisement, by which he had hoped to establish contact with the Duke's organization, had not drawn a single response. And now only four days remained of the week within which he had promised to lay the Cosmopolitan collection at the feet of Helen Hardwick.

He wondered, as he dallied over an excellent dinner, whether his famous luck was failing him at last. He did not care for triumphs easily won, and he knew that his present enterprise was as difficult and perilous as anything he had attempted in the past, but the mere thought of defeat was bitter to one who had never known failure. Perhaps the Duke was too wary to nibble at the baited hook. Perhaps he had not even seen the advertisement. Perhaps——

Suddenly the Phantom looked up. Almost in the same instant, but not quickly enough to elude his sharp gaze, a woman seated half a dozen tables to his left lowered her eyes, and pretended complete absorption in her chocolate glacé. She was dining alone, and the

obsequious attentions lavished upon her by the waiters told that she was a frequent and favored guest.

"Caught you that time," was the Phantom's triumphant thought. "Quite an alluring creature! Wonder who you are, lady of the prying eyes."

Having an appreciative eye for beauty, he admired the horizontal sweep of the two fins of paradise that adored her thistle-colored velvet hat. Her Callot gown of gray satin, with a frill of gorgeous silver lace extended from the bodice, also won his approval. The dusky beauty of her exquisitely molded face and the delicately rounded lines of her gleaming throat and shoulders appealed to the Phantom's æsthetic sense, but somehow he found himself contrasting her with the fresh and artless charms of Helen Hardwick.

"Vampire or intrigante?" was his mental question as he studied her.

Presently she raised her head again, and for an instant their eyes met. There was a roguish light in hers, and a slight arching of the brows, accompanied with a little twitching of the lips, suggested a waggish invitation.

"It's vampire," was the Phantom's disgusted conclusion. He had grown used to feminine admiration, and the wiles of the sex held no fascination for him. The woman in the Callot gown was an accomplished flirt, nothing else. He was already dismissing her from his mind.

But a moment later he wondered whether he had read her right. Once more her head went up, and the Phantom, apparently giving undivided attention to his dessert, observed her covertly. Evidently unaware of his furtive scrutiny, she sat with head tilted against her hand, seemingly absorbed in deep thought. All signs of frivolity and coquetry had fled from her face, and in their stead had come a crafty, designing expression which he was at a loss to analyze.

"An intrigante posing as a vampire," was the way in which he revised his estimate of her. "If I didn't have weightier matters on my mind just now I would cultivate her acquaintance. I fancy she's up to some sort of mischief."

He fixed her with a level glance, and in a twinkling the smiles and the roguery returned to her face. The paradise fins described a scarcely perceptible nod, and the lids of her left eye contracted ever so slightly. This time the invitation in her eyes was unmistakable.

"I'll accept, just for luck," resolved the Phantom, puzzled and fascinated by the two sharply conflicting expressions he had seen in her face. "It will be as good a way as any to while away an hour."

He summoned the waiter, hurriedly paid his bill, and started to walk out. As he reached the woman's table she looked up quickly, and an artful look of surprise and recognition dawned in her eyes.

"You!" she exclaimed, extending a slim, bejeweled hand. It was an ancient stratagem, but the Phantom thought she managed it rather well. He murmured a platitude as a waiter ceremoniously placed a chair for him. He resolved to remain in her company just long enough to ascertain whether her espionage had been prompted by anything stronger than an idle whim.

"Did you take coffee?" she inquired, adding after he had replied in the negative: "Shall we have Oku serve us in my apartment? I don't believe you ever met my mother?"

"Haven't had the pleasure," declared the Phantom truthfully, resolving to pursue the adventure to the end.

"Then let us start at once," she suggested. "The air here is abominable. My car is waiting outside."

The Phantom, spurred on by the imp of recklessness, acquiesced, and gal-

lantly handed her her furs. As he assisted her into the car he noticed that it was a lemon-hued affair, and it occurred to him that he had seen it before.

"I suppose you think I am outrageous?" she began as the car swung down the street, her slender, supple body nestling luxuriously against the cushions.

"Oh, no," said the Phantom with a laugh, wondering what and whom she took him to be. "There is ample and time-honored precedent for what we did, and you carried off your part very charmingly."

She murmured a "Thank you," then lapsed into a dreamy silence which lasted until the car brought up in front of a brownstone house. The Phantom, who had been glancing occasionally at a corner sign, thought they must be somewhere in the upper Forties. The woman leaned lightly on his arm as they left the car and entered the building, and a little gasp of admiration escaped the Phantom as they passed into an exquisitely furnished apartment. Save for the prevalence of the feminine touch, exemplified in gorgeous but meaningless trifles and gewgaws, it met the emphatic approval of the Phantom's discriminating eye.

"You will find cigarettes in the humidor on the table," said the woman. "I shall tell Oku to prepare our coffee."

She withdrew. As he helped himself to a cigarette the Phantom wondered why she had not rung for the servant and given her instructions in his presence. He resolved to partake of Oku's coffee very sparingly.

"My mother is indisposed, and asks to be excused," announced the woman, reëntering the room after a few minutes' absence.

The Phantom expressed his regrets, though strongly suspecting that the mother was a mythical being. He looked straight into her eyes. "They're violet, I see," he murmured softly. "I thought so the first time I saw them, though I didn't get a good look."

"You are very observant," she replied, smiling mischievously as she drooped down on an ottoman and clasped her hands over one knee. "The average person doesn't usually notice the color of one's eyes."

"Well, you see, it's my impression that yours have been following me all evening."

"Oh! Then you noticed?"

"And I am naturally curious. Won't you enlighten me as to why you have paid me the compliment of keeping me under surveillance?"

She regarded him candidly out of her big, oddly luminous eyes. "Many a woman would lose her head and heart over a man like you," she declared.

He shrugged modestly. "Not a woman of your type, however. When a woman like you honors a man with such attentions as you have paid me this evening, it usually means that she is playing a game of some sort. Suppose we stop the mummery and put all the cards on the table. My name is Roland Adair." It was the name under which he had registered at his hotel.

"Really?" She spoke in a faintly teasing tone, accompanying the words with a keen look. "Mine is Virginia Darrow."

The Phantom bowed, and just then a gaunt and weazened Japanese entered with the coffee. She dismissed him, and poured the fragrant liquid into fragile china cups, handing her guest one of them.

"Your Oku is an excellent distiller of coffee," said the Phantom, pretending to sip. "Now that we are duly acquainted, won't you gratify my curiosity? Why have I been under this pleasant espionage all evening?"

"Oh, please, Mr. Adair"—he fancied she was putting a slight sarcastic

emphasis on the name—"don't ask embarrassing questions. Let us discuss something else—five-legged bulls, for instance."

He started so violently that the cup almost slipped from his fingers. Her mischievously twinkling eyes were upon him, taking in his bewilderment.

"As you please," he said, steadying himself with an effort; and he noticed that she had taken advantage of his momentary confusion to empty a part of her coffee into an ornate urn standing near her chair. "Am I to understand that you saw my advertisement in the papers?"

She nodded.

"Aren't you taking a rather roundabout way of communicating with me?"

"Didn't you take a rather roundabout way of making known your desire to purchase a five-legged bull?"

He grinned, at the same moment tingling with elation and a gentle excitement. He had not expected it would come about this way, but evidently he had struck the trail at last—the trail that would lead him to the headquarters of the Duke.

"You see," she went on, her face sobering, "the circumstances were somewhat extraordinary. I am being frank with you. Your advertisement could mean either one of several things. That was why I took the precaution of approaching you in this indirect manner. I wanted to look you over, and see what manner of person you were, before I felt safe in discussing business with you."

Her eyes were on the floor as she spoke, and the Phantom consigned a little of his coffee to a potted fern at his back.

"You are very prudent," he remarked.

"I knew, of course, that you would call at the newspaper offices for replies to your advertisement. While I was waiting outside in the car my secretary kept watch inside until you appeared in one of them and called the number over which your notice had appeared. It was very simple."

"Very. But why such elaborate precautions?" She was looking away from him again, and a little more of the coffee was sprinkled over the fern.

"Can't you guess? I thought we were going to call a halt on the mummery. You must know that the statue described in your advertisement was, until a short time ago, in the Cosmopolitan Museum."

"I am aware of that, Miss Darrow."

"And you presumably know also that the same statue disappeared one night last week."

"I know the museum was robbed, but the five-legged bull was not included in the lists published in the newspapers. If I had given it a moment's thought, however, I suppose I might have guessed that his bullship vanished along with the rest of the collection."

"Guessed, Mr. Adair?" The violet eyes regarded him narrowly. "Didn't you *know?*"

The Phantom feigned acute embarrassment. "Well, yes, I admit I was aware that the creature had disappeared from the Cosmopolitan. I had long desired to gain possession of it, and it occurred to me that its falling into private hands gave me the opportunity I had been waiting for. My only difficulty was how to get in touch with the —ahem, present owner. Hence the advertisement."

"Just so. In other words, your advertisement is in reality an offer to purchase stolen goods."

The Phantom laughed. "Those are harsh words, Miss Darrow. I am a collector, not a moralist, however. The bull's past, no matter how lurid it might have been, doesn't interest me. It's his antiquity that appeals to me. Am I to infer that he is in your possession at the present moment?"

She hesitated, and he watched her with some misgivings while she refilled his cup. He took another cigarette from the humidor and lighted it.

"If I answered that question in the affirmative I should be incriminating myself," she remarked guardedly. "It would amount to a confession that I am a keeper of stolen goods."

"More harsh words! I should prefer to believe that you had bought the five-legged creature in good faith and without suspecting that it was stolen property."

"Would you really?" She regarded him steadily, her lips parted in a queer little smile. "I wonder who you are, Mr. Adair. It is possible, of course, that you are what you represent yourself to be, a collector of antiques. On the other hand, you may be a detective. Again, you may be——"

She paused, and an odd tingle crept down the Phantom's spine. Her eyes, crystal-clear and keen, were studying him intently. It was not possible, he reasoned, that she was penetrating the disguising beard, yet her concentrated scrutiny was a bit disquieting. Suddenly she rose to press a button, and the fern at the Phantom's back received another drenching.

"Oku," she directed when the Japanese servant appeared, "bring me the supplement of last Sunday's *Sphere*."

Once more the fragile cup in the Phantom's hand escaped demolition by a scant margin. It was in the supplement of last Sunday's *Sphere,* he recalled, that the article speculating in regard to the possible return of the Gray Phantom had appeared. To conceal his confusion he took a third cigarette from the humidor. He imagined that the woman was shyly smiling at him. He felt he must think coolly and act with deliberation, but something seemed to interfere with the processes of his mind.

Oku appeared again, and handed his mistress the paper; then, in response to a signal from Miss Darrow, stationed himself at the door. The Phantom, smoking in silence, thought there was something strange about the proceeding, but he refrained from comment. The woman searched the paper until she reached the page she seemed to have been looking for, then folded it across her knee and began to make a series of short, rapid strokes with a pencil.

"Are you an artist, Miss Darrow?" inquired the Phantom, passing a hand across his forehead.

"I sometimes amuse myself by sketching. By the way, Mr.—ahem—Adair, you will kill that poor fern unless you stop sprinkling coffee over it."

Tinkling laughter followed the words. The Phantom jerked himself erect, wondering at the meaning of the aching confusion in his head. It occurred to him that he might gain an advantage over her if he could startle her.

"I suspected Oku's coffee from the start," he declared, wondering why his voice sounded weak and distant. "You see, the moment you mentioned the five-legged bull, I guessed you were an emissary of the Duke's."

If she was shocked her expression did not show it, and a moment later he had regretted the foolish and impulsive speech. Evidently his mind was not working with its customary nimbleness. She flashed him a smile as she rose from the ottoman and approached him, holding the paper before his eyes. He uttered a gasp as a swift and bewildered glance showed him the meaning of the pencil strokes.

The page she was holding before him was the one containing the illustrated article about the Gray Phantom. She had folded it twice, and the exposed portion showed a photograph of him as he had appeared at the height of his career, before his dual life had become

revealed. Into this photographic likeness the woman had deftly sketched a beard resembling the one he was wearing now.

"Just as I thought," she declared triumphantly. "A beard sometimes makes a vast difference, doesn't it? You are Cuthbert Vanardy—the Gray Phantom."

He tried to rise from the chair, but an overwhelming drowsiness held him down. The room heaved and seesawed before his heavily blinking eyes. The woman seemed to have dissolved into a blur of flesh tints merging with the deep-toned hues of her gown.

"I shan't need you any more just now, Oku," he heard her say, and her voice sounded as if she were speaking across a vast abyss. "I knew he would suspect a trap, and I made him think the coffee was drugged to avert his suspicions from the cigarettes."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SIREN'S SCHEME.

SLOWLY and haltingly, like one struggling out of a slough, the Phantom's mind came out of the stupor induced by Virginia Darrow's doctored cigarettes. He gripped the arms of the chair and looked about him dazedly. A single bulb was burning in the electrolier above his head, shedding a mellow radiance over the room, and the melodiously ticking clock on the mantelpiece showed that it was a little after two in the morning. His elastic strength and superb constitution had shaken off the effects of the drug in an amazingly short time.

There was a dull, throbbing ache at his temples, but bit by bit recollection of past events came to him. His first sensation was one of poignant humiliation. He had been very neatly tripped by a fascinating adventuress in the Duke's employ, and was now, to all appearances, at the mercy of his old rival in criminal exploits. He wondered whether the Phantom, heretofore invincible, was at last to taste the bitter dregs of failure.

Then a picture drifted into the range of his mental vision, a picture of a slender slip of a girl with wonderful hazel eyes and masses of brown hair shading the only face that had ever made a deep and lasting impression on the Gray Phantom.

"I'll win that kiss or die," he told himself with a chuckle.

It occurred to him that, despite his present predicament, one point had been gained, for he had established contact with the Duke's organization. If the goddess of fortune would only smile on him again, it should not prove difficult to trace the Duke to his lair, and then it would be only a question of time and deft maneuvering until the Cosmopolitan collection was in his hands, together with the rest of the Duke's hoarded booty.

He grinned at the thought, but in the midst of these pleasant reflections it struck him as strange that his hands and feet were free, and that he could move about at will. It was odd that an astute schemer like Miss Darrow had not adopted the precaution of manacling him. The doors were probably locked securely, but such obstacles had never given the Phantom much difficulty. Perhaps she had relied on the drug to keep him under its influence a while longer.

He dragged his feet about the room and stretched his arms to shake off the numbness that still clung to his limbs. By accident he glanced at a silver-framed mirror, then stared in surprise at his reflection in the glass.

His glossy, black beard, upon which he had relied to escape detection, had been removed while he was unconscious. Once more he was Cuthbert Vanardy, the Gray Phantom, the supercriminal whose features, thanks to en-

ergetic exploitation in the newspapers, were known to every man, woman, and child in the country.

"I suppose I have the versatile Oku to thank for this," he muttered. In a twinkling he understood why Miss Darrow had not thought it necessary to shackle him. She had relied on subtler and more ingenious means to prevent his escape. With his beard gone, the fact that he was supposed to be dead would no longer protect him. It would not be safe to venture on the streets even after dark.

"Fairly clever," he mumbled grimly, realizing that the obstacles in the way of accomplishing his aim were now almost insurmountable, for he could scarcely make a single move without incurring the risk of recogntion and arrest. All he could hope for now was a chance to slip out of the city unobserved and return to his retreat on the hilltop. A false beard might afford him temporary respite, he reasoned, but how was he to procure one when he could not show himself on the streets?

"Checkmated at the start," he grumbled.

The sound of muffled voices broke in on his dismal reflections, and he had barely had time to tiptoe back to his chair and assume an attitude of profound and drug-induced sleep when a door opened in the rear of the room and two pairs of feet—one of them heavy and dragging, the other light and swift—crossed the floor.

"Are you sure it's he?" inquired a masculine voice.

"Look for yourself, Duke," was the reply, spoken in Miss Darrow's vivacious, full-throated tones.

It required all the Phantom's self-control to repress a start. He felt the Duke's eyes on his face, and his veins tingled at the thought that at last he was in the presence of the only man whose criminal enterprises had rivaled the Phantom's in magnitude and audacity. Though their organizations had clashed many times, they had never before met face to face, and now Vanardly felt a wild impulse to open his eyes and see what his famous rival looked like.

"You are right, Virgie," declared the Duke after a long pause, during which the Phantom imagined he felt the man's eyes burning into his flesh. "It's Vanardy. So, me meet at last, after the rascal had made us all believe he was dead. How did you get wise?"

The woman laughed mockingly. "Oh, he is quite transparent, despite his cleverness. At first I thought as you did, Duke, that the advertisement was inserted either by a detective or a genuine collector, and that in either case it behooved us to investigate. I followed him during the evening, and later I managed to get a table close to his at the Occidental Hotel. My idea was to get a chance to study him at close range."

"And so you sprayed him with smiles and tender glances, I suppose?"

"Well, I did my best to dazzle him. But he wasn't dazzled at all; he merely pretended to be. A woman can always tell the difference, you know. Naturally I grew suspicious. I could see he was too much a man of the world to be a detective, and I had my doubts about his being a collector. I worked my siren's wiles, but——"

"But he didn't fall for them?"

"He pretended to succumb, Duke, but I knew he accepted my invitation only because he was playing a game. That made me all the more suspicious, and in the meantime it occurred to me that there was something vaguely familiar about his appearance. I remembered the *Sphere's* article, and of a sudden it popped into my head that he was the Gray Phantom. I made certain by sketching a beard on one of the photographs that accompanied the article."

"What have you given him?"

"Enough to keep him dead to the world till daylight. When the drug took effect I had Oku shave off his beard."

The Duke laughed as if highly amused. The Phantom heard him walk about the room, mumbling to himself. He opened an eye ever so slightly and had a glimpse of a short, thin man, apparently of nervous temperament, for he walked with quick, jerky steps, and wagged his head from side to side.

"What kind of game do you suppose the Phantom is playing this time?" he asked abruptly.

"Isn't it fairly clear, Duke? The fact that he advertised for one of the articles your men removed from the Cosmopolitan Museum is proof to my mind that he was trying to get in touch with your organization and locate your headquarters. Evidently his purpose was to top off his career with a raid on the baubles and knickknacks stored in your cellars."

"He would have made a fairly rich haul if he had succeeded, and I shan't forget that it was you who put the kibosh on his scheme, Virgie. What do you mean to do with him?"

"Nothing."

"But he will attempt to escape as soon as he wakes up."

"That is precisely what I am hoping he will do."

The Duke's footfalls stopped abruptly. "Eh?"

"I have a man stationed at the door who will follow him wherever he goes."

"I don't get you at all, Virgie."

The woman gave a teasing laugh. "Just ask yourself where he will go when he wakes up and discovers that his beard has been amputated. He can't move about without risking detection, and the Phantom is too shrewd a man to take unnecessary risks. Consequently he will give up the attempt to raid your place for the time being, and he will find himself in the unenviable position of a man who has no place to go but home."

The Phantom gave an involuntary start, but apparently it was not noticed by the other two. His respect for Virginia Darrow's ingenuity rose several notches.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Duke. "You would have me do unto the Phantom as the Phantom would have done unto me. You are a marvel, Virginia. No one but you would have thought of that."

"It shows the value of team work. My specialty is scheming; yours is execution. The Phantom must have accumulated a king's ransom during his years of polite brigandage. The haul you made at the Cosmopolitan Museum last week would be a paltry pittance in comparison. Besides, if I remember correctly, you have a bone to pick with the Phantom."

"You bet I have!" muttered the Duke; and a grin tugged at the corners of Vanardy's lips. "I haven't forgotten how he queered my game after I had nearly grabbed the Russian crown jewels three years ago. This is my chance to get even. Before I am through with him the Phantom will be as poor as a church mouse, and I want the satisfaction of telling him to his face that he has me to thank for his poverty."

The Duke was evidently working himself into a passion. He was walking the floor with a quickened pace, and his voice was edged with a snarl.

"Don't let your vindictiveness get the better of your discretion, Duke," cautioned the woman. "The Phantom is a dangerous adversary."

"But just now, thanks to you, he is as helpless as Samson after Delilah gave him that famous hair cut. I think you have doped things out about right, Virgie. As soon as he comes to he will seize the first chance that comes along

to beat it for home. Your man will follow him, and locate his camping ground. Then I'll organize a raiding expedition to clean out the Phantom. I want the satisfaction of heading it myself, so the Phantom will know that I am paying him in full for the trick he played me three years ago. It's going to be great fun."

"Better be careful, Duke."

"Oh, I'll be careful," declared the Duke grimly. "I'll take enough picked men along to make the job easy and safe. You can trust me not to take chances when I am dealing with the Phantom."

Miss Darrow laughed. "I believe," she remarked casually, "that it is your motto to strike while the iron is hot."

"The hotter the better," replied the Duke with a chuckle. "It will be daylight before the Phantom comes to, and he will probably decide to make no moves until to-night, but in the meantime I must make certain arrangements. I will get in touch with some of our men at once. Sykes and Levinsky and a few others are probably hanging around headquarters."

"Why not have them come here?"

"Too dangerous." There was a slight trace of nervousness in the Duke's tones. "Virgie, you haven't seen any signs of treachery within our organization, have you?"

"What an amazing question, Duke! What on earth led you to ask it?"

"A hunch—nothing else. I've had a queer feeling for some time that things are not just right. Nerves on edge, I guess. I'll feel all right as soon as I have settled my score with the Phantom. Ha, ha!"

A soft click followed, telling the Phantom that the Duke was at the telephone. He was ordering a taxicab, and Vanardy was glad that the trying ordeal of feigning unconsciousness was nearly over. Squinting out of an eye he saw the Duke don a long dark topcoat and a soft hat that came far down over his eyes. Then he took leave of his hostess, and a moment later the front door opened and closed.

A tingle of excitement ran down the Phantom's back. With infinite weariness he opened an eye a little. Miss Darrow was standing a few feet away, facing the door through which the Duke had just departed. With head thrown back and hands resting over her hips, she made a picture which Vanardy regarded with both admiration and perplexity. Then, abruptly she switched off the lights, and went out through a door in the rear.

The Phantom rose, realizing his chance had come. His head was clear now, and he felt a thrill of delectable excitement. A distant chugging testified that the Duke's taxicab was approaching.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUKE'S HEADQUARTERS.

BAREHEADED—for in the darkness he had been unable to find his hat—the Gray Phantom tiptoed into the hall and opened the outer door a crack. The Duke was standing at the curb, and the wedge-shaped glare projected by the oncoming taxicab threw his short, gaunt figure into sharp relief.

Vanardy listened intently. The house was silent and still. The servants were no doubt asleep, Miss Darrow was by this time retiring, and the Phantom expected no interference, save possibly from the man who had been stationed at the door to watch his movements if he should attempt to escape.

"Twenty-second Street and Ninth Avenue," directed the Duke as he climbed inside the cab. Vanardy, making a mental note of the directions, waited until the vehicle had gained half a block's headway, then pushed the door wide open and started in the opposite direction.

Glancing back over his shoulder as he hurried along he saw a shadowy figure emerge from the basement entrance and stealthily take up the pursuit. He chuckled softly as he turned a corner and walked south. He had an advantage in the fact that the man stalking him thought his quarry unaware of pursuit, and he intended to use it to the utmost.

At the next corner he turned abruptly and pressed close against the wall. The shadows were deep where he stood, and a swift glance in either direction revealed no one in sight. At the sound of hurriedly approaching footsteps he tensed his body for a spring. In the next instant his pursuer, somewhat breathless, appeared around the corner, halted, and glanced about him bewilderedly, as if half suspecting that his quarry had vanished within one of the houses.

Without making the slightest sound Vanardy leaped forward, seizing the man's coat collar with one hand, and with the other strangling the startled cry that rose in his throat. Then he sent a quick, stinging blow to the fellow's jaw and another to his diaphragm. With a wheezy squeal he reeled and fell, striking his head against the iron railing.

"Rough treatment, old chap, but necessity knows no law," muttered the Phantom regretfully. He glanced about quickly, satisfying himself that the episode had attracted no attention. His victim lay prone and inert on the sidewalk, having been stunned by the two blows and the thump he had received in striking the railing. Working swiftly Vanardy went through his pockets and transferred their contents to his own. Among the articles was a letter with an address on it.

"You will receive your property by mail to-morrow or next day," he promised, addressing the unconscious figure. "In the meantime it is just as well for you to proceed on the assumption that the Phantom gave you the slip, and that you were knocked down and robbed by a hoodlum. Everybody knows that the Phantom never stoops to plain and sordid robbery."

Chuckling gently, yet regretting that necessity had forced him to resort to coarse tactics, he was about to turn away when he remembered that he was bareheaded, and therefore likely to attract undue attention. He tried on his victim's soft hat and found that it fitted fairly well. Deciding to pay generously for the accommodation he hurried westward as rapidly as he thought prudent. Luck was with him, for a vacant taxicab was swinging into the side street just as he reached Sixth Avenue.

"Ninth Avenue and Twenty-second Street," he directed as he stopped the cab and jerked the door open. "There's a fiver in it for you if you forget the traffic regulations."

The bribe proved effective, for the vehicle dashed along the street at a law-defying pace, stirring a drowsy patrolman to profane but impotent wrath. The Phantom leaned back in his seat and reflected that so far all had gone well. He hoped the man he had left unconscious on the sidewalk would be picked up by an ambulance and taken to a hospital before he recovered sufficiently to be able to return to the house of his employer and report developments. Aside from his uncertainty in this respect his mind was at ease.

He looked out of the window as the cab swung southward in Ninth Avenue and giddily raced along under the elevated railroad. Street signs and long rows of bleak buildings flashed by in rapid succession. As the cab jolted across Twenty-fourth Street Vanardy caught sight of a lone, dark figure approaching from the opposite direction. He started as, for a mere instant, a cor-

ner light illuminated the pedestrian's face, most of which was shaded by a soft hat. In the brief flash he had recognized the Duke, who evidently had thought it prudent to leave his taxicab a few blocks short of his destination.

A rap on the windshield brought Vanardy's conveyance to a quick stop. Jumping out he thrust a bill into the chauffeur's hand, and, tarrying for an instant in the shadow of one of the huge pillars supporting the elevated structure, descried the Duke's coat-tails flapping in the wind a short block ahead. Taking the opposite side of the street, and pressing close to the dark walls, he advanced briskly until he had reduced the distance between them by half.

He had barely done so when the Duke stopped, and whirling quickly about, glanced carefully in all directions as if to make sure he had not been pursued. The Phantom, swiftly dodging into a doorway, became indistinguishable in the shadows. Apparently satisfied that he had not been followed the Duke turned into a side street, and Vanardy emerged from his hiding place just in time to see his quarry halt before a door near the middle of the block.

It was a rather squalid neighborhood. In all directions were murky tenements and rooming houses, and an occasional small shop. Cautiously approaching from the other side of the street Vanardy noticed that the lower windows of the building before which the Duke had stopped were dimly lighted. The Duke made a motion as if pressing a button, and presently a stout man garbed in black came forward and opened the door. The two men exchanged a few words, after which the Duke walked toward the rear and disappeared.

"Queer layout," muttered the Phantom. He crossed the street in a diagonal direction, and glanced through one of the lighted windows; he saw the black-garbed man seated at a desk reading a newspaper. There was no one else in the room, but in the back he glimpsed the door through which the Duke had passed a moment ago. There were potted ferns in the windows, and the interior was decorated with artificial palms, biblical pictures, and somber rugs and wall hangings. The whole impressed Vanardy as rather strange, but a glance at the sign painted on the window glass dissolved his perplexity:

DIGBY UNDERTAKING PARLORS
C. W. Digby, Prop.

After his first bewilderment Vanardy grinned approvingly. He could appreciate cleverness even on the part of a rival and adversary, and he realized that it was nothing short of an inspiration that had led the Duke to hide his nefarious activities behind the somber mask of an undertaking establishment. No one would think of looking for the headquarters of a master criminal in an atmosphere of embalming fluids, and nobody would think it strange if lights were burning and people coming and going at all hours. If by some remote chance the police should take it into their heads to investigate they would undoubtedly discover that a bona fide undertaking business was being conducted on the premises by a licensed embalmer whom they would never suspect of being the accomplice of a celebrated criminal.

"The Duke is a thorough-going cuss," muttered the Phantom, running his eyes up and down the three-story building, the upper floors of which were dark. "I would never have found the place if he hadn't been accommodating enough to lead me to it."

The first important step in his enterprise had been achieved, but the Phantom knew there were greater difficulties ahead. He could not hope to accomplish much until he had ascertained

the lay of the building, and how to gain entrance without attracting attention was a poser. Nothing could be gained by recklessness, for without doubt several of the Duke's men were within, and others could be quickly summoned. Vanardy did not care to ruin his plans by walking blindly into a trap.

His glance slid downward to the dark basement entrance. Descending the three wooden steps, he found that the door was secured with a heavy padlock. His hand went into his inside vest pocket and drew forth a little metal box. Fortunately Miss Darrow had not taken the precaution of searching him. Opening the box, compactly packed with small but very useful tools, he took out one of them.

A few minutes later the lock had been picked and the door yielded noiselessly to his push. He drew it shut behind him, and tiptoed forward in the impenetrable gloom. The air was oppressively dark, and his progress was impeded by refuse and broken boxes scattered over the floor. He had taken only a dozen steps or so when he brought up against a brick wall. Turning to his left, his feet shortly encountered another obstruction. It was a wooden object, and, as he ran his hands along its surface, he discovered that it was long and narrow in shape. After a moment's hesitation he struck a match.

The next instant a little shiver ran down his spine. The Gray Phantom had more than once laughed death in the face, but the accessories of funerals and burials always inspired him with horror. The object that had excited his curiosity now proved to be a rough and unpainted box of the kind which is usually kept in stock in undertaking establishments, for enclosing coffins for burial. He raised the cover, which was unfastened, and peeped into the interior. Then the match flickered out.

He started violently as a mouse scampered past him in the darkness. Then he struck another match, and now he noticed that he was standing in a narrow basement chamber, barely twelve feet wide, and only slightly longer. It contained several other boxes similar to the one against which he had stumbled, confirming his guess that a genuine undertaking business was being conducted in the place. In a corner opposite the one in which he stood a short stairway led to the ground floor of the building.

He stole forward as the second match went out, and ascended the stairs until he came to a door. Cautiously trying the lock he found that it was securely closed, but a faint humming of voices reached his ears from the other side. It amused him to think that the Duke and his associates were plotting a raid on his treasures at Azurecrest. He stooped and put his ear to the keyhole, and in the same instant a gong sounded sharply in the silence, followed shortly by a hubbub of voices and the clatter of hurrying steps.

He muttered a curse as he realized what had happened. In his anxiety to play eavesdropper he had touched or stepped on a hidden signal wire. Wondering why it had not occurred to him that the Duke's headquarters must be generously supplied with such devices he scurried down the stairs and darted swiftly toward the basement door. Just as he reached it, a form pressed heavily against it from the outside, then he heard a slight grating sound as a key turned in the padlock, and he knew his escape was cut off.

In the seconds that followed the Gray Phantom did the swiftest thing of his career. The two doors were barred, and he could not penetrate the brick walls that surrounded him on all sides. Steps overhead told him that some one was approaching the door at the head

of the stairs. In a few moments he would be caught and stand face to face with ruin and failure. He gazed frantically into the enveloping darkness.

Then in a flash an inspiration came to him. He remembered the long, grewsome box that had impressed him so unpleasantly, and the thought occurred to him that it offered a slender chance of temporary security. It was impossible that he would remain undiscovered for long, but no other course of action came to him.

With a shudder he raised the cover and lowered himself into the box. Then, again thanking his lucky star that Miss Darrow had neglected to ransack his pockets, he took out his automatic and placed it on the floor of the box. Gradually adjusting himself in a reclining position, he pulled the cover into place above him, gripped the weapon in one hand, and stretched out his arms along his sides.

Presently he could hear footsteps on the stairs and a faint wedge of light penetrated the narrow crack between the cover and the sides of the box. He was in a cramped position, but he dared not stir for fear that he would betray his presence. The Phantom did not shun a fight, but neither did he relish a useless encounter in which the odds would be vastly against him. As yet he had accomplished but little toward achieving his purpose, and he was not disposed to ruin his prospects by a reckless show of bravado.

The footsteps were coming closer, and the zigzagging gleam told that the intruder was searching the basement room. Evidently he was surprised at finding no one, for Vanardy heard him mutter to himself, and he hoped against hope that the man would conclude that he had made his escape before the basement door was locked.

Vanardy gripped the automatic a little more tightly, resolving that if matters came to a climax he would sell his life dearly. The intruder was apparently making a systematic search which was gradually taking him closer and closer to Vanardy's hiding place. Now, he imagined, the man was standing directly above him, and for a long, painful moment the Phantom held his breath.

Then a vigorous kick sounded against the side of the box. Vanardy tensed his body for action, expecting that in another moment or two he would be discovered. But the man merely gave the box a little shove, then walked toward the other side of the basement. The Phantom scarcely dared to believe that he had escaped so easily, for the man must have noticed the weight of the box as he administered the shove, and guessed the reason for it.

And an instant later, as if to confirm his misgivings, the searcher again approached the coffin, and this time a heavy plumping sound indicated that he had sat down on the lid. Speculating as to the meaning of this the Phantom lay perfectly still, wondering if it were possible that the man had not yet guessed his whereabouts.

A moment later he heard a laugh, a loud, harsh, mocking laugh, and then a series of quick metallic thwacks that sent a freezing horror through Vanardy's veins.

In a twinkling he knew what those sharp whacks meant. The man was nailing down the lid!

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAPPED.

FOR a few moments, each one of them punctuated with a loud metallic whack, the Phantom lay numb and stupefied, his nerves and senses palsied by the ghastliness of his predicament. Dimly he knew that his lungs were achingly straining for air, and that his head felt as if it were about to burst.

Then the blows ceased, and he heard his captor's voice, loud and gloating:

"I've got you now!"

The words seemed to electrify him, and a reawakening fighting instinct shook him out of his stupor and spurred his nerves and muscles to action. Seized with a fierce desire to live and conquer he felt an exhilarating flow of returning strength and confidence. And then out of the hideously dark background emerged an enchanting vision, limned in rich and vivid coloring, which inspired him with an added determination to win.

"Helen—Helen Hardwick," he murmured, his lips caressing her name.

Vanardy tingled with bouyant strength, and maneuvered his limbs within the narrow confines of the box so as to direct the full energy of his muscles against the lid. He shoved with all his might, straining his ears to catch the squeaking sounds that would tell him that the nails were giving. But the clinchers held firmly, and the only sound that greeted his efforts was his captor's sarcastic guffaws.

"Wriggle all you want to," was his derisive challenge. "I nailed her down pretty tight."

The Phantom set his jaws with a click and endeavored to exert a few extra pounds of pressure on the covering. Clammy sweat broke from his pores, and his arms and knees ached from frenzied exertion, but the lid gave no signs of yielding. The box, of a small size for its usage, was so narrow that he could not move his limbs with sufficient freedom to gain leverage, and he saw now that he was dissipating his strength without avail.

For a few moments he lay prone, bathed in perspiration, stung by a new sense of horror as he realized that his efforts were useless. As his short-lived exhilaration ebbed away the weak and fruitless gasping for air became an insufferable torment, and he wondered whether his captor meant to let him die of suffocation. He had never feared death, but he had never imagined that he would meet it in this form, and the horrors of his close confinement weighted his senses with a feeling of unutterable dread.

With a quickening sensation of relief he remembered the little metal box in his vest pocket. The slender, hard, and sharp-nosed instruments it contained had helped him out of many a tight corner. Moving his arm with difficulty within the narrow enclosure he succeeded in reaching the pocket and extracting the receptacle. He placed it at his side, and examined the instruments by touch until he found the one he wanted, a small but rather broad-gauged chisel with a sharp point. With this he began to gouge a hole in that side of the coffin which was nearest the wall, reasoning that the vent would probably escape detection there and that even a tiny ventilator would give him a fighting chance for life.

The man had walked away, and the Phantom fancied that he heard his steps on the stairs. Presently there came a sound as of a door being banged against a wall, and then his captor's stridently triumphant voice, loud enough to penetrate the walls of the box:

"I've got him! He's down here in the storeroom."

Vanardy, manipulating the keen-pointed chisel with feverish haste, had succeeded in widening the chink between two of the boards into a circular hole. He enlarged it little by little, being careful to make no noise. Through the little aperture came a faint stirring of dank air, and sounds from the outside could be distinguished more clearly now. The relief was not great, but somehow the Phantom felt that his situation was not so hopeless as before.

Noises on the stairway told him that

several men—perhaps half a dozen—were descending into the basement.

"Where is he, Shorty?" bawled a voice which he recognized as the Duke's.

Shorty, evidently the man who had nailed down the lid over the box, laughed with great gusto. "There," he declared, and Vanardy guessed he was pointing to the box.

"Huh?" exclaimed the Duke, plainly bewildered.

"I looked all over the room, but couldn't find him at first," explained Shorty in tones of keen gratification. "I knowed he couldn't have got out, for the door was locked on the outside. Finally I happened to give one of them coffin things a shove, and it felt heavy-like, just as if somebody was hiding inside. I didn't let on I was wise, but just got busy with some nails and a hammer." Another raucous laugh indicated that Shorty was highly pleased with himself and his achievement.

The Duke chuckled as if finding the recital very amusing. "But why didn't you take a look at him first?" he inquired. "When people come breaking in here in the dead of night we want to know who they are."

"I know who he is, all right," declared Shorty proudly, "and that's why I wasn't very anxious to get close enough to him for a look."

The voices sounded low and distant, but the Phantom managed to hear nearly every word. Shorty's declaration that he knew the identity of the man inside the box caused him to give a start.

"You didn't see him, and yet you say you know who he is," remarked the Duke perplexedly. "Explain yourself."

"Sure I know who he is," asserted the other triumphantly. "Look, chief! He must 'a' dropped this when he crawled inside the coffin."

Puzzled, and in a torment of suspense, the Phantom lay very still, momentarily at a loss to guess what Shorty was referring to. Then it occurred to him that the hat he had so unceremoniously borrowed was no longer on his head. Evidently this was the object that Shorty pointed out. Despite his serious predicament a wan smile fluttered about the Phantom's lips.

"Look at the initials inside," suggested Shorty eagerly.

"F and W," read the Duke, and of a sudden his voice sounded harsh and sinister.

"I know the hat is Fred Wynn's," declared one of the others. "I saw him wearing it yesterday afternoon. He told me he had just bought it. What I don't get is what Freddie was up to."

"Treachery!" thundered the Duke. "I have had a hunch for some time that crooked work has been going on inside this organization, but I couldn't put my hand on the rotten spot. I never suspected it was Wynn."

"Maybe we're judging him wrong," interposed another of the group. "I always thought Wynn was on the level."

"Judging him wrong!" spluttered the Duke. "On the level! Why did he pick the lock then, and sneak in here like a cheap, lowdown crook? Why did he hide in the box when he saw he was caught? It's clear as daylight that Wynn has been trying to double cross us. Maybe he was trying to get down below and cop out some of the swag for himself. Maybe he's a rotten stool pigeon. You did right, Shorty. You put the snake just where he belongs."

"Well," explained Shorty, "I saw the hat, and I knowed at once that the guy in the box was Wynn. That's why I didn't have much of a hankering to look at him. I know Wynn is handy with the trigger. He shoots straight, and he shoots to kill."

"Are you sure he is armed?" asked the Duke.

"Wynn is always armed. Besides, there was a sound inside the box like somebody monkeying with the safety catch of a gat. I figgered Wynn meant to take a shot at me as soon as I pushed back the lid and poked my head inside the box. So, instead of doing that, I just hunted up a hammer and some nails."

"You did right," declared the Duke. "It was the safest way. Furthermore, I'm going to let the lid stay nailed down a while."

A hush followed, and the Phantom felt a chill wriggle down his spine. Then some one spoke:

"You're going to let him smother to death, chief?"

"Serves the traitor right, don't it?" The Duke laughed nastily. "I'm going to make an example of him. I'll have a notice posted upstairs telling just how he died, and why. Guess the next fellow who thinks of double crossing us will think twice."

A chorus of loud approvals followed the Duke's suggestion.

"Anyhow, it isn't safe to open the box till the cur is through gasping for breath," continued the leader. "He'd be sure to take a shot at us, and somebody would get killed. When it comes to dealing with a traitor I don't believe in taking chances."

"You're as right as right can be, chief," came Shorty's voice, "but aren't you forgetting that gun of his? He might try to shoot a hole through the box to let in air."

"Let him," said the Duke dryly. "I wish him luck. He can't get enough air that way to keep him alive very long, and in the meantime he'll starve to death. We'll get him one way or the other."

"But suppose the shot should be heard outside, chief."

"I didn't think of that," muttered the Duke. "Well, one thing is dead certain; I'm not going to give him a chance to pot any of us. He isn't worth it. I'm going to put him in a place where the sound of a shot won't reach very far. He is lying so still that I guess he's mostly all in, but I'm not taking chances. Shorty, you stay here. The rest of you go upstairs. I'll join you in a few minutes."

The Phantom felt a quaver of apprehension. To be mistaken for the man called Wynn did not worry him greatly, but the Duke's last speech had given rise to disquieting speculations. He wondered whether he was to be put in an underground dungeon where he would have no chance for his life, but would slowly die of suffocation.

He weighed his chances carefully, meanwhile listening to the rasping, wrathy voice of the Duke, who was giving a series of terse directions. He might act on Shorty's suggestion and fire a shot through the coffin in the hope that some one on the outside would hear it and rush to his assistance, but he did not care to waste any of his few cartridges on so slender a chance. Neither would it do any good to shout out to the Duke that he was not Wynn, for necessity would compel the Duke to kill him just the same, and whether he died as a spy or a traitor made little material difference.

"Anyhow," was his grim consolation, "as long as there is life there is hope."

Suddenly the box began to move. It was being dragged over the rough flooring, and Vanardy fervently hoped that the hole he had drilled in the side would not be noticed. The dragging movement ceased after the box had been shifted a few feet, and then one end of it was lifted from the floor.

"Let her go!" commanded the Duke, and the Phantom's fingers instinctively groped for something to clutch.

Abruptly the box started to slide downward, and the Phantom felt as if he were being catapulted down an abyss. He closed his eyes and held his

breath for an age-long second. Then, with a jolt that shook every bone in his body, the box struck firm ground.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TREASURE CHAMBER.

THE shock must have stunned him, for he was vaguely conscious of a lapse of time when again he opened his eyes. He felt an overwhelming weariness and a dull, throbbing pain in every portion of his body. He gasped weakly for air, for the tiny current filtering through the vent in the box seemed only to tantalize him, as a crumb of bread tantalizes the starving. Seized with a numbing despair he wondered whether this was to be the end of the Gray Phantom's tempestuous career.

He stirred slightly to ease his aching limbs, and his head came in contact with something hard and cold. Presently he realized that it was his automatic, which in the downward plunge of the box had rolled to one end. The contact seemed to revive a paltry fragment of physical and mental strength, and to imbue him with a sense of companionship. He stretched an arm, and his fingers touched the little receptacle in which he carried his emergency tools. Slowly, reflectively, as if reaching for a far-away hope, he pried the cover open and ran his fingers over the instruments.

Instinctively selecting one of them he inserted its point between the lid and the side of the box and pried downward with all his strength. He scarcely realized what he was doing until a slight creaking sound told him that he had loosened one of the nails. He had moved it only a little, but a tingle of reviving strength and hope ran through his body. He tried the other nails, loosening each one in turn, and was rewarded by the discovery that the lid had budged a small fraction of an inch.

He took a blunter tool from the receptacle, and repeated the performance, gradually widening the crack between the lid and the walls of the box. It was a laborious task, but the prospect of final escape from his grisly imprisonment buoyed his spirits and fortified his physical endurance. It seemed he had been at work for an hour or more when at length he had loosened the lid to such an extent that a mighty shove with shoulders and knees released it completely.

His gratification found vent in a hoarse, hysterical laugh. After resting for a few minutes he clambered stiffly out of the box, joyously drinking in the stale, damp air that seemed like a Godsend after his tormenting experience in the box.

"Now, Mr. Duke," he declared elatedly, lurching forward on wabbly legs, "we'll see who shall win."

Though still feeling dazed he struck a match and looked about him. The flame revealed a switch on the wall at his back, and at his touch an electric glare illuminated his surroundings. The room, bounded by four murky walls and a high ceiling, from which particles of moisture dripped at intervals, was much larger than the one above. The box from which he had just escaped lay at the foot of a steep stairway, at whose upper end was a trapdoor.

His brain was already beginning to clear. Stacked against one of the walls was a tall row of coffin boxes just like the one that had afforded him such a precarious hiding place, and these the Phantom regarded with great curiosity. Approaching, he raised the loose lid of the topmost one, and, standing on tiptoe, looked inside. He stared for a moment; then an amazed gasp slipped from his lips.

"The Cosmopolitan collection!" he exclaimed, reeling dizzily and clutching at a corner of the box for support.

His experienced eyes had recognized the contents at once. There were priceless oddities, historical relics, and time-worn antiques gathered from all the corners of the world. Doubtless the other boxes in the tier also contained loot accumulated by the Duke, of which he had not yet been able to dispose. The Phantom drew a hand over his throbbing forehead.

"My hat off to the Duke," he mumbled admiringly. "Nobody watching the unloading of a lot of near-coffins in front of an undertaking establishment would suspect that they contained stolen goods. Fairly clever! Well, I am here at last, but if anybody had told me that I was to reach the Duke's treasure chamber inside a coffin box I should have called him an idiot. However, I am not sure that I am much better off than before."

He verified the latter suspicion by ascending the stairs and testing the trapdoor. As he had expected it offered a firm and solid resistance in his efforts. He was still a prisoner, though no longer in imminent danger of smothering to death.

A glance at his watch showed him that it was eight o'clock. He reflected that Wynn must have recovered consciousness long ago. Perhaps he had already reported to Virginia Darrow that he had been struck down and robbed by a hoodlum, and that the Phantom had eluded him. The Duke would, of course, be dumfounded upon learning that Wynn, whom he supposed to be encased in a long, narrow box, was free and unconfined. To settle his doubts and perplexities he would at once repair to the subterranean compartment in which the Phantom was now standing, and then——

Vanardy was unable to finish the thought for his brain was not yet quite clear, and a gnawing hunger impeded his mental processes. He recovered his automatic from the bottom of the box, opened the cartridge chamber, and noticed with satisfaction that it contained four loaded shells. Then he gathered his tools, returned them to their receptacle, and put the latter in his pocket. Finally he replaced the lid of the coffin box, inserted the nails in the original holes, and pressed down on the cover. When the Duke came down the stairs it would require a close glance to warn him that something was wrong, and the Phantom reflected that this delay might give him an important advantage.

Again he looked at his watch. Half an hour had passed since his last glance. His nerves clamored for stimulant, and he took a cigarette from his case, lighted it, and began to smoke with keen relish. Inhaling deeply, he felt a delicious sense of strength and courage surging through his body. Through the blur of tobacco smoke he saw a pair of clear, strong hazel eyes and wavy masses of brown hair surmounting a face whose beauty played upon his heart with a muted melody.

Suddenly he drew himself erect, ears straining, muscles tense, and every fiber and nerve in his body on the alert. A slight sound came from the head of the stairs. He turned quickly, darted to the wall, and with a touch on the switch plunged the room into impenetrable gloom. Then, gliding noiselessly across the floor, he wedged himself into the corner formed by the tier of boxes and the wall. He was crushing the cigarette under his foot as the door at the head of the stairs opened.

"Nonsense, Virgie," said the Duke's voice, irritable and slightly mystified, "Wynn can't be in two places at once."

The door slammed, and two pairs of feet were heard descending the stairs. The Phantom, instantly guessing the trend of the conversation, grinned amusedly.

"Quite right, Duke—a man can't be

in two places at once." Miss Darrow was speaking, her full-toned voice edged with a slight trace of sarcasm. "And as Wynn was at my apartment half an hour ago, it would be a physical impossibility for him to be here."

"Careful, or you will stumble over him," cautioned the Duke with a chuckle. "The coffin box is lying right at the foot of the stairs. Better stay where you are till I turn on the light."

Vanardy heard the Duke's groping footfalls, and he pushed a little closer into the corner just as the powerful incandescent in the ceiling flared into light. Miss Darrow, dressed in an attractive morning costume, was standing on the third step from the bottom, staring with a frown at the long, narrow box.

"Wynn is in that box," declared the Duke firmly, "and I fancy the miserable traitor has gasped his last by this time. Now tell me all about it."

Miss Darrow, drawing up her skirts, stepped around the coffin. "As I told you," she began, "I placed Wynn at the door to follow the Phantom in case he should attempt to escape. As you remember——"

"Wait a minute," broke in the Duke excitedly. "You told me you had a man at the door. You didn't mention any name."

"It made no difference—did it?"

"No, of course not," said the Duke grimly.

"Well, Wynn came back about eight o'clock, with blood in his eyes and a bump on his head. He told me the Phantom left the house a few minutes after your departure."

"He did, eh?" exclaimed the Duke thickly. "Evidently your drugs weren't quite so strong as we thought."

"Apparently not. Wynn told me he had been following the Phantom only three or four blocks when, as he turned a corner, a footpad struck him down, rendering him unconscious. When he awoke his hat was gone and his pockets empty."

"His hat?" The Duke's voice shook with excitement. "Sure of it?"

"Why should Wynn lie about a thing like that? Besides, he was bareheaded when he called on me this morning, and the swelling on his head was ample corroboration of his story."

The Duke, pacing back and forth, ground a curse between his teeth. "So the Phantom gave us the slip, eh? You had a beautiful scheme, Virgie, but he seems to have nipped it in the bud. It would have been great fun, to say nothing of the financial returns. No use crying over spilt milk, though. But if the fellow in the coffin isn't Wynn, who the dickens is he?"

Miss Darrow looked down at the box, and the Phantom, peering out intently from his hiding place, imagined that her eyes were opening in a bewildered stare.

"Look!" She seized the Duke's sleeve. "The cover is loose!"

"Eh? What? By——" Snarling an oath the Duke pulled up the lid, which adhered only loosely to the sides, and stared into the empty box. "Gone!" he muttered fiercely. "And, by heck, he drilled a hole through the side, to let in enough air to keep him alive. How did he do it?"

Miss Darrow threw back her head and laughed in rollicking mirth.

"It's nothing to laugh at," growled the Duke, glaring at her.

"I can't help it." The woman laughed again. "I would have gone insane long ago if Heaven had not given me a sense of humor."

"I can't imagine who the fellow was," muttered the Duke savagely.

"But I can. There is only one man in the world—with the possible exception of yourself, my dear Duke—who can break out of a coffin box after the lid has been nailed down, and that man is the Gray Phantom."

The Duke started. "But how——" he spluttered.

"It is all ridiculously clear. The Phantom's intention all along was to locate your headquarters, and make a raid on your treasures. He followed you last night when you left my apartment, knowing that you were on your way to headquarters. He——"

"Impossible!" interrupted the Duke impatiently. "He was unconscious."

"Anything is possible where the Phantom is concerned. Didn't Wynn tell me that he stepped out shortly after you did? That proves he had been conscious for some time. He started to follow you, and then—— Ah, I have it! It is the Phantom whom Wynn has to thank for the bump on his head!"

"Quite right, madam," declared a deep, sonorous voice, and the Gray Phantom stepped out from his hiding place beside the tier of boxes.

CHAPTER X.

THE PHANTOM'S CHALLENGE.

HE was smiling an imperturbable smile, and there was a reckless gleam in his ash-gray eyes as he bowed to the woman and bestowed a nod on the Duke. His clean-chiseled face bore a look of infinite alertness and audacity, and the tall and springy figure, with every muscle flexed, suggested a cocked trigger.

Miss Darrow regarded him narrowly. There was wonder in her steady gaze, and also a glint of admiration. A thin smile parted her lips as she took in the details of his wrinkled clothing and rumpled hair.

"You look more romantic with your beard off, Mr. Phantom," she remarked with a low laugh.

"But I have a most unromantic appetite," Vanardy assured her, looking at her approvingly, as if recognizing a worthy adversary. "Duke, I want to sit down to a good breakfast as soon as possible. Suppose we hurry this little matter along."

The Duke gasped. His mind seemed to reel before the other's colossal impudence. He opened his lips time and again, but no words came. Finally his hand made a backward sweep, and he drew out a stocky automatic.

"A pistol is a fairly impressive argument," murmured the Phantom, glancing down at the bluishly glinting weapon, "but I hoped we would be able to settle this little affair amicably."

"You've got your nerve," said the Duke, at last finding his voice. "How did you get out of the coffin box?"

Vanardy chuckled. "My secret. You didn't expect the Gray Phantom to stay in a coffin for very long—eh, Duke?"

There was a look of helplessness and utter bewilderment in the Duke's piggy eyes. He made a flourish with the automatic. "Don't you know I could kill you?"

"It would be the easiest thing in the world, but you do not intend to do anything so foolish."

"Foolish?" echoed the Duke, gradually gaining control of himself. "Why, I could kill you without running any risk at all. Nobody would miss you, except your own friends, if you have any. You're supposed to be dead, you know. It's a safe thing to kill a man who's already dead."

"Absolutely safe," granted the Phantom coolly. "But I was looking at the matter from the viewpoint of expediency. You have no intention of killing me just yet. Last night you and Miss Darrow were discussing a plot to raid my humble diggings and annex a few baubles that I have accumulated in the course of my career."

"Oh, you heard!" mumbled the woman.

"I did, despite your attempts to make it impossible for me to do so. Well,

Duke, I believe your idea was to trail me if I attempted to escape, and in that manner you hoped to locate my present place of residence. It seems your plan miscarried."

"It isn't too late yet," declared the Duke emphatically. "I've got a bone to pick with you, Vanardy, and I'm going to pick it very soon. You will either tell me where I can find the swag you have salted away, or you never get out of this place alive."

"Just as I thought. You want me to tell you something before you kill me. There's nothing like having a clear understanding. Now that you have stated your terms, let me state mine."

"*Your—your* terms?" stuttered the Duke, peering at Vanardy as if suspecting that he had lost his reason. "I've always heard you were a cool one, but this—why, this is crazy! Aren't you forgetting that you're in no position to dictate to me?"

"I am forgetting nothing, Duke."

The Duke, utterly bewildered, swung around on his heels. With a motion so swift and agile that it was scarcely noticeable the Phantom lunged forward and snatched the pistol from the Duke's hand before Miss Darrow had time to raise a warning cry.

"You see how easily it is done, Duke," observed Vanardy, calmly examining the weapon. "This is a very excellent piece of artillery. You seem a bit upset this morning, and I was afraid it might go off in your hand and hurt either Miss Darrow, yourself, or me."

The Duke was livid with rage and humiliation. His slight figure trembled, and there was blazing fury in the gaze he bent on the Phantom. The latter coolly put the automatic in his pocket while the woman regarded him with a faint smile of amusement and wonder.

"You fool!" snapped the Duke.

Vanardy grinned genially. His gray eyes were sweeping ceilings and walls, as if an idea were gradually taking shape in his mind. For an instant they rested on a long, stout piece of scantling lying behind the stairs.

"You'll pay for that," declared the Duke thickly. "That pistol isn't going to do you much good. Don't you know that my men are upstairs? All I've got to do is to press a button and the forty or fifty who are there will swoop down on you inside sixty seconds."

"Of course," said Vanardy carelessly, but there was a gleam in his eyes that belied his indifferent tone. "I expected that. I knew when I began this little adventure that it would be no holiday picnic. I suggest you ring for your men at once, Duke. You are going to need them."

Dumfounded by his audacity and his careless tone, the Duke stared at him for a long minute. The Phantom, his arms folded across his chest, his habitual unfathomable smile hovering about his lips, was a picture of complete unconcern.

"Don't you know the meaning of fear?" asked Miss Darrow, contemplating him queerly.

"Its meaning was profoundly impressed on my mind while I was inside the coffin box," admitted Vanardy. Again his glance stole toward the stairs and the scantling lying behind it.

"You must know that escape is impossible," continued the woman. "The only exit is the stairs, and our men would be upon you before you got half way up."

"Excellent arrangement," murmured the Phantom, and his tone carried the faintest hint of a double meaning.

The Duke had recovered from his daze. "Better stand aside, Virgie," he suggested grimly. "There's going to be trouble here in a few moments."

The woman shrugged and did not

move. With a determined air the Duke stepped to the wall and made a motion as if pressing a button. Then, with a vengeful glance at the Phantom, he returned to his former position.

Vanardy lighted a cigarette and puffed with keen enjoyment. The proceeding seemed to strike him as faintly amusing, but in the depths of his ash-gray eyes was a flicker indicating a feverishly active mind. Once he touched the region of his inside vest pocket as if assuring himself that he had lost nothing of value during his captivity and confinement.

The dull and distant sounds of a hubbub came from above. A thickset, bullet-faced man dashed down the stairs. He was followed by another, then by a third, and as each man arrived the Duke motioned him to the rear of the room. At intervals of a moment or two some one raced down the stairs and joined the rapidly swelling group. In a few minutes the Phantom had counted thirty, but others were constantly arriving. They were a motley crowd, fierce-visaged, sullen-faced, the type of men who blindly follow a command no matter where it leads; but the Phantom observed they were not the kind that he would have selected. Scanning their faces he looked in vain for signs of quick wits, subtlety, and imagination, but the men made up in numbers what they lacked in mental equipment. He looked with amusement at the Duke. Evidently he hoped the Phantom would be impressed with the formidableness of his organization.

"All here, it seems," observed the Duke, glaring vindictively at the Phantom. "Men, I have a treat for you. That's why I called you all down, though I really needed only a few of you. You have heard of the Gray Phantom. There he is."

With craning of necks and loud exclamations the oddly assorted collection evinced its interest in the famous criminal whom they had supposed to be dead. Looks of frank admiration lighted up some of the sullen faces, while others indulged in good-natured banter.

"Take a good look at him," invited the Duke with grim sarcasm. "It may be your last chance."

The Phantom smoked on with airy abandon. He saw the Duke cast a glance at the open trapdoor at the top of the stairs. Vanardy watched him furtively but carefully as he stepped to a corner, stooped low, and appeared to manipulate a concealed lever. In the same instant the trapdoor closed with a little whirring sound, and the Duke, with a gloating expression in his lowering face, turned toward the Phantom.

"Still in hopes of making a getaway?" he inquired maliciously.

The Phantom, rocking gently on his heels, nodded emphatically.

The Duke scowled, evidently vexed by the other's placidity. "You will be performing a miracle if you get out of here," he announced impressively. "You just saw me close the trap-door. There is no other exit. And these men," making a comprehensive sweep with his hand, "will shoot the moment I give the signal."

Vanardy tossed away his cigarette, and brushed a flake of tobacco ash from his vest. Still smiling, he sauntered about with apparent aimlessness, but the Duke noticed that he was gradually drawing closer to the stairway.

"Cut out the funny stuff," he commanded harshly. His watch lid snapped open. "I will give you exactly five minutes to tell us where you have hidden your swag. If you have not told by the time the five minutes are up, you die."

The Phantom, continuing to pace about within a narrow circle, heaved a mock sigh. Presently he paused in front of the stairs, and delivered a kick

at the bottom step, as if to test its strength. The Duke watched him with frowning perplexity. Next Vanardy cast an indifferent glance at the big incandescent in the ceiling, and finally he picked up the scantling behind the stairway.

"Drop the comedy," snapped the Duke.

The Phantom seemed to be regarding the scantling with mild interest. Holding it by one end he pushed it slowly to and fro, but each push placed the opposite end of the scantling a little closer to the bottom step of the stairway. Finally, when it was all the way under the step, he gripped it firmly with both hands and with a powerful wrench tore the stairway from its fastenings. With a loud crash it toppled to the floor.

The Duke stared in speechless amazement. The Phantom's action seemed so utterly pointless that it had taken him completely by surprise. The crowd in the rear surged forward, but he waved them back.

"Won't you gratify my curiosity by telling me just why you did that?" inquired Miss Darrow.

"Last night you played Delilah; this morning I am playing Samson," replied Vanardy. "I wrecked the stairway so you wouldn't be able to get away from me."

The Duke laughed hoarsely. "So *we* wouldn't get away from *you?*" he echoed dazedly.

"Exactly. I haven't the slightest doubt about my ability to walk out of here whenever I please. The Gray Phantom has always lived up to his name—hasn't he? Whenever he was thought to be cornered he always found a way out. Every time he was believed to be in a given place it developed that he was somewhere else. Some people have gone so far as to credit the Phantom with occult powers. Perhaps they are right."

He spoke with calm assurance, meanwhile glancing at the men huddled in the rear. Their faces told him that his boast had impressed them, as he had intended it should. Some of them gazed at him with an expression of awe, as if they were looking upon a superior being.

"The time's almost up," declared the Duke in ominous tones. "You have only a minute and a half."

"Quite enough for what I have to say. Duke, I give you final warning. There is only one thing I want in this place, and that is the collection you hauled away from the Cosmopolitan Museum. Give me that, and you may keep the rest and walk out of here unmolested. If you refuse, every one of you will occupy a cell before night."

The Duke guffawed raucously. "Have you gone plumb crazy?"

"I mean every word." The Phantom's tones were clear and metallic. "The police and I are not friends, and I don't like to play into their hands; that is why I am giving you fair warning. Unless you accept my terms I shall turn you all over to the police. That's final."

Again a boisterous guffaw from the Duke. Miss Darrow peered at the speaker with an expression of amazement and reluctant admiration, as if scarcely knowing how to interpret his challenge. The sullen-faced crowd in the rear exchanged murmurs and whispers, and it was clear that the Phantom's audacious proposal baffled their comprehension.

"Half a minute," snapped the Duke, his eyes on his watch.

The Phantom glanced at the ceiling. The smile on his lips grew a little hard, and there was a determined glitter in the slowly narrowing eyes. He looked as though he realized that one of the great moments of his career had come.

Again his glance darted upward, and the Duke, standing a few paces away,

looked in the same direction, as if trying to ascertain the meaning of the look. Then, so quickly that the maneuver was scarcely noticeable, the Phantom snatched out his automatic. A sharp crack broke the silence, followed by a splintering sound.

The room went dark.

CHAPTER XI.

GRAY MIST.

A TUMULT of oaths, startled cries, and scampering feet followed the abrupt extinction of the light. Vanardy had acted so quickly that for several moments no one realized what had happened.

"He's smashed the electric bulb with a bullet!" exclaimed some one.

"Where is he?" demanded another. "Let's get him!"

The Duke shouted a few wheezy commands, but no one heard him. The Phantom had been blotted out in the gloom that engulfed them all. The group that had stood huddled in the background now rushed forward, tumbling and sliding in the direction where Vanardy had last been seen.

"Why doesn't somebody strike a match?" asked Miss Darrow, who remained calm amid the general hubbub.

"The first match that is struck will be my target," warned a voice. It was the Phantom's. It was low, but so clear that it penetrated to every corner of the room. No one ventured to light a match, for they had just seen a sample of the Phantom's marksmanship.

Finally the Duke's generalship reasserted itself. "Get back, every one of you," he commanded. "Back against the wall." He grabbed two wildly scampering forms, inextinguishable in the darkness, and roughly pushed them to the end of the room. Obeying the voice of authority they fell back.

"All here?" inquired the Duke, lowering his voice so that only those standing next to him could hear. "The Phantom is, or was, at the other end. Next time he speaks shoot in the direction of the voice, but don't kill one another. If several of you fire one of you will be sure to get him."

"Better get out of the way yourself, Duke," warned Miss Darrow, brushing past him at that moment. "This Phantom is an astounding person."

Following the faint fragrance that clung to her he walked beside her to a corner. "I can't see what the devil is up to," he muttered.

She laughed softly ." 'Devil' just about describes him—doesn't it, Duke? I always thought there was something Mephistophelian about the Phantom."

"You are not falling in love with him, Virgie?"

"Love—bah!" She chuckled contemptuously. "The Phantom is above love. But one can't help admiring genius and dare-devil recklessness—can one?"

The Duke did not answer. Suddenly, out of the blackness at the other end of the room, came Vanardy's voice, soft, funereal, but oddly penetrating:

"Have you any idea what time it is, Duke? I can't see my watch in this stygian gloom."

Several pistols spoke in unison, piercing the darkness with streaks of fire. Then came a breathless wait, during which every one waited for a cry or a groan that would signify that the Phantom had been hit.

But the only response was a laugh. "You aimed much too high that time," taunted Vanardy. "I was lying on my back."

Again came a chorus of sharp cracks and darting gleams of fire, but once more the only result was a tantalizing laugh.

"The Phantom is armed, isn't he?" remarked Miss Darrow.

"He has my automatic," confessed

the Duke ruefully, "and perhaps his own besides."

"If he wanted to he could shoot into our crowd. He would be sure to hit some one."

"The Phantom never kills unless he has to. You ought to know that by this time."

"To be sure. I had forgotten." The woman fell into a strangely silent mood. She was watching a wisp of gray light that had suddenly appeared at the other end of the room. It wavered and fluttered, like luminous mist in the surrounding darkness, shooting into slender tendrils that were gradually rising higher, forming a pyre of cloudy rays.

"Look!" she exclaimed.

The Duke started, and a moment later a babel of cries and mutterings told that the others had seen the startling apparition. The luminous fog was slowly expanding, assuming fantastic proportions, and suffusing the darkness with a sinuously stirring grayness. The crowd, staring wildly, pressed closer to the wall.

"It's the devil himself," muttered a shaky voice.

Then a shot rang out, followed by a second and a third, and finally a salvo of pistol barks was directed at the wraithlike thing in the distance. The air was heavy with the smell of burned powder. The Duke coughed.

"Bit weird, eh?" he asked his companion, trying to steady his voice. "What do you suppose is happening?"

"The Phantom is translating himself into his natural element," said Miss Darrow. "I wouldn't be at all surprised to see him *float* out of here, like an immaterial being. Anything is possible for the Phantom."

Her voice shook a little as she spoke, and a slight shudder on the part of the man beside her revealed that he, too, was affected. The darkness seemed rent in a thousand ways by constant flashes of fire, each one of them accompanied with a sharp report.

"The man can't be flesh and blood," muttered the Duke, "or he would have been dead by this time."

Suddenly a chorus of awed exclamations burst from the crowd. The firing ceased, and a breathless stillness ensued. The vapory formation rose from the floor, sprawled like a huge monster toward the ceiling, describing a wavering semicircle as it fluttered over the heads of the huddled throng. Some one, more timid than the others, was mumbling a prayer.

"Don't lose your heads, men," admonished the Duke, though his own voice faltered queasily. "It is nothing but a trick. Don't let the Phantom fool you."

But his words fell on deaf ears. Shuddering, the men stared at the gray, ghostlike thing floating above their heads. An acrid smell, mingling with the scent of powder, seemed to have infested the air they breathed, causing their senses to whirl with an uncanny sensation. They would have faced a tangible peril without flinching, but this spectral horror was beyond their understanding.

Several of them rushed toward the stairway, forgetting, until they fell over it in a kicking and sprawling heap, that the Phantom had torn it down. Some one suggested moving the coffin boxes away from the wall and placing them in a tier below the trapdoor.

"Get back!" roared the Duke. "Those boxes are heavy, and it would take you an hour to move them. Besides, nobody leaves this place without my permission. You can't open the trapdoor without working the lever, and the first fellow that touches it is a dead man. What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

His tones were none too reassuring, but the men, knowing that their leader seldom voiced idle threats, fell back.

The gray specter, alternately spreading and contracting in fanciful formations, was drifting back toward the other end of the room. It descended slowly, assumed a perpendicular shape, became a pillar of faintly gleaming mist—and out of it came the mocking laughter of the Phantom.

"Shoot!" shouted the Duke.

The men had acted even before the word was spoken. In an instant the darkness became alive with spiteful cracks and lurid flashes of flame. Every man who was armed—and most of them were—was pouring a hail of bullets into the vapory pillar.

Suddenly a piercing yell, fraught with intense agony, rose out of the gray mist.

"You've got him," cried the Duke triumphantly. "Give him more—quick!"

The firing was renewed with trebled intensity. The air was choked with smoke that floated in huge masses through the inky darkness. As the pistols continued to spit fiery gleams the luminous pillar gradually dwindled, shrinking in size until it was a small, fluttering wisp. Out of the thickening darkness came a faint, anguished groan.

"I think we've finished him," declared the Duke gleefully. Gradually the firing died down until only an occasional crack split the silence. Not a sound came from the point where the tiny tendril of gray vapor was seen.

"The gray light seems to die with the Gray Phantom," murmured Miss Darrow queerly. Even as she spoke the little wisp of mist disappeared.

"He's dead!" cried a husky voice.

"He'd better be," declared another. "I haven't got a single cartridge left."

"Me neither," put in a third.

The Duke struck a match and looked toward the point where the light had vanished, but rolling clouds of smoke obscured his vision. The match burned down and bit his finger. He advanced warily through the choking curtain of smoke.

"Come, men," he commanded, striving to control a slight impediment in his speech. "Let's see if there is anything left of the Gray Phantom."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PHANTOM LAUGHS.

AS the Duke spoke a chuckle sounded somewhere in the darkness, but it was so low that none in the shoving, pushing, and excitedly gibbering throng heard it. While the crowd surged blindly toward the point where the wisp of light had been seen the Gray Phantom, crawling on hands and knees along the floor by the wall, was stealthily and silently approaching the opposite end of the room. With a frenzied din and clamor the throng rushed past him, while some one loudly called for matches.

Then the Phantom stopped, unbuttoned his clothing, and ran a hand exploringly over his left shoulder. His fingers encountered a warm, clammy fluid that was gradually soaking into the garments, and a stinging throb indicated the spot where one of the fusillade of bullets had entered his flesh.

"Just a scratch," he mumbled, inserting his handkerchief between the clothing and the skin to absorb the flow of blood. "But that yell fooled them. They'll waste at least five minutes looking for the Phantom's body."

He crawled forward again, occasionally glancing back to where the glow of a match now and then filtered wanly through the smoke and darkness. Men were scurrying hither and thither, hoarse voices muttering imprecations, and raising sullen shouts. Steadily the Phantom advanced, groping with his hands. He had watched the Duke carefully when he closed the trapdoor, and he expected to find the lever without great difficulty. His sense of distances

and direction told him it could not be far away.

"He's gone!" cried a husky voice. "The devil has gone up in smoke."

"That would be just like the Phantom, wouldn't it?" The voice, accompanied with a short, nervous laugh, was Virginia Darrow's. "What did you expect?"

"Don't be a fool," said the Duke snappily. "Didn't you hear that shriek? His body can't be far away."

Despite the throbbing ache in his shoulder the Phantom chuckled elatedly. He was almost certain that he was in the identical spot where the Duke had stood when the trapdoor closed. He ran his fingers along the edge of the floor, and presently, in a little niche scarcely large enough to permit him to insert his hand, he encountered a small steel bar. He pushed it to one side. Instantly a whirring and buzzing sounded in the direction of the trapdoor.

The din at the other end of the room suddenly ceased. The Phantom rose to his feet, stood erect, and flexed his muscles. For a breathless second he waited. Finally the Duke's wheezy voice rose out of the darkness.

"He's alive! He's tricked us! Shoot in the direction of the lever. Quick!"

The Phantom dodged, then ducked. Instead of the volley he had expected came only a few scattered shots, indicating that the Duke's men had exhausted their ammunition. A low, triumphant laugh fell from his lips.

"Why don't you fire?" bawled the Duke. "You can't miss him if you all shoot at once."

"Give us some cartridges and we will," said a surly voice.

"Idiots!" Snarling, the Duke rushed forward. Fixing his line of approach by the aid of his stertorous breathing and slithering footfalls, the Phantom placed himself directly in his path. Then he crouched, caught the onrushing figure with one hand, and dealt a smashing blow with the other. With a ludicrous little squeal his adversary went tottering to the floor, then lay inert. For a few minutes, at least, the band would be without a leader.

The Phantom sped toward the trapdoor, but another body collided with his with a force that almost choked off his breath. With a mighty shove Vanardy sent him sprawling and cursing to the floor, but a moment later another scurrying form dashed against him. The two clinched, toppled to the floor, and, arms and legs tangled, rolled hither and thither. The Phantom wrenched his right arm free and crashed his fist into the other's face. A moment later he was on his feet again, flinging aside the onrushing forms that blocked his path. Suddenly he stumbled against something. It was the coffin box in which he had been imprisoned. After a moment's pause to recover his breath he raised it on one end, and then, remembering the position in which it had lain with reference to the stairs, shoved it backward until he thought it was directly beneath the trapdoor.

The members of the band, now leaderless and in a state of mind approaching panicky confusion, were running helter skelter about the room, some of them calling loudly for the Duke, others declaring their firm conviction that the Phantom was possessed with a devil. Now and then some frenzied form lurched against the box, only to feel a grip of steel about his throat, and to be tossed tottering to the floor. Suddenly, in the midst of the din and confusion, a wriggling flame appeared in the center of the room.

In the glow the Phantom distinguished the white but determined face of Virginia Darrow. She alone had maintained a measure of composure. In her hand she held a taper formed of paper,

one end of which was lighted, suffusing the drifting clouds of smoke with a faint luminosity. Her steady glance swept the room, finally lighting on the Phantom, and in a twinkling she took in the situation.

"Close the trapdoor," she commanded. Her eyes were hard, but an audacious smile parted her lips as she looked at the Phantom. The latter read the grim challenge in her face. He took the automatic from his pocket.

"The first man that touches the lever will drop dead," he warned grittily, making a flourish with the weapon.

The members of the band, scattered about the room, regarded him with expressions of mingled sullenness and fear. As if mesmerized by the steely gaze with which he fixed them they stood motionless, and no one ventured to advance.

The taper was burning low in Miss Darrow's hand, but some one took a sheet of paper from his pocket, twirled it between his fingers, and put a lighted match to its end.

"Are you all cowards?" demanded the woman hotly. "Are you going to let one man bluff you? Close the trapdoor instantly."

A tough-limbed, evil-featured man, more courageous than the rest, glared dubiously at the Phantom, and with a contemptuous shrug stepped toward the lever. The Phantom's pistol spoke, and the man removed his hat and peered diffidently at a smoking rift in the crown.

"I aimed high that time," announced Vanardy sharply. "Next time I'll shoot to kill."

His narrowing eyes swept the room with a swift glance. The adventurous one had fallen back, and nobody else seemed inclined to obey the woman's command. Quickly pocketing his weapon the Phantom placed both hands on the upper edge of the coffin box and with an amazingly quick and agile movement swung himself on top. In the same instant Miss Darrow dropped the charred taper and darted toward the lever, coolly disregarding the Phantom's threat.

But it was too late. Vanardy had already gripped the sides of the aperture just above his head and lifted himself through. With a baffled cry the woman stopped, and for the first time a look of defeat crept into her blazing eyes.

Suddenly electrified, the crowd surged forward, racing madly toward the trapdoor, trampling the limp and insensate body of the Duke. Like a frightened herd they checked themselves as the Phantom, leaning over the edge of the opening, made an ominous motion with his pistol. Dumb despair was written in the faces of the motley, huddled crowd.

"Take the swag, but let us out of here," humbly implored one of them.

"Too late," declared the Phantom. "Except for you, Miss Darrow. I'll give you a lift." He extended his hand.

The woman smiled coldly. "Thanks, but my place is here with the others."

The Phantom sighed regretfully. "Just what I expected you to say. You are game."

He forced the trapdoor down, silencing the snarls and maddened cries that rose from below. The door, he noticed, was ingeniously hidden in the flooring, and could be discovered only by thorough search. He looked about him, noticing that there were several of the long, narrow boxes in the room. He lay one of them flat against the door, then placed another perpendicularly on top of it, thus bracing the door against the ceiling so that it could not be forced open from below.

Now that the suspense was over he felt a little dazed and weary. Slowly and trudgingly he mounted the steps leading to the ground floor. In its mad downward rush the crowd had left the

door open, and he passed through and entered what appeared to be a funeral chapel. Encountering no one he walked in to the outer office and sat down beside the telephone.

"Spring 3100," he called. "Give me the commissioner's office," he requested when the connection had been established.

A gruff voice answered after a brief wait.

"Listen carefully and ask no questions," said the Phantom. "If you will send a wagon load of men at once to the Digby Funeral Parlors you will capture the Duke's entire organization, together with the Cosmopolitan collection, and a few million dollars' worth of other junk. You will find the Duke's crowd and the swag in the sub-cellar. There's no danger whatever, for there isn't a single cartridge left in the whole gang. Good day!"

The Phantom hung up as the gasp sounded over the wire. The commissioner would suspect a joke, but he would send the men, nevertheless. Somewhat bewildered, the Phantom noticed that, for the third time in twenty-four hours, he was hatless; but a derby was hanging on a peg at his back. He put it on, smoothed his rumpled clothing as best he could, then stepped to the door and looked blinkingly out into the sunlight. He opened the door, and with a cautious glance to right and left he stepped boldly out and halted a passing taxicab.

"Twenty-third Street ferry," he directed.

CHAPTER XIII.

PAID IN FULL.

A PAIR of brown and deeply bewildered eyes were looking into the Phantom's ash-gray ones.

"I can hardly believe it's possible," murmured Helen Hardwick. They were standing in Vanardy's library at Azurecrest. "You say the entire Cosmopolitan collection was recovered?"

The Phantom nodded gayly. "Yes, including the five-legged bull."

"But this gray light you have told me about? I don't understand."

The Phantom laughed softly. "Oh, that! The Duke's men are, at heart, a cowardly, impressionable, and superstitious lot. Even at first glance I knew that they were gullible enough to believe that the Phantom could perform miracles. I wanted to throw a scare into them. That wasn't all, though. Nearly all of them were armed, and I knew I could accomplish nothing unless I could bamboozle them into wasting their cartridges. So I tricked them into shooting perfectly good bullets into a pillar of gray mist. That pillar accomplished three objects—it drew the enemy's fire, put the fear of the Lord into their hearts, and made a smoke so thick that for a long while nothing could be seen. Once, to enhance the realism of the thing, and to make the crowd believe that I had converted myself into gray vapor, I stepped right into the pillar and shouted to them. That trick was good for about a hundred bullets or more, not to mention the one that scotched my shoulder."

"You are wounded!' she exclaimed, staring at a dull discoloration on the Phantom's coat.

"Only a scratch," said Vanardy deprecatingly, experiencing an odd thrill.

"But this pillar of mist—what was it?"

"Simplest thing in the world," said the Phantom chuckling. "I usually carry around a little emergency kit that, among other things, contains a small bottle filled with glycerin, Fuller's earth, and a few other ingredients. I tied a long string to the neck of the bottle and ran my stickpin through the cork, making a small vent for the air to filter through."

"Yes, and then?"

"I knew the contents of the bottle would ignite upon contact with damp air—and the air in that cellar was the dampest I ever breathed. The ignition converted the stuff into phosphorus and caused a huge cloud of luminous vapor to shoot out of the little vent in the cork. It's nothing new, except that an added ingredient of my own caused it to burn with a gray light instead of a white one. You see, the Gray Phantom has to live up to his name. Well, by manipulating the string, I swung that bottle all over the place, and over their heads, taking care to keep out of the hail of bullets as much as possible."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the girl.

Helen Hardwick paused for a moment; then, lowering her eyes and smiling, she said shyly: "The laborer is worthy of his hire."

She tilted her head a little. The Phantom felt a rush of blood to his head as he looked into the demurely laughing eyes. Reverently, and with a slight tremor running through his body, he kissed her lips.

"The ten million dollar kiss!" she murmured, a little confused.

"Worth it—every cent of it!" declared the Phantom. "I have you to thank for a new thrill—a thrill of such hallowing influence as I never dreamed existed."

He bent his head low to hide the deeper color that rushed to his face. For an instant he stood very still, then he reached out a hand and touched a button. A door swung open on noiseless hinges.

"Good-by, Gray Phantom!"

"Good-by."

In a moment she was gone.

GIRL BURGLAR KEPT BUSINESS HOURS

HAVING selected crime as a means of livelihood, Molly Rosen, sixteen years old, went about her chosen vocation in a systematic manner. She worked six days a week, keeping regular hours each day, and giving her mother twenty dollars every Saturday night. This money, which was only a small part of what she stole during the three months of labor uninterrupted by the police, she told her parent she had earned by working in a downtown New York business house.

Instead of journeying southward from her home each morning the girl worked in the upper part of the city, robbing apartment houses. She was methodical in that phase of her operations also, for, before entering an apartment house, she would memorize two or three of the names in the vestibule mail boxes, and if any one questioned her presence in the halls she would name one of the tenants and declare that she was looking for him. If her presence was not challenged she would try the doors of the various apartments until she found an unlocked one and then would enter and hastily ransack the place.

Several times she was surprised in the act of robbing an apartment, but for that emergency she had a ready story of a sick mother who needed necessities. People who believed her tale let her go unscathed rather than press a charge against one they thought very unfortunate.

She is said to have robbed fifty apartment houses and secured six thousand dollars in cash and jewelry before she was arrested.

Thubway Tham's Preth Agent

by Johnston McCulley

Author of the "Terry Trimble" Stories, etc.

LIKE many another individual Thubway Tham at times considered the futility of terrestrial existence, the bare uselessness of it all, the grim knowledge that, in the last analysis, everything resolved itself into one gigantic query: What's the use?

"We are here to-day, and to-morrow we are gone to that dithtrict whence no man returnth," Thubway Tham declared to himself solemnly. "To-day we eat our ham and eggth and to-morrow we are but dutht. A man thinkth he ith thomebody until he meeth thome cuth who never heard of him. The betht ditch-digger in the world may be a whale in hith own ditch-diggin' union, but he ith utterly unknown in London thothiety. When a man dieth, hith friendth go to the themetery, and then talk about how much it cotht to live. The motht the poor defunct geth ith two lineth in a newthpaper—if he hath been lucky enough to know a reporter. Tho it ith a good thing to make hay while the thun thineth. It doeth a man no good to be famouth after he ith planted. When thome big actor playth 'Hamlet,' Thakethpeare doeth not hear the applauthe. It ith a bum world!"

These remarks by Thubway Tham directed to himself only, were caused, any physician would have told him, by an injudicious mixture of foodstuffs hurled into the stomach to be trifled with by certain gastric juices with wills of their own. Thubway Tham was a temporary victim of melancholy indigestion. Some doctors may look down their noses and declare in deep tones that there is no such animal as melancholy indigestion, but I know better.

While engaging in his soliloquy Thubway Tham was walking slowly down the street toward Madison Square. It was midmorning, and Tham did not care to enter the subway yet for the avowed purpose of stealing a purse. The rush hour was the one during which Thubway Tham engaged in activities that caused certain detectives of the city police department to gnash their teeth in rage, and sundry citizens to howl about the incompetence of peace-preserving officials, and threaten to do things about it next municipal election.

Tham came to a corner of Madison Square and started across it diagonally. He loved to walk across Madison Square diagonally, for he could see life there in many of its phases. At noon the soap-box orators were more willing to reform the world and his wife with

loose talk than to earn a livelihood by honest toil that caused perspiration. Bright young stenographers crossed it on their way to work, like trim sailing craft bearing away before a spanking breeze. Chauffeurs hung around its rim like so many sea-going tugs awaiting a call. Business men went briskly along it, bent on big things like mergers and syndicates, resembling gigantic liners on the transoceanic lanes. And here and there a derelict hugged the end of a bench.

In his time, Thubway Tham had seen them all, and had found each type interesting. And upon this midmorning he glanced around in the hope of finding something new and startling. A few feet in front of him a man sat on a bench. That in itself was nothing new, for Tham had seen many down-and-outers there. Yet there was a difference.

The man on the bench appeared to be about thirty years old. He was well dressed; that is, his clothing bore the stamp of the ultra fashionable. And he wept.

The weeping puzzled Tham for a time as he stood against a railing and watched the other. The man on the bench had an excellent "front," hence he could not be the worst kind of a derelict. And it wasn't usual for a man to indulge in a fit of open-air weeping in Madison Square just prior to the noon hour.

Thubway Tham approached carefully and in a nonchalant manner, and cast occasional sidelong glances at the other. Sympathy was born in the heart of Tham anew. It is a terrible thing to see a strong man weep.

"What theemth to be the trouble?" Tham asked, half expecting a tirade to the effect that he should be about his own business.

The man on the bench raised tear-dimmed eyes and batted red lids. He sniffed, openly and unashamed.

"It's a cruel world, mate," he said.

Thubway Tham sat down beside him and regarded him carefully. The other covered his face with a handkerchief for a moment, and his shoulders heaved with sobs.

"Thay!" Tham said. "Ith it ath bad ath that? If there ith thomething I can do——"

The other dropped the handkerchief and looked at him mournfully.

"My name is Peter Locke," he admitted, with a bit of pride in his manner.

"Ith that tho? And what ith the trouble, Mithter Locke?"

"It is a cruel world, mate, as I remarked. A man does his best—but what would you?"

"What would I what?" Tham asked desperately.

"There is no gratitude in the world," said Peter Locke. "There is only a gross spirit of commercialism that will eventually ruin humanity."

"How many drinkth have you had thith morning?" Thubway Tham wanted to know.

"Is it morning?" asked Peter Locke, gazing around. "Why, so it is!"

"It ith my opinion that you have a cryin' jag," Tham said.

"Oh, my dear sir! There is ample reason for my tears, I assure you. I am the victim of ingratitude, duplicity, base conspiracy, and the like."

"My goodneth! What hath happened to you?"

"I've lost my job," said Peter Locke.

"Ith that tho? Why not get another?"

"That might not be difficult. But I regret losing the one I had, not so much that it gave me the privilege of sordid gain—which it did not to any great extent—but because losing it is a reflection upon my professional reputation."

"What thort of buthineth?" Tham requested to know.

"I am a master of publicity, called a

press agent by the common herd that little appreciates the finesse of scientific effort to impress the public mind."

"My goodneth!"

"I have been informing men, women, and children regarding the merits of a certain alleged musical comedy yclept 'Betty of the Bronx.' Yesterday—was it yesterday?—the manager handed me the can."

"Fired you?" Tham asked.

"Precisely. And just because I made a slight error."

"Well, my goodneth!" Tham exclaimed. "Why weep about it? Are you broke?"

"I have a few dollars remaining," Peter Locke admitted. "And my clothing is of the mode of the moment. It is not food or funds that I wish just now; it is vindication. I wish to demonstrate to the manager of the 'Betty of the Bronx' aggregation of old ladies' home candidates that he has lost a good man."

"I thee."

"There are half a dozen jobs I could have, but they are all jobs of the ordinary, workaday variety that would bring me no prestige, no remuneration save sordid dollars."

"I thee," Thubway Tham repeated.

"I would be publicity representative for something out of the ordinary and make a mark in the world. I am not without abilities and unusual merit, I assure you."

"You are a modetht violet," Tham said.

"I am a professional press agent," Peter Locke countered.

"Thay! It ith a funny thing, but I wath thinkin' of thomething like that a few minuteth ago," Tham told him. "I wath juth thayin' to mythelf that it doeth a man no good to be the betht in hith line if the world don't know it."

"And there you are eminently correct," declared Peter Locke, facing him and emphasizing his remarks with an extended forefinger. "What doth it profit a man if he gain perfection and the world know it not? Anent this interesting subject, I would say——"

"You lithten to me," Tham interrupted. "Lithten to me, and maybe you'll have a job."

"I am all attention."

"How much doeth it cotht to hire a preth agent like yourthelf?"

"My remuneration generally is about two hundred a week and expenses." Peter Locke replied. "The expenses are—er—considerable at times."

"It ith too much," Tham said.

"I was speaking of my usual remuneration. Did I see the chance to make a name for myself and cause the manager of that so-called musical comedy to throw a fit and regret having allowed me to go, I might work for less."

"I thould think tho," said Tham. "How would fifty a week thuit you?"

"A mere fifty?"

"And twenty-five extra for expentheth," Tham added.

"That might be considered if I could go to work at once."

"I'll give you a job," Tham said.

"And what am I to make a household word?"

"My own name."

"What is it?"

"Thubway Tham."

"Rather a peculiar name. Don't believe I ever heard it before."

"There it ith," Tham wailed. "You have never heard that name before. And it ith no more than right that everybody thould know it. Every actor hath a preth agent, every thhow, and loth of other folkth. I am ath big in my line ath a man can be, and you never heard of me before."

"It is a hard world, mate. You seek to bask in the brilliance of publicity?"

"I do," said Thubway Tham.

"I'm your man. I can make men, women, and children mouth your name

within a week. But I must have something upon which to work in addition to the mere name. What special claim to fame do you put forward, my dear sir?"

Tham cleared his throat, glanced around, and spoke in a lower tone when he made reply.

"Bar none," Thubway Tham said, "bar none, I am the betht, motht thientific, motht thuccethful pickpocket in thith town."

Peter Locke looked at him in amazement.

"No!" he said.

"Yeth!" Tham declared.

Peter Locke grinned. "I have a poor room in a side street within four blocks of this bit of park," he said. "We will go there, if you do not object, since it is my office as well as my home. There we can talk."

"Yeth, thir."

"And we shall stop at a certain corner on the way. I know a place that'll let you have the stuff if they know——"

"How can you work if you drink any more?" Tham asked.

"I am a press agent."

"Tho you thaid."

"And I have found many a brilliant idea in a little drink. Let us go," said Peter Locke.

II.

Detective Craddock was a police officer of whom it had been said that he combined in his make-up the qualities of the bloodhound and the bulldog. He also had a sense of humor and fair play which are traits not always found in police detectives, or in any other class of men.

About a year and a half before Detective Craddock had informed Thubway Tham that, sooner or later, he was going to "catch him with the goods" and see him sent "up the river" for a long "stretch." Tham, Craddock said, was the pest of the subway, and the officer knew it. Tham, also, was so clever that the only way in which to get him right was to catch him red-handed. It appeared that Tham had a multitude of tricks at his command.

The battle had been as merry as it had been long. Several times Detective Craddock came so close to catching Thubway Tham that the latter felt shivers playing up and down his spine. Then there had been the time when Tham stole the detective's shield and returned it to him by post, and the time when he had relieved a broker of his wallet while Craddock was standing beside him.

Thubway Tham had every bit the best of the battle so far. He enjoyed it, for it gave spice to his daily existence. Detective Craddock enjoyed it at times, too, and while he remained determined to do his duty, he often found himself thinking that he would be downright sorry when the day came for him to take Tham to headquarters with evidence in hand that would mean Tham's conviction and incarceration.

He was growing used to Thubway Tham's tricks, yet always was alert for new ones. There had been a time when Tham insured his hands against injury, the same as a famous violinist, leaving Craddock to discover, after an accident to his right hand, that Tham always used his left in lifting a leather. And there had been other times.

On a certain morning after Tham's meeting with Peter Locke, Detective Craddock picked up his favorite newspaper while waiting for breakfast, and glimpsed at the headlines. On an inside page he found an article that caused him the feeling of sensation. This is what he read:

That men of to-day carry wallets grossly inferior to those carried by our fathers, is the statement of Mr. Thubway Tham, famous pickpocket, who has his center of interests in the city. The soft leather of olden days that was improved with use and age was an

object of beauty, says Mr. Tham, who adds that the modern purse is a thing of paper, a sort of by-product of the packing industry, Mr. Tham declares that the wallet of to-day is not worthy of being carried in the pocket of a gentleman. Mr. Tham is the proud owner of a collection of wallets of much interest, some of them with historical associations. From time to time, if possible, he adds to this collection the purse of some noted man. It has been suggested to Mr. Tham that he put his collection on exhibition at one of the museums, and he has taken the suggestion under advisement.

Detective Craddock shivered when he finished reading that article, and could not explain why.

"What the deuce?" Craddock asked himself. "Is that bird up to some new and wise game now? Got a famous collection, has he? I'll say he should have."

Craddock went from his home to the streets, and purchased at a convenient corner the other morning papers. The matter of Thubway Tham puzzled him. He thought, of course, that some reporter had caught Tham in a talkative mood and that the article in the paper was but a jest.

Standing at the curb, Craddock searched through another newspaper and found this:

The old trick of wrapping a ten-dollar bill around a roll of ones and thus pretending wealth is not practiced at present to such an extent as formerly, according to Mr. Thubway Tham, foremost pickpocket of the city. Asked whether he thought people were becoming more honest and less inclined to give the impression of possessing wealth they do not have, Mr. Tham replied that he did not, but that people were so busy these days that they did not wish to take time to manufacture the "flash roll" of days gone by. Men, says Mr. Tham, generally have bills of large denomination folded neatly, and they thrust dollar bills into the pockets of their waistcoats. When pressed for his opinion as to whether it was true that women are careless in their handling of money, and as a general rule wad bills together promiscuously and thrust them into their hand bags with powder puffs and pins, Mr. Tham replied that he did not know. He has no dealings with women.

"That rat's up to something," Detective Craddock declared to himself, wadding up the newspaper and tossing it into a trash can on the corner. He added something that sounded suspiciously like a mild oath. Tham, to relate the exact truth, was "getting Craddock's goat."

The detective opened another paper of wide circulation, worked through it until he came to page five, and read:

Success in any line has its drawbacks, according to Mr. Thubway Tham, distinguished pickpocket. The famous singer cannot eat what he pleases, smoke every time he desires a cigarette, or enjoy outdoor sports where there is a chance of dust ruining the vocal chords. A pickpocket, says Mr. Tham, to be highly successful, must have the nerves in his fingers highly developed. He must have a sort of sixth sense to direct him toward victims and away from dangerous prospects. It is necessary for the earnest "dip" to maintain himself in an atmosphere of suspicion and half fear, to keep his faculties on edge, as it were. But the picking of pockets as a profession has its rewards, Mr. Tham declares. It is no less than a high art. The hold-up man, says Mr. Tham, is a bully who gives his antagonist no chance, and a burglar is but a thug. Mr. Tham knows whereof he speaks, having been successful to a great degree. He is, without doubt, the most eminent pickpocket of the day. For more than a year he has successfully eluded one particular detective who has been assigned to capture him, and who has sworn to "get him with the goods." On one occasion, Mr. Tham stole this officer's shield.

Detective Craddock muttered another curse and hurled the newspaper into the trash can. He chewed furiously at a cigar and walked down the street like a man who was very much determined about something.

"It's a game," Craddock told himself. "And he's trying to make fun of me, is he? How did those articles ever get into the papers? Why—dang it all! The idea of a pickpocket being praised like that! 'Most eminent dip in the business,' is he? Dang it all!"

Craddock reached the vicinity of

Madison Square and continued on downtown after a look around. It was at Union Square that he came face to face with Thubway Tham on a corner.

"Well!" Craddock exclaimed.

"Tho I thee your ugly fathe again, do I?" Tham sneeringly inquired. "Are you goin' to pethter me to-day. I thuppothe tho!"

"I see you've been getting your name in the papers," Craddock remarked.

"Merit thooner or later will be recognithed," Tham told him.

"How did it happen?"

"Can I help it if I have been dithcovered?" Tham wanted to know. "My goodneth! Every chief of polithe in the country keepth a thtring of reporterth at hith heelth. I'm a good dip, ain't I? Why thould not I get thome advertithing?"

"Rather unusual, isn't it? What particular game are you up to now?"

"Thir?"

"You heard me!"

"I hear loth of thingth," Tham said. "I heard you thay almoth two yearth ago that you wath goin' to catch me with the goodth, but all you have done ith pethter me. You make me thick, Craddock! Do you think I am a thimp? Oh, you thilly ath!"

"You've got a nerve, advertising your skill as a crook."

"It payth to advertithe," Tham remarked.

"I want to know how it happened."

"I got me a preth agent," Tham replied. "I didn't thee why I thould not have thome publithity the thame ath other men. My goodneth! Don't you thuppothe I want to be famouth?"

"So you got a press agent, did you?"

"I thertainly did, and a good one," Tham answered. "He uthed to work for a big thhow, but he got fired. Hith name ith Peter Locke, and he ith a dandy."

"Pete Locke?"

"Yeth, thir."

"Tham, you're wandering from the truth. Pete Locke is the best theatrical press agent in town. He can do as he blame pleases and get away with it. He can make a rotten show run a year. And he gets as much salary in a month as you get coin in a year if you pluck a fat wallet every day. You hire Pete Locke?"

"For fifty dollarth a week and twenty-five more dollarth a week ecthpenthe money."

"Like fun you do!"

"I do," Tham declared.

Then, after a pause: "I believe you're speaking the truth," Craddock said. "And, if you are, Pete Locke is playing some smooth game, or else—— Tell me, Tham, does he drink?"

"He doeth. When I hired him he wath drinkin' becauthe he had juth lotht hith job."

"Lose his job. He could commit murder, and his job would go on just the same. Drinking, eh? Then Pete Locke is on his annual bat, and he's liable to do anything at such times."

"Thay, are you tellin' me the truth?"

"I am," Craddock said.

"Well, my goodneth! I thought he wath almothe broke, and gave him that job becauthe he felt tho bad about it."

"Tham, you ass, Pete Locke gets at least four hundred dollars a week, whether he's drunk or not. He's the foremost press agent in our fair city. He's probably spending your twenty-five for cigarettes or newspapers."

Thubway Tham removed his cap and scratched at his head.

"Why, the crook," he said, after a time. "I thuppothed that he had nothin' but a front. He wath in a little room up by Madithon Thquare——"

"Just a place he keeps to drop in now and then when he's boozing around," Craddock explained. "He's got a ten-room apartment on Riverside Drive, as I happen to know, and a swell

private office in a suite near Times Square. You've been played, Tham, my boy—you've been played."

"He thertainly hath delivered the gooth," Tham said.

"And I'll be delivering them one of these days, too, Tham. Your young career is about at an end. You can't get away with it forever, old-timer. There's a cell waiting——"

"That ith a good name for a thong. Why don't you write it?" Tham asked, and turned his back and went on up the street.

Tham had pride of a sort. A block away, he took several newspaper clippings from his pocket and perused them. Peter Locke certainly had done his work well, and Tham was certain that he had spent the twenty-five dollars of expense money.

He went to the little room near Madison Square, and there he found his press agent half asleep with feet resting on top of his desk. Peter Locke turned speculative eyes upon him.

"It goes great," he said. "It is something new under the sun. Every city editor in town is falling for the stunt of me being the press agent for a pockpocket. Never been done before."

"You thertainly——" Tham began.

"Costly, though," Peter interrupted. "City editors always demand the best food and drink, and I had to take several of them to lunch, of course, to mellow them up. If you can let me have another twenty-five for expenses——"

"Thay! A man juth told me that you have all thorth of coin, and that you get a big thalary. He thaid you wath not fired but wath juth on an annual bat."

"Ah, the cruel world! It is easy to keep a man down, easy to kick him when he's there. Was your lying informant a man you know and trust?"

"He wath a detective——"

"Ah! Do you not see?" Peter Locke asked. "He had read those articles, and he is a member of an antagonistic profession. He dislikes to see you get the publicity and measure of fame you so justly deserve. The scoundrel! He cannot afford a press agent of his own, I suppose. Ah, well!"

"He thaid you had an apartment on Riverthide Drive."

"My dear sir! Would I be here, in such a case? Oh, my dear sir! On the Drive? I should have, if I had my just deserts. But let us get to business. What say you to having some photographs taken? I believe I can place them in the Sunday editions."

"Thay! I would be a hot thketch to have my picture printed, wouldn't I?" Tham asked him. "A pickpocket never advertitheth hith fathe."

"I suppose not. Ah, well! I must think of something else. If you will be kind enough to remember the twenty-five——"

Thubway Tham hesitated for a moment, and then gave Peter Locke the money. Perhaps Peter Locke was truthful, and Detective Craddock only an ordinary liar. And Locke seemed to be in a reverie. Thubway Tham had heard that writers were like that. So he tiptoed from the room and went away, secure in the belief that the morning papers would carry more articles that would acquaint those of the city with Thubway Tham and his claim to fame.

"He ith all right, and Craddock ith an ath," Tham declared to himself. "Thith Peter Locke ith doin' good work for me for the money he ith gettin.' He doeth it becauthe he liketh me."

Thubway Tham walked down the street, conscious of the fact that certain gentlemen of the underworld looked at him with envy. It is not every crook who can engage a high-salaried publicity expert and get results.

III.

The following morning Tham went to his usual restaurant for breakfast, purchasing copies of the morning papers on the way. Having given his order, he opened the papers with keen anticipation and prepared to have steal over him that glow that comes from sudden fame, whether it be legitimate or forced.

He searched his favorite newspaper for some time, and finally discovered what he sought. And, as he read, the glow faded.

New York, noted as the home of innovations, again claims the laurel wreath for something new. This time it is a criminal who, far from being a shrinking violet, openly courts publicity and engages a press agent. The man is Thubway Tham, a notorious pickpocket who once did a term in Sing Sing. Thubway Tham approached and engaged as his publicity representative one of the best men in the field, Mr. Peter Locke, well known to all theatrical people. Mr. Locke entered into the spirit of the undertaking and actually got articles concerning his man printed. Thubway Tham balked, however, when Locke expressed a desire to use his photograph in the daily press. It is said that Tham works in subway crowds during rush hours, and that the police are making special efforts to catch him when there is evidence sufficient to obtain his conviction. Mr. Locke, by the way, is at present representative for "Betty of the Bronx," the delightful new musical comedy that is turning them away nightly at the Tragedy Theater. Critics are saying that "Betty of the Bronx" is due for a season's run. The book of the piece was written by——

Thubway Tham did not read further. He hurled the newspaper to the floor.

'Tho!" he said. "He wath playin' a game juth to get hith old thow mentioned in the paperth. He ith a double-crothin' crook. And I am a thilly ath!"

Tham did not relish his breakfast. Out upon the street again he walked slowly northward. He had a feeling that he would meet Detective Craddock —and he did.

"Well, Tham, what did I tell you?" Craddock asked. "Made a fool of you, didn't he? Working his own game all the time, he was. Got his show spread all over the papers by being the press agent for a dip. How does it feel to be a victim, Tham?"

"I got mine," Tham declared.

"And Locke got your fifty and expense money, and I'll bet he got plenty of the latter, too. He's got coin of his own to burn, Tham. An easy mark is what you are—an easy mark!"

Craddock went away, chuckling, and an infuriated Thubway Tham went in the opposite direction. He really had given Locke a job because he thought that he needed one, and now he knew that Locke merely had collected from him expenses for a two days' spree. Of course, Locke had delivered the goods, but Tham felt the deception just the same.

He called the office of the theater manager and was informed that Mr. Locke was not in the office, but would be at the theater within the half hour. Thubway Tham darted into the subway and emerged again in the vicinity of Times Square. He took up his station on a busy corner in such manner as to be inconspicuous and yet be in a position to watch the theater entrance. He smoked cigarette after cigarette and waited for almost an hour.

And then he saw Peter Locke. The publicity expert came from the stage door and hurried toward the corner. He turned the corner and went along Broadway, and Thubway Tham followed. Peter Locke entered a florist's establishment, ordered a mass of blooms, and paid for them from a roll of bills that caused Tham's eyes to bulge.

Having paid, Locke smoothed out the bills, placed them in his wallet—and put the wallet in his hip pocket.

"The ath!" Tham exclaimed, as he witnessed the action. "For a tho-called withe guy, he ith a thimp and nothin' leth. Oh, the thilly ath!"

Locke went on up the street; Thubway Tham still followed. The publicity agent met a chorus lady and engaged her in conversation, lifted his hat and went on. Tham saw him dart into the subway.

Tham followed as closely as he dared. Peter Locke boarded a train going uptown, and Thubway Tham got into the same car. The car was crowded. Tham squeezed close to his victim and waited for an opportune moment. It came.

Thubway Tham's hands did what was required of them, and Peter Lock's wallet was in Tham's pocket. Tham squeezed back through the crowd and got away from his man. He waited until Locke stepped out at a station, and again followed.

On the way up to the street Tham took the money from the wallet and dropped the leather in a dark corner of the stairs. He made the bills into a roll and darted after Locke, caught up with him, and grasped him by the arm.

"You did me a dirty trick," Thubway Tham said. "I have theen the morning paperth."

"No hard feelings, old-timer," the now sobered Locke replied, grinning. "You got publicity, didn't you?"

"And I paid for it," Tham reminded him. "And you wath uthin' my coin for ecthpenthe money when you have got a roll in the bank and draw down a big thalary bethideth. Ah, well!"

"If you want some of it back——"

"Not tho! No, thir! I am a man of my word," Tham told him. "I wath juth goin' to your apartment to thee you. You have one day'th wageth comin'. You worked one day more than a week. One theventh of fifty dollarth ith a little more than seven. I am goin' to give you ten dollarth and call it thquare."

"That's very generous of you, but we'll just let matters stand," Peter Locke offered.

"No, thir! I do buthineth in a thraight way," Tham declared. "I inthith that you take thith bill."

"It isn't necessary——"

"I inthith! I want thingth thquare!"

"If you insist I'm not the man to turn down a ten-dollar bill."

"I thertainly do."

"Then it's my money!"

"You are abtholutely right," Tham replied, grinning as he turned away.

HIS CLOTHES WERE HIS BANK

IF Joe Armstrong had not had his foot so badly injured that he had to go to a hospital for an operation Chicagoans would perhaps not have known until his death that the ragged old junkman, whose home was a hovel, possessed at least six thousand dollars. For years Armstrong had been seen in the same suit of clothes which he wore constantly, and which, beside being frayed and patched, was very soiled.

When he arrived at the hospital the doctors and internes decided at once that he should be stripped and bathed. This decision not only provoked yells of protest but also an ineffectual physical struggle. Disrobing Armstrong proved to be a lengthy procedure, however, for it was soon discovered that his outer garments were sewed to those inside. The junkman kept his secret until the internes began to gather up his clothes, preparatory to removing them from the room. Then he announced loudly that they must not take away his bonds, and, on examining the garments closely, the hospital attendants found six thousand dollars' worth of bonds sewed into the rags.

One Perfectly Straight Deal

by Hugh Kahler

Author of "At Second Hand," etc.

IT was characteristic of Mr. Morgan Brown to foresee squalls and to be safely out of their path before they broke. He was a gentleman of rather unusual intelligence, by virtue of which he was enabled to exist comfortably, even luxuriously, at the expenditure of a minimum of endeavor. Thanks to his faculty for scenting trouble long before it arrived, he also contrived to avoid the unpleasant consequences arranged by legislators, prosecutors, and police for the discouragement of such professions as his.

He found himself, therefore, departing from Sackville well in advance of any disagreeable complications. He had bought his ticket without haste, and had secured a seat in the solitary Pullman as a matter of course. Day-coach travel was decidedly below Mr. Brown's dignity, and, moreover, he had discovered that profitable acquaintances could often be formed in parlor cars.

It was annoying to leave Sackville without having brought certain carefully formed schemes to fruition, but there was no help for that. He was decidedly in luck to be leaving it unaccompanied by a vigilant person charged to hand him over to the State authorities down at Penton, where the gloomy graystone walls of the big prison skirted the railroad tracks as a sort of grim reminder to such gentlemen as Mr. Morgan Brown. The fact that his pockets were almost empty was distressing, to be sure, but it was much better to be leaving with vacant pockets than with handcuffed wrists. Mr. Morgan Brown made the best of it, therefore. He had winded the trouble that waited for him, and was departing without a stain on his character.

He lighted a cigar and unfolded a newspaper as the train drew away from the unlovely station. Presently he glanced up as a round-faced young man came hesitantly into the compartment. Mr. Brown's eyes narrowed for a fraction of a second as they rested on the countenance. He had a very keen faculty for appraising faces, and what he saw in this one delighted him. He smiled slightly, and moved over on the leather cushions. The newcomer thanked him and sat down, fumbling for cigarettes. Mr. Brown supplied a match, and the ice was agreeably broken. Before they had traveled ten miles he had elicited a considerable amount of information concerning his companion without betraying anything resembling inquisitiveness.

It developed that the round-faced young man was Alfred Flick, of Pitt-

land. He had been sojourning in Sackville in connection with the wedding of a cousin, and was now returning to his work in the larger city. Mr. Brown repressed a tendency to grin when he discovered that this work consisted of acting as teller in the uptown branch of the Pittland Trust Company. A bank clerk! It could hardly be better. He listened attentively to Mr. Flick's conversation, artfully drawing the expansive young fellow into a series of self-revelations each of which delighted Mr. Morgan Brown more than the last.

Luck was evidently smiling on him after all. As a rule the people with whom Mr. Brown transacted business were as innocently trustful as Alfred Flick seemed to be, but it was exceedingly rare to find a person so disposed who was in a position to handle a considerable quantity of money. As Mr. Brown himself would have phrased it:

"Never hunt for a rich sucker. If a guy's born a sucker he never gets rich, and if a sucker's born rich he doesn't stay that way."

Here, however, was the happy combination of circumstances which represented Mr. Brown's ideal customer—a man of unsuspicious instincts who had access to vast sums of ready money. And Mr. Brown was easily able to observe that he had made an agreeable impression on Alfred Flick. He was cheerfully communicative about himself in return, confessing that he had sold out his business in the West and was looking for a profitable opening in this part of the country.

Their acquaintance developed so rapidly that Mr. Flick suggested his own boarding house as a comfortable abode, and escorted Mr. Brown thither when they reached Pittland. More: He presented him to Mrs. Molloy as "my friend, Mr. Ralph Blaine, of San Francisco," and therefore spared Mr. Brown the disagreeable necessity of prepaying Mrs. Molloy's charges.

Mr. Brown resigned himself to patience. He realized that luck had put an unusual opportunity in his path, and that he must set about his task with care and deliberation if he hoped to make the most of the chance. As he pondered on the situation a new aspect appealed to him more strongly than even the happy circumstances of Mr. Flick's trustfulness and occupation. If by any manipulation of the factors in the case Mr. Flick could be induced to borrow more or less heavily from the bank's funds, and Mr. Brown should contrive to separate him from these borrowings, Mr. Flick would be compelled, in sheer self-defense, to juggle with his books as long as possible, thus giving Mr. Brown plenty of time to seek other and safer pastures.

"He wouldn't dare to put up a squeal no matter how raw the stunt might be," mused Mr. Brown happily. "It looks soft, if I can only find a good excuse for tapping the till. That's the weak spot, all right—and me without even a flash roll, too!"

He devoted himself to solidifying his friendship with the affable Mr. Flick. They spent several evenings together, and after a week or so Mr. Brown was presented to the young lady in whom Alfred Flick was frankly interested. He was so diplomatic in his subsequent expressions of admiration that Flick thawed into confidences. He and Mamie had it all fixed up, he confessed, but he wasn't getting enough to risk matrimony just yet. And the bank's policy was niggardly, too. It might be years before he got his promotion.

Mr. Brown was mildly sympathetic. He even went so far as to hint that he might be able to put something good in his friend's way before long. Flick was almost pathetically grateful, and Mr. Brown, realizing his own impecunious condition, was moved to secret profanity. With the most promising opportunity of his career before him, he

had nothing to offer. His stock of materials was reposing in Sackville, where he dared not attempt to recover it. And even if he had brought along his whole supply of printed matter concerning the Texas and Nebraska Oil and Land Corporation, Limited, he could hardly have hoped to interest Flick in that enterprise. Mr. Flick was not guileful, but his bank training would certainly have taught him to look distrustfully at securities not listed on any of the exchanges.

"It's got to be something new to get past this simp," Mr. Brown informed himself. "And I got to get busy pretty quick or they'll be getting unpleasant about my board up at the house. Gee! Why can't I frame up something?"

His invention failed him, however, during the week that followed, and he began to be conscious of a distinctly hostile atmosphere when he encountered Mrs. Molloy. He was correspondingly delighted, therefore, when he found himself confronted by Dan Hanson.

"Talk about luck," he ejaculated, as they shook hands. "You're the very lad I'm needing, Dan. I'm flat—and I've got a live prospect on the string that——"

"Flat! You beat me to it by an eyelash, Brown. I was all set to make a touch myself. I'm in hock up to the eyes down at Terry Link's joint."

The pleasure winked out of Mr. Brown's countenance. He listened while Hanson related a tale of misfortune which outmatched his own. He shook his head gloomily as it concluded.

"I guess that beats me," he said, sighing. "I'm not good for more than a day or two longer myself."

Hanson listened to the story, pulling meditatively at his cigar, his eyes narrowed to slits in his cadaverous countenance.

"A teller, eh? That listens good. If we could frame up something on him it ought to pay big for a change. I'm sick of talking my head off for chicken feed. Let's go and see Terry Link. Maybe he'll help."

They interviewed Mr. Link forthwith in the dingy little office of his hotel fronting the railroad station. Both men knew him of old and trusted him implicitly. Terry Link enjoyed a rather peculiar position between the upper and lower levels of society. He was unwaveringly honest himself, and yet he dealt almost exclusively with crooks. His shabby hotel was their haven of refuge when fortune frowned; his ear listened sympathetically to hard-luck stories, and his roof sheltered many an impoverished knight of fortune until the luck turned. And yet Link himself never varied his own policy by a hair.

"The more I see of you wise guys," he remarked when Mr. Brown had finished his dismal narrative, "the better I like my game. Why don't you get on to the fact that you work for Sweeney? With the amount of brains you use on these slick stunts of yours you'd be millionaires if you played on the level instead of hanging around Terry Link for handouts. Both broke, eh? Well, where do I come in?"

"You grubstake us, Terry," urged Brown eagerly. "All we need is a front and a flash roll, and we can mace this simp for the whole works. You put up a couple of hundred and draw down an even split when we cash in."

"Nothing stirring!" Terry Link shook his head positively. "I don't draw cards in any game where the deal's stacked. I've seen too many sure things explode. You crooks are all alike; you're wise as Solomon but you finish in the nice striped pajamas just the same. I've seen a couple of thousand of you, and I never saw a rich one yet."

"Stake us, anyway," pleaded Brown. "This is the big chance of a lifetime, Terry. This simp can't squeal, you see.

He's got to cover up as long as he can to save his own neck. We can roll him for real money and take all the time on earth to get away."

"Not for mine," declared Link. "You can't play horse with a bank and live happy ever after. Those guys hang together. They're bound to get you first or last. Why, they even got poor old Johnny McGrue, and he was the wisest gun I ever met. He cashed in right here in the house—come out after a ten-stretch and just about managed to get here in time to croak."

"I never heard of him," said Brown listlessly. "McGrue, eh?" He scowled. "What was his line?"

Terry Link sat up. "By beans!" It was his direst oath, used only when he was deeply stirred. "I shouldn't wonder if—— You guys come with me. I'm going to show you something."

He led the way to a damp basement where he unlocked a door and admitted them to a cluttered storeroom. A pile of trunks flanked one wall, and a heap of miscellaneous hand baggage bore mute testimony to many an unpaid board bill. He stooped and surveyed the hand-written labels pasted on the faces of the trunks, and presently he lifted the lid of a battered old tin-and-horsehide veteran.

"Look there," he said, pointing. The others craned their necks over a collection of rubber-banded sheaves of stock certificates which half filled the topmost tray. Morgan Brown lifted one.

"Consolidated Gas," he read aloud. "What's the idea, Terry? This looks like the regulation stuff."

Link chuckled heavily. "It ain't, though. That's where old Johnny McGrue had it on you blue-sky merchants. You'll find Consolidated Gas listed in the market reports right now, and everything else in that trunk the same. Johnny didn't bother to persuade his suckers that Goofoozelum Copper was going to pay sixty thousand per cent day after to-morrow. He sold the real stuff. Pretty fair imitation, ain't it? Why, Johnny planted that stuff on fifteen or twenty banks all over the Middle West before they got wise to him. Walked right up to the counter and borrowed on it. He and Tony Napero made it—you've heard of Tony, of course, the guy that did the Buchanan twenty, back in seventy-six, and the phony greenback stuff that gave green goods the name? Tony cashed in down at Atlanta without a jitney, and Johnny passed in his checks right here flat broke; but in their day they handled close to a million I guess. Nice little sermon for you two in that."

"You mean this is queer?" Brown was thinking hard. "They faked the certificates?"

"Just that. Beautiful work, ain't it?" Link lifted another sheaf and surveyed it lovingly. "Napero was an artist all right. It takes a wise guy to spot the difference between this stuff and the real thing. You got me thinking when you pulled that yarn about this simp of yours working in the bank. Struck me that maybe you could use this on him."

"It's a good bet we could," said Brown softly. He rubbed his jaws. "Only I don't like monkeying with the bank direct. That's where McGrue played it wrong. They get together and trail you clear to China, if it costs a million. But if we could slip it over on my tame hick—Terry, let us have this little lot will you? You'll split even on anything we take.'

"Not so you'd notice it," said Link. "I've got a hundred and thirty bucks coming to me from McGrue's estate, and Dan there owes me sixty-two fifty. I'll take that, and not another cent. No pretty striped clothes for Terry Link. When I get a dollar, it's mine, honestly. But you can help yourself to that stuff and do what you please with it. That's all I'll do. And, re-

member, I don't know anything about it."

They helped themselves joyously, bearing the plunder upstairs to Hanson's room, where they debated long and earnestly over the details of the killing. It was Dan Hanson's idea to try a variation of the old "sick engineer" game, with Hanson cast in the rôle of the engineer.

"I know it's a chestnut, Brown, but it's good yet. And remember we're handing this guy the real stuff—no fake mining stock in this. Why, the chances are he can take these certificates right down to his own bank and shoot them over the counter. All we got to do is to frame up a good spiel to make him bite. And that's your little job. You always were there with the chin stuff. Go to it."

Mr. Brown, doubting at first, convinced himself into a state of something like enthusiasm. He invented his story swiftly, rehearsed it patiently until the slower-witted Hanson was letter perfect in the part, and departed in high spirits for the boarding house, where he breezed past Mrs. Molloy so buoyantly that that distrustful lady decided to wait a little longer before mentioning the matter of Mr. Ralph Blaine's overdue account. It was her experience that boarders who couldn't pay their bills didn't come in as Mr. Blaine did, with confidence and prosperity radiant in every line of their faces. She retreated to the kitchen, and Mr. Brown ascended unmolested to his room where presently he was discovered by his friend Alfred Flick.

Mr. Brown was engaged in intricate calculations based on a penciled list at his elbow and a copy of an afternoon newspaper open at the financial page. He put these evidences hastily out of the way as Mr. Flick entered, and assumed an expression so obviously uneasy that even Mr. Flick's innocence could not fail to observe it.

"What're you doing?" asked Flick. "You looked as if you'd been making a killing in the street. What's up?"

Mr. Brown permitted himself to be persuaded into confidences. It appeared that he had run into an almost incredible bit of luck. He himself could hardly believe that it was true.

"A friend of mine's got stocks that figure up to ninety-three thousand bones, by to-day's quotations," he chortled, "and all he wants for the lot of 'em is——" he hesitated, trying to appraise Mr. Flick's capacity. "He loaned twenty-five thousand on 'em and he figures he's stung at that. Poor old Bill—he never did have any head for business. The only thing he understands is the hard coin. Best-hearted old geezer alive, but solid ivory above the ears. I ran into him downtown and he handed me the whole story. He had a deal on with a fellow out in Omaha, and, as usual, trusted the fellow all the way. He put up twenty-five thousand, and this other lad left a bundle of securities with him. It was a mine deal according to Bill, and the other guy was to go out and close the bargain with Bill's coin. But the fellow talked too much and some shifty lads held him up, robbed him of Bill's twenty-five thousand, and finished the job by shooting him up as he cashed in without recovering consciousness. Anybody else but old Bill Temple would have hot-footed down to a broker's office with that bundle of stocks and found out what was coming to him, but not Bill. He'd been stung on mine stocks so often he figured all engraved paper was worth its weight in scrap-iron, and he's actually been hanging on to that bunch of securities ever since!"

"He must have been tickled pink when you told him," opined Mr. Flick. Brown regarded him malevolently. A man as honest as this was going to be hard to handle, after all. He hesitated a moment to choose his words.

"I tried to tell him, for a fact," he said, "but you don't know old Bill. Nobody can tell him anything. He's either willing to give his last jitney to a stranger or he won't trust his best friend with a plugged cent. He got the idea I was trying to put something over on him. 'I've heard that line of talk too often,' he told me. 'You bring around twenty-five thousand bucks in real coin and you can have the pretty papers.' I tried to argue with him, but what are you going to do with a bonehead like that? It serves him right if he never gets a penny over and above the coin he's out. I was just trying to figure out how I could manage it."

"It wouldn't be square to take him up on any such proposition," declared Mr. Flick. "No matter how foolish he is, it would be crooked to let him cheat himself like that. Why don't you have him bring the stuff down to the bank to-morrow? We'll soon persuade him that's wrong." He laughed. "Gee! Some people sure do have luck, don't they? Now if that had happened to me——"

Mr. Brown struck skillfully while the metal glowed. "Wedding bells, eh? I get you, old man. Look here—why don't you take the luck when it's yours for the taking? You can put more money into your jeans on this one deal than you can earn in ten years. Come in with me on it and we'll go shares. I've got some loose money. You put in the rest and we'll buy the stock at Bill's price, sell it, and divide the difference."

Mr. Flick's face betrayed conflicting emotions, but only for a moment. He shook his head.

"It wouldn't be fair," he said. "It's his money, really, and——"

"I don't see it. Twenty-five thousand of it is his all right, but the rest isn't, any more than it's ours. It belongs to the fellow who was in the deal with him, and he was an orphan, without any relatives. Bill tried to find some, hoping to collect from them. Think of it! Of all the prize boobs! Why, he deserves to be stung. And he will be. Sooner or later some crook will give him a couple of hundred for the stock and walk off with it. Why shouldn't we get the benefit—especially if we hand Bill a square deal?"

"It doesn't look honest to me," persisted Flick. "It may not belong to him, but it certainly doesn't belong to us. That's sure."

Brown managed to keep his temper. "Well, if you feel that way about it, why don't we do this: Let's take it over on Bill's terms, sell it at the market, and then split the profits with him? That's fair enough, isn't it? Sixty-eight thousand, split three ways, would give us each about twenty-two five. What's the matter with that?"

It was apparent that Mr. Flick was tempted. "I—I'll talk it over with Ella," he compromised. "If she says to go in, why, I don't know but I'll go you."

Again Mr. Morgan Brown did battle with a rising tide of anger. Ella! He foresaw another long-winded argument over the ethics of the transaction. More, Ella would never let her precious Alfred borrow from the bank—not for a moment. He argued carefully against the idea. Ella might talk; it would be better to complete the deal and then tell her—he advanced a number of excellent arguments without avail, and, after dinner, accompanied Mr. Flick to call on the lady of his heart.

Ella Henderson, who earned every penny of her twenty dollars a week as stenographer, listened attentively to the story as related by her devotee, prompted now and then by Mr. Morgan Brown himself. Mr. Brown watched her face intently during this process, and what he saw there delighted him. Miss Henderson, although quite as honest as the estimable Alfred, was far

more acute in her perceptions. She recognized at once the nice distinction which Mr. Brown had already drawn.

"Of course it doesn't belong to either of you, just as Alfred says," she declared, when the story was done, "but it doesn't belong to Mr. Temple either—especially since he refuses to be advised by those who know better. It seems to me that you both would be honestly entitled to a reward for recovering his investment for him, and I don't see why Alfred shouldn't accept his share of it quite honorably."

"That's just what I think," said the delighted Mr. Brown. "Old Bill will be tickled half to death to get back his twenty-five thousand, and he'll think he's stung us at that. If we give him a split in the profits he certainly is better off than he is now. And we'd each have twenty-two thousand or so after that. I say we do it."

Mr. Flick turned a dubious but wistful eye on the lady. "If you think it's all right, Ella," he began.

She cut in smoothly. "Of course it depends on whether we can finance it between us," she said. "How much would we have to put up, Mr. Blaine?"

Brown hesitated. If he placed their contribution at too high a figure he might discourage them both. If he placed it too low he was forfeiting a share of his hard-earned profits. He reached a quick decision.

"I've got a little over twelve thousand," he said. "If you two can raise thirteen, we're all right. And we'd only need it for a day or so, you know."

He saw Mr. Flick's countenance change. Evidently the honest-minded young man was still considering only the possibility of financing the transaction out of his savings. The idea of borrowing from his bank had not yet presented itself to him. But Ella spoke briskly.

"That's a good deal of money," she said, "but we might be able to get it, provided we were properly protected. You see"—she smiled sweetly at Mr. Brown—"you see we haven't known you very long, and——"

"Oh, I say, Ella——" The pained Mr. Flick protested quickly against the reflection on his friend's probity, but the girl gestured him into silence.

"This is a business matter, Alfred, and we ought to handle it on a strict business basis. Mr. Blaine won't object to your being protected, I'm sure."

"Of course not! I'd insist on it," said Mr. Brown quickly. "That's absolutely right. Make it just as safe as you can. It suits me better that way."

"I knew you'd feel like that," she told him. "Well, then, suppose we get the money for you, you won't object if my brother goes along with you and Alfred to close the deal? It's a lot of money for us, and we'd want to be sure that nothing happened to it."

"Suits me," said Morgan Brown disingenuously. He was distinctly dismayed by the amendment. Her brother, eh? He hadn't heard anything about a brother——

"I was sure of it. John's a big, strong boy, and I'd feel safe if he went with you. Nobody would try to rob him, I'm sure. Of course he's not very clever, but he'd be some protection against a thief or a holdup man."

"But—but——" Mr. Flick endeavored to express himself. Again her gesture silenced him.

She turned to Brown. "Now, if you don't mind leaving Alfred with me, we'll see what we can do about getting the money. It's going to take some financing, you see——"

Did the long lashes of her left eyelid droop ever so slightly? Mr. Brown, with a stab of pleasure, fancied that they did. His brain worked fast. She was going to deal privately with the stubbornly honest suitor. Under her persuasions his scruples against borrowing from his employers would be

more easily quieted than by the most effective oratory on the part of Mr. Brown. She could handle the big boob, he told himself. Why hadn't he spotted her before? She was pretty wise, all right. She knew. It couldn't have worked out better. He permitted his own eyelid to descend ever so little as he withdrew. And he whistled as he went down the street. It was going to work out all right. Of course thirteen thousand wasn't as much as he had hoped to get, but it was a very respectable sum indeed, considering that the whole affair was pure luck. After splitting with Dan Hanson and paying Terry Link's modest bill of expenses he would still have better than six thousand for himself, and with that much money in his pocket he could easily enough finance another and more profitable enterprise such as the one he had been obliged to abandon in Sackville.

He was not in the least surprised when Alfred Flick came into his room much later in the evening with the announcement that the money would be forthcoming to-morrow night, and that, if Mr. Brown was ready with his end, they could close the deal then. He seemed to be laboring under some lingering doubts. He looked pale, Brown thought. He chuckled to himself after Flick departed.

"Scared clear to his spine," he mused. "He'll juggle the books for a year before they get to him. Soft!"

He completed his arrangements with Dan Hanson next day, and, toward seven in the evening, met Alfred Flick at Ella Henderson's abode. Mr. Flick was unquestionably pale now, and decidedly nervous. He kept moistening his lips and his hands shook perceptibly. Ella Henderson, however, was entirely cool, and her expressive eyelashes informed Mr. Brown that all was well. She made him acquainted with her brother Sam—a tall, thickly-built young gentleman with a rather opaque blue eye and a countenance devoid of anything suggesting mental alertness.

"Sam's going to carry the cash," she explained. "He's quite a boxer, you know—probably you've heard of him—he uses the name of O'Leary in the ring."

Mr. Brown repressed a chuckle. Boob O'Leary! He remembered hearing and reading about the heavyweight gladiator as one of the least intelligent members of a profession not overly noted for its brilliancy of wit. He shook hands cordially with Sam, and expressed himself truthfully as delighted to make his acquaintance. Mr. Henderson was also delighted, he said. He exhibited a small satchel, toward which Mr. Flick cast alarmed and frequent glances.

"Got the cash in here," he declared. "Let's be on our way."

They set out forthwith, Mr. Flick walking on the side nearest the satchel, Mr. Brown serving as guard on the other side. Ten minutes' walk brought them to Terry Link's hotel where Dan Hanson, attired in pajamas and sprawled on his bed, awaited them. They came straight to business.

"If you've got the stuff, show me," growled Mr. Hanson. "I'm sick. I can't stand any chin-music. Let's get through with it."

"We got the stuff all right," said Sam, lifting the satchel. "But we want to see yours before we go any further. Flick here has got to look it over."

Hanson opened his suit case and produced the securities, sanctioned by a nod from his confederate. There was a chance that the counterfeit might be apparent to Flick's experienced eye, but it was a risk which had to be run. And the counterfeit engraving had been good enough to deceive a score of bankers in the old days. Mr. Brown held his breath while Alfred methodically ex-

amined the certificates and listed their values, adding the columns with the lightning speed of his profession.

"Ninety-three thousand, six forty-three," he announced, with a sigh. "At the closing prices on to-day's market. It's all right, Sam."

Dan Hanson stretched out his hand for the satchel, but Sam waved him back.

"Wait. We've only got thirteen thousand here. Blaine here is putting up the balance. Better count his first."

Mr. Morgan Brown moved rapidly. "Oh, I put up my share this morning, to bind the bargain," he said easily. "Bill was getting nervous, so I thought I'd better."

Flick and Sam exchanged glances. Then to Mr. Brown's utter amazement, the pugilist broke into a harsh laugh.

"I might have guessed it," he said. "Alf, it's all off. These crooks are shy even the flash roll we were going to take. Don't move, you two."

His voice hardened, and his face, curiously, became distinctly intelligent as a heavy automatic made its appearance in his right hand, its unpleasant muzzle pointed suggestively in the direction of the crestfallen partners. "I made you both, of course, but I thought we might as well pick up what loose change you had before I ran you in. If you've got any, we might listen to a business proposition. There's no charge against you yet, so far as I know, and I don't say I wouldn't listen to reason if the price was right."

"Who—what—I don't get you——" Brown fumbled for words. "This is all some mistake."

"You bet it is," said Sam, grinning. "You've made it. Pickin' on Alf, here, when he's engaged to my sister, and me with a record of eight years on the headquarters squad! Some mistake! Why, I dropped to the play the minute you pulled it. Raw stuff, Blaine! And playing it on a bank teller, too!"

"I don't know what you mean—it's a perfectly straight deal."

"You can tell the district attorney all about it," said Sam imperturbably. "It'll be a pleasant change for him to hear about a perfectly straight business deal with you two mixed up in it. You, Hanson, get on some clothes, unless you want to go down to headquarters in those fancy pajamas. We'd better be starting. Alf, pack up the stuff. The D. A. will be interested."

Mr. Brown felt the clutches of the law closing inexorably upon him. He was not wholly unacquainted with the ordeal of arrest, but hitherto, thanks to his habit of forethought, he had always been able to face a magistrate with an unassailable defense. His wits moved swiftly as he looked ahead now. There was no chance for escape if he and Hanson ever reached a cell with the present situation to be explained. The counterfeit securities would convict them both. He thought desperately as Hanson began to dress under the menace of Sam's revolver. Mr. Flick attracted his attention. The bank teller, paler than ever, was whispering eagerly to his prospective brother-in-law. Mr. Brown could not hear what passed between them, but a gleam of hope lighted within him at the changed expression which gradually became visible on the countenance of the detective. Suddenly he understood.

The faked securities had deceived the teller. He actually believed that they were genuine. Brown meditated. If the poor fish convinced the bull that the stock was real, they might slip through the mesh of the net, even yet. He said nothing, waiting his time.

"Wait a minute, you two." Henderson spoke with a touch of excitement in his voice. "Alf here says he's for letting you both off, and I don't know but he's right at that. The bank might not like the idea of a teller running around with a couple of fly crooks. If

I let you go will you beat it to-night?"

"You're on," said Hanson instantly. "Only you'd have to stake us to get-away money. You doped us out right. We're cleaned—both of us."

There was another whispered conference between the captors, while Brown held his breath. Were they going to fall? Was it possible that Flick was simple enough to dream that the stock could be good, in the face of what had happened? He dared not speak. Suddenly Henderson rose.

"Alf says he'll stake you to ten apiece," he said. "Here you are. And if you're in town to-morrow I'll have to take you in. That goes."

"But you're going to leave us the stock, aren't you?" Brown pocketed the bill as he protested, gesturing toward Flick, who was busily packing the securities in the satchel.

Henderson laughed.

"Not so's you'd notice it we aren't. Alf's going to turn 'em in to-morrow, so's they can be properly canceled. I'm willing to let you two go, although it's against my duty, but I wouldn't leave you with that bunch of phony stock to work off on some fresh sucker. Not much!"

They submitted with feeble protests, and presently, leaving Hanson's baggage in his room, the two conspirators crept cautiously downstairs and managed to slip into the street without being observed by the watchful Terry Link. They did not talk as they made their way to the station where, after a few moments of uneasy waiting, they boarded an eastbound local.

After fortune had smiled again on certain enterprises in which Mr. Morgan Brown was interested, the sting of the defeat began to lessen. He had almost forgotten the incident when it was recalled to his memory by a chance encounter with Hanson, also prospering modestly, in the corridor of a New York hotel. With Hanson was old Perry Waters, dean of the fraternity, his gray hairs endowing him with an aspect of virtue wholly at variance with his long and highly dishonorable career. Over a friendly drink of amber liquid Hanson and Brown rehearsed the tale for his diversion. When Johnny McGrue's name was introduced Perry Waters started, his eyes opening very widely indeed.

"What! Not the McGrue that was in the greenback game with Tony Napero, back in the seventies and eighties?" he ejaculated. "Don't tell me——"

"That's the fellow all right," said Brown. "Why? What's wrong?"

Perry Waters smote the table a resounding thwack. "Why, you everlasting hicks! Haven't you ever heard about McGrue's roll? That guy never parted with a jitney all the time he was in the business, and he must have made a couple of hundred thousand at the inside. About fifty banks had the dicks huntin' high and low to locate his wad when they finally got him, but they never dug up a cent. I'll bet——"

The same idea dawned simultaneously upon Hanson and Brown. With one accord they moved toward the door, leaving Perry to pay the check. They caught the nine o'clock to Pittland by a bare eyelash, and when the uptown branch of the Pittland Trust Company opened its doors, next morning, its first visitors were Messrs. Blaine and Temple. And the first face which met their view as they surged into the lobby was that of Mr. Alfred Flick, who eyed them coolly, not from the teller's wicket, but over the top of a neat mahogany desk on which a black-and-gilt sign bore witness to the fact that Mr. Flick was now assistant cashier.

"Well, gentlemen?" Mr. Flick's voice was crisp, as became one accus-

tomed to listen to appeals for loans. He eyed them in a fashion which temporarily robbed Mr. Brown of his usually fluent faculty of speech.

"You—you—we want our fair split——" he managed to say at last. "You stung us. That stock was perfectly good——"

"I'm sure there's some mistake," said Mr. Flick coldly. "I can't recall ever having met either of you before."

"Can it!" Mr. Brown found his tongue. "You can't get away with it."

"Can't I?" Mr. Flick pressed a small pearl-topped button at the side of his desk. "We'll see whether I can or not. There's a friend of mine who's in the business of remembering faces, and it's just possible that he may recall yours. I'll have them send for him. I've got a lot of faith in his judgment, you see. He's my brother-in-law, and they've just appointed him chief of the detective bureau. Sit down and wait for him. He'll be right up."

The partners wavered. "You can't bluff us," said Brown, with a feeble attempt to bluster. "They've got nothing on us; that was a perfectly straight business deal, and you know it."

"Glad to hear you say so," said Flick heartily. "In that case, of course, you've no grounds for complaint. And now, as I'm rather busy this morning, I'll have to ask you to excuse me—unless you care to wait and discuss matters with Mr. Henderson. I'm sure he'll be glad to see you again."

The partners retreated. On the sidewalk Mr. Hanson broke into a laugh. Mr. Morgan Brown stared at him questioningly.

"What's the merry jest, Dan?"

Mr. Hanson emitted a final chuckle. "Oh, nothing. Only it struck me funny, that's all. He called it a perfectly straight deal, and it was, f'r a fact! About the only one I ever was mixed up in, so far's I can remember. And yet there's poor old Terry Link, claiming it pays to be honest? Say, ain't it rich, Brownie? Come on—let's go and tell Terry the glad news! I want to see his face when he hears that he passed up ninety-three thousand in cold coin for a board bill of sixty-two fifty, and got done for the board bill at that! Oh, sure—it pays to be honest—if you're on the receiving end of the deal!"

LOST DAUGHTER FOUND AS BEGGAR.

LITTLE LELIA ORME was overjoyed to meet her father, from whom she has been parted for nine years, even though the reunion took place in a crowded courtroom in New York, where the child was to have appeared as a material witness against her mother. As soon as she was old enough the child, who was kidnaped when she was three years of age, by her divorced mother, was sent out to beg. On the money Lelia received from kind-hearted people she and her mother lived at good hotels.

Finally the girl, now twelve years old, was arrested while begging at a hotel in New York, and her mother was taken into custody soon afterward, charged with having caused the child to become a mendicant. Lelia told the police that her name was not Hastings—the alias given by her mother—but Orme. Further questioning led the authorities to communicate with Mr. Orme, who is a wealthy manufacturer residing in Washington.

He hurried to New York, and the meeting with his long-lost daughter followed. The child's mother jumped the bail she had furnished and was not in court when her case was called.

The Curse on the House of Carson

by Ernest M. Poate

Author of the "Doctor Bentiron" Stories, etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

SOON after meeting George Carson and Carson's stepdaughter, Alice Macy, Arthur Ward, an ex-soldier, hears that his host is in great terror of ghosts, especially in the vicinity of Lakeside Park. Carson's nervous irritability leads to a quarrel with his stepdaughter, who leaves the house he has rented at Amidon Point, and speeds away in a big motor car.

Ward and Mr. and Mrs. Carson are sitting on the veranda of the house that afternoon, when an antiquated automobile, with a woman driving, approaches. As the car passes the house a shot is fired, wounding Carson dangerously.

Mrs. Salome Jacobs, a witchlike old woman, who lives with her son, Billy, a motor-cycle enthusiast, in a cottage across the road, takes a malign joy in her neighbor's trouble, and warns Ward not to go to Lakeside Park. Nevertheless, the ex-soldier does go, and discovers an ancient automobile in a carriage house on the deserted estate. He learns that the place had been the scene of a murder fourteen years ago, when Mrs. Sol Caldwell and her son, Ed, had been shot while sitting in an automobile, and her daughter Grace had become dumb and insane after the tragedy. Geoffrey Caldwell, another son, was suspected of the murder.

On the way back to the Carsons' cottage Ward's motor car is passed by a high-powered machine carrying two men, and traveling at great speed. A few moments later the joy riders' car is wrecked and its occupants seriously injured. Glass is found strewn entirely across the road, and Constable Ed Hopkins suggests that the trap might have been placed for Ward.

CHAPTER XVII.

WORSE!

ALTHOUGH Hopkins had managed to clear away the worst of the crowd cars were continually stopping, while their passengers stared with morbid curiosity or clambered out to examine the wrecked automobile, which still leaned drunkenly against a telegraph pole.

For a time the constable struggled to keep them moving along. At last he turned to Ward with a half-humorous sigh.

"By jolly," he muttered, "looks to me like it'd be a job fer the State police just to keep this road clear. If they'd been a good, bloody murder, now, it would of fetched folks clean fum Pittsburgh, seems as though. Prob-'bly be another smash-up here before night. All right, let 'em. *I* give up."

He walked up the hill, to sweep the remnants of broken glass carefully off the concrete.

"I'd ought to of done that before," he drawled. "Wonder how many of them rubber necks've got punctures outa that?"

Then he turned back to the wrecked car. Its top, broken loose from the windshield, was crumpled and bowed. The cushion of the rear seat had slid forward, half covering an open suit case, now quite empty.

Hopkins spat reflectively. "Somebody made a good, clean sweep," said he mildly. "Didn't so much as leave the boys their spare socks. Ain't it queer how light-fingered some of these summer folks is? That one feller, now; he's as good as dead, doc says

—and the other'll mebbe die. Kinda like grave-robbing, seems to me. They say one fat feller made off with a big roll of bills, just before I come. We-ell —they left the automobeel. Busted too bad to be wuth taking away, I s'pose."

Ward turned toward the yellow roadster. One hind tire was quite flat, and the other showed a deep, slanting cut. He sighed ruefully, looking down at his white flannels, then began to rummage in the tool box.

There was a jack, and a rim wrench, but no tire iron. He searched through the boot, and under the front seat, then patted the door pockets; it might possibly have been put in one of them. Yes, there was some bulky object in the left one.

Unbuttoning the flap, he plunged in a hand—and drew forth a small pearl-handled revolver!

He was half stunned by the discovery. Mechanically he looked it over; the barrel was fouled. He broke it; one chamber held an empty shell!

"Thutty-two, ain't it?" came a dry, drawling voice over his shoulder. "Yeah; thought so." Mr. Hopkins spat reflectively. "A thutty-two, one ca'tridge fired," he repeated in absent tones, then abruptly abandoned the subject.

He examined the flat tire with care. "Done a good job," he conceded. "Now I wonder who spread that glass? Tanner's garage ain't more'n a quarter mile. Won't hurt that shoe, neither; 'sall gone now. Why don't ye drive down there 'n' let them fix ye up? It'd save them pritty ice cream pants, too." He seemed to have forgotten the revolver.

With another look at the flat tire Ward consented. "It would take some pumping," said he, striving to emulate the other's indifferent calm despite his shaking pulses. "That's a thirty-five by five. And I hate to pull off clinchers. It means a new tire—and it'll just about take my bonus to pay for it." He sighed heavily; this thought momentarily obscured his deeper troubles. True, a good job waited for him in Denver; but Denver was a long way off, and his slender funds were running low.

"Ye can take me along," directed the constable, climbing into the right-hand seat. "Ain't nothing left up here that's wo'th stealing. And as fer these rubber necks—well, I ain't no traffic cop. Let 'em block the road, and get smashed up, if they wanta. I'll phone up to Mayville fer the State police. And I'll have Tanner come up and fetch that boat, and hold it till the feller gets well—if he *does*."

So Ward also climbed in, and the yellow car limped and pounded its slow way into Bemus.

Billy Jacobs was sitting on a bench in front of the garage, smoking moodily. At sight of the big roadster he gave a perceptible start, but did not get up.

"You, Bill!" called the constable jocosely. "Come 'ere and see what you done!"

The boy's cheeks paled under their coat of grease. He lifted a sullen face, looking everywhere but at the two men.

"What you drivin' at?" he whined. "*I* ain't done nothin'."

"Ain't ye heerd?" demanded Hopkins. "They was a bad accident up the road a piece; two fellers killed. Somebody'd put glass in the road."

The boy hung his head, kicking at a loose bolt on the ground. "Naw, I ain't heard nothin'," he muttered. "I been right here, tendin' t' my business."

Ward opened his lips; the boy could not have been there long. Then, changing his mind, he directed:

"Well, fix up that tire for us."

Young Jacobs walked to the rear of the car and kicked the flat tire tentatively. "Shot," he announced. "Y' got to have a new shoe."

Ward sighed again. "All right, son," said he. "Put on the spare for now. I'll buy a new tire to-morrow."

"We-ll," drawled the constable, climbing out, "I'll be getting on. Bill, you tell Tanner t' go up and get that smashed auto—right opp'site Mullers, it is—and hold it here till I c'n see Judge Siegwaldt."

The boy grunted something from beneath the hind axle, where he was placing the jack.

In twenty minutes he had removed the rim and placed the spare tire. After inflating it he walked around the car, examining the other wheels.

"Y' got a bad cut in that right one, behind," he reported. "It'd ought to be took off and vulcanized."

"Well," said Ward, sighing—here was more expense; "won't it hold for a day or two?"

Young Jacobs wiped his face, leaving a fresh smear of grease along one cheek. "You goin' to take this boat out to-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes, for a while."

"Goin' fur?" There was a curious, morose anxiety in his manner; he blinked furiously, momentarily resembling his mother.

"Why, no," answered Ward. "Just out past Westfield a little way."

The boy's crooked teeth showed in a vicious, mirthless grin. "Out to Lakeside Park?" he demanded truculently.

Ward looked at him a moment, surprised at his manner. "Perhaps," said he coldly. Then, thinking of the old man's advice: "By the way, is your mother at home?"

Billy started again. The hand which laid down a wrench was unsteady. "Yeah!" he snarled. "She's always to home," and stalked away.

Ward started the car, mildly annoyed by the young fellow's gruffness. No wonder Tanner talked of discharging him, if this was the way he handled the trade! And so thinking he turned into the Carsons' driveway.

Alice and her mother sat on the porch.

"We're waiting dinner for you, boy," called the latter cheerfully. "Run right in and get washed. Did you hear about the accident?"

"I saw it," said the young man. "I was just behind."

Alice gasped. "You weren't in danger, Arthur?" she cried, with a solicitude which warmed the boy's heart.

He shook his head, while Mrs. Carson's monologue flowed on. "Dear me, it must have been dreadful." She sighed comfortably. "I expect they'd been drinking. Doctor Otis says one of them will die before morning. Have a good time, all by yourself, Arthur?"

"Why, yes," answered the man, "though I was sorry Alice wouldn't come along."

"I had a headache," murmured that young lady; there were dark circles beneath her eyes.

"Where did you go?" asked her mother carelessly.

"Oh, just around," replied Ward, with a vague gesture. "How is Mr. Carson, now?"

"Why, Doctor Otis is in there now. George seemed real well this morning, but about eleven o'clock he got terribly excited and kind of light-headed, talking about a 'ghost car' that keeps chasing him."

Ward started, recalling the words of old Mr. Watson. "At eleven o'clock?" he asked, then, with a strange feeling of dread. For at that time he had been peering in at the battered old auto. He met Alice's reproachful gaze half guiltily. What unclean spirit had he aroused by his profanation of that dreadful place?

"Just about eleven," Mrs. Carson was saying. "Doctor Otis was away;

we only just caught him. The nurse and I had to hold George in bed for an hour or more. He was dreadfully excited."

Her full lips trembled. Looking closely, Ward could see the marks of deep anxiety upon her usually placid face. Involuntarily he gave a thought of admiration to the courage which maintained her friendly serenity, despite the strain of her husband's illness.

Then Doctor Otis emerged from the house, his broad face somber and irritated.

"Man's batty!" he announced. "Climbing out of bed to dodge ghost cars. Yah! Stubborn as a mule; couldn't do a thing with him. Had to fill him full of paraldehyde." He grinned briefly. "Wouldn't have taken it, probably, if he'd been right. Taste's enough to knock you down. Got to be kept quiet, Mrs. Carson; have to get an extra nurse. You're worn out, and he goes crazy whenever he sees Alice. I'll send for somebody. Ought to be two with him all the time. Afraid he'll break out some of those stitches and get up a peritonitis." He pawed at his two tufts of rusty hair in angry perplexity. "No sense to his being delirious this late," he grumbled. "Can't imagine what ails him; 'snot his physical condition, I'm sure. No; man's got something on his mind—something that scares him sick! Know what it is?"

His brilliantly blue eyes pinioned the older woman; but she bore their intent scrutiny well.

"Why, no, doctor," she answered mildly. "There's nothing to worry him, I'm sure. Of course, George has always been moody ever since I first knew him."

"Yah!" exploded the doctor. "'Moody,' hey? Whyn't you say grouchy and ugly?" He transferred his truculent stare to Alice. "*You* know what ails him?" he snapped. "Been quarreling with you, hadn't he, hey?"

The girl looked back at him bravely, but her black eyes were full of tears.

"Yes," she admitted remorsefully. "But I don't know what made him so cross."

"What'd he pick on you for?"

"Because I—I disobeyed him," replied the girl hesitantly. "It was about —no, doctor, I can't tell you what it was about. If I'd *only* stayed at home! If I'd done as he told me things might have been all right now. But how could I know? Oh, dear! There's a curse on the house—there's a curse on us all. And I brought it—I brought it!" She sobbed.

Doctor Otis turned a comically puzzled look upon Ward. Both hands went up to clutch the outstanding locks of rusty hair; a flood of crimson obscured his freckles.

"Yah!" he shouted. "Such rot! Ghosts with him, and curses with you! Yah! What a mess of foolishness! Young fellow, do *you* take any stock in this rot about ghosts?"

Ward gazed at him, unsmiling. "I'm beginning to," he confessed.

"Oh!" groaned the doctor, tugging at his hair until it seemed that he must uproot it entirely. "Oh, gosh! Mystery and mummery and rot! Why can't some of you speak out and explain all this slush, hey?"

But Alice shook her head determinedly. "No," she declared, "I can't —I *won't* tell you any more. I've done enough prying into things that weren't meant for me to know. You'd say it was all imagination, anyhow. And if I told all I know it wouldn't explain father's trouble."

She rose and hurried into the house, slender shoulders heaving. And with a disgusted grunt the doctor lurched down the steps and away, the very curves of his bowed legs declaring elo-

quently that he washed his hands of the idiocy of the whole Carson family.

Ward's hostess gave a small sigh. "Come, Arthur," said she, maintaining her serenity with a manifest effort; "let's go in to dinner. You and I can still eat, I hope."

And she led the way to the dining room with a hopeless gesture, as though to say that it was quite useless to puzzle her head further over the incomprehensibilities of her family.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VEILED WARNING.

ALICE made a tardy appearance at the dinner table, but ate almost nothing and soon retired to her room, pleading a headache. She looked wan and tired, so that Ward forbore to urge her, though he longed for her company. Her sad face drove him to a new impatience with this mystery. Let him but settle this affair, and then, he promised himself, there should be a swift wooing.

Mrs. Carson presently departed to sit with her husband, and the young man, left to his own devices wandered out to the wide porch. There he sat for a space, full of tender fancies, of lover's plans to bring back the forgotten smiles to those sweet lips. And then a renewed irritation swept over him. First he must solve this seemingly insolvable riddle. He glanced across the road.

There sat Mrs. Jacobs, hunched in her old-fashioned chair, tap-tapping with the thick crutch-handled cane and gazing steadfastly at the big house opposite her.

Ward watched her idly for a time, his mind running hopelessly over the round of its problem. The old car; Carson's strange fright at it; the quarrel; Alice's angry departure; the reappearance of the ancient machine. And then—the shot! And his discoveries of the morning—they only made matters worse. Fear gripped at his heart as he thought of that little revolver, from which one shot had been fired. It was still hidden in the door-pocket of Alice's car. He half rose, determined to hide the accursed thing, then dropped back. No, Hopkins had already seen it. And what, he wondered, had been the thoughts of that shrewd, leisurely person? He had said nothing.

The boy passed a hand nervously across his forehead; his head ached dully. Still gazing absently at the crippled old woman yonder, he fell to pondering her interest in this cryptic affair. From the first she had shown a strange, malevolent absorption in Carson's condition. He recalled her repetitions of the sick man's name, always with that drawling sneer. He puzzled over her air of uncanny wisdom, of mysterious knowledge; that odd declaration: "He knows what ails him—and *I* know!" He thought of her "witch word"—"Sal-o-me!"

This was the S'loam Martin of old Watson's tale; she had been maid to Grace Caldwell, mistress of the ghost car. There seemed no doubt that this fourteen-year-old tragedy was inextricably interwoven with the tangle of Carson's shooting; that the last had in some way grown out of the first. But how? What possible relation could there be between George Carson of Minnesota and Geoffrey Caldwell of Lakeside Park and California? Parenthetically he resolved to question Mrs. Carson when he might; to learn something, if possible, of Carson's earlier life. But even so—granting that he had known the Caldwells; that he had had some connection with that still unsolved double murder—how did Alice Macy, only his stepdaughter, and doubly innocent of that unknown past, come to be meshed in the grinding gears of this mill of the fates? For, despite

his inner rebellion, he was forced to the belief that she had in some way been privy to the reappearance of the ghost car.

Well, there was the living link between that old mystery and the new one; there, across the road: that distorted, grimacing old witch yonder. He rose, throwing away his cigarette, and descended the steps. If she only would, he felt that this woman could explain much that was dark to him. If she only would! But this grim play seemed to him a pantomime; none of its actors would say their lines.

Cap in hand, he approached the little stoop.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Jacobs," he greeted her.

Grimacing strangely the old lady peered at him from sharp, beady little eyes that were never still.

"How do," she answered grudgingly.

"I drove out to Lakeside Park this morning," began the young man.

"Yeh," said she dryly, "I heerd so."

"And out there," he went on, "I met an old gentleman, a Mr. Watson, who told me he used to be a friend of yours."

"Yeh?" repeated the old woman. Her face writhed and twitched disconcertingly; her eyebrows worked up and down. The sunken mouth, beneath her jutting, beaklike nose, narrowed and widened, the thin lips coming together with audible smacking sounds.

Ward sighed. He was not making much headway; this old woman was difficult to question.

"Mr. Watson told me all about the Caldwell case," he ventured. "He said you were employed in that family at the time of the murders."

Mrs. Jacobs fixed him with fierce little eyes. Her eternal mouthing had stopped for the moment; her face was still and very grim.

"Yeh," said she again. She regarded him for perhaps thirty seconds with a stare disquietingly intense. Then: "Young feller," she demanded, "what you drivin' at?" The grimacing, which had stopped momentarily, now broke out with renewed vigor. The effect was weird, uncanny; it would have been the despair of a medieval sculptor, seeking a model for some peculiarly evil gargoyle.

"What you drivin' at?" she repeated insistently. "Yeh, I was to Caldwellses fer years an' years. I was Miss Grace's own maid." Her cracked voice rang with pride. "I was there when Ed an' the old lady was shot, and my poor dear beat up so's she never got over it. An' I went with her when they took her to the 'sylum."

"And she's been there ever since," completed Ward, anxious to maintain her flow of talk.

But she stopped, glaring fiercely once more. Her grimacing ceased, as it seemed to in moments of stress.

"What you—what——" she broke out, then checked herself with a secret look. "Yeh," she finished dully. "Been there ever since—I s'pose. What'd you come over here fer, anyways?" she demanded. "Wa'n't to hold my hand, was it? What'd ye want, hey? Say it, an' git out, ye loafer!"

"Why," hesitated Ward, rather taken aback by this abrupt attack, "why, I just wanted to ask you. You see, I'm trying to find out about Mr. Carson's shooting. It was so mysterious, you see, and folks are accusing Miss Alice. And I—I——" He broke off, confused, beneath the old lady's ferocious glare.

"An' you come to me," she finished for him. "Yeh!" She cackled derisively, beating the floor with the tip of her stick. "What've *I* got to do with this here tony Mr.—eh—Carson, hey? I ain't got nothin' t' do with him, ner I don't want nothin' to do with him, neither—ner you, ye young fool. So they says Alice done it, hey? Good! Let 'em think so. *He* don't, ner *I*

don't. But I ain't goin' to say nothin' different, an' *he* better not, neither. No, ner you, young feller. You mark my words, now!" She spoke slowly and with grim emphasis. "You stand off fum them Carsons, young feller. Don't you go mixin' into this no more. It ain't healthy!"

She broke off, blinking at him savagely, then began again in a more affable tone.

"Prit' nigh had a accident yerself this mornin', didn't ye?" she inquired.

Ward looked at her closely; her tone was odd. "Yes," he admitted.

"Yey-us!" It was the stilted "society" voice of Chautauqua County. "Yey-us. Wey-ll"—she nodded at him portentously, reverting to her usual clipped speech—"them young fellers' hurt bad, I heerd. You watch out, Arthur Ward, you hee-ro soldier boy"—with a savage sneer—"er mebber next time it'll be *you*, 'stid of them!" Each word was accompanied by a sharp tap of the crutch-handled stick; the old woman's head nodded in time to them. "Now git out," she finished. "Git home t' yer tony friend, Mr.—eh—Carson. An' mind what I say: You go pokin' yer nose into this business and ye're li'ble to git it—snapped right—off!"

Ward beat a hasty retreat, followed by the old hag's sneering chuckle.

"You watch out, that's all!" she shrilled after him. "An' keep away fum Lakeside Park."

Back on his own porch, Ward smoked a cigarette in futile exasperation. Carson—Alice—even this old hag opposite—all possessed a knowledge of this affair which was denied him. If they would but speak—or even one of them—he felt that the mystery might clear itself. He was making no progress thus; he only became more hopelessly involved.

Then he fell to thinking of Mrs. Jacobs' threat—for it had been nothing less. She implied that "next time" *he* would be the victim. And this, today, had been no accident. True, the men were driving recklessly; they might have crashed, anyway; but *some one* had sprinkled that glass. Remembering that young Jacobs had passed him a few moments before, he wondered if it had been that sullen youth. It would have been a dreadful thing; but——

Ward shook his head. "No doubt it was meant for me," he reflected. "If I thought Billy was responsible I'd—I'd make him hard to catch!"

His jaws hardened. Grim lines came about his mouth and at the eye corners, transforming his pleasant face to a relentless mask. Billy Jacobs might well have shivered at the sight of it.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MIDNIGHT ALARM.

THAT night Ward lay long awake, tossing restlessly, mulling his problem over and over, forever grasping at a solution that seemed in plain sight, yet forever eluded him by a hair's breadth. Sleep fled from his aching eyes.

It was a still, black night. With wide eyes he stared at his windows, briefly illuminated by the headlights of passing cars, then abruptly vanishing into the blinding dark which printed red and purple squares upon his eyeballs. And so for hours, until the last late wayfarer had driven past, singing, and silence and darkness wrapped everything in an impenetrable shroud.

Ward glanced at the luminous hands of his wrist-watch; it was nearly two o'clock. A restless tension was upon him; that nervous horror which all returned soldiers know. Through his mind flashed unforgetable pictures of the past months; vivid, brutal etchings. He crouched in a pitchy dugout, deafened and shaken by enemy drum fire; crept through the noisome, pitted black-

ness of no man's land, tearing his flesh upon unseen wire. And at last he drifted gradually into an uneasy slumber, dreaming that he occupied a listening post—alone. A sluggish, blood-sated fly was crawling slowly across his face; his straining eyes saw nothing but the black dark which danced with tiny specks of fire. But to his ears came soft, half-heard rustlings; a faint creak, as of the leather belt across a straining shoulder, out there in the dark. In his dream he froze, rigid; every sense was merged in that of hearing. Yes, there was some one out there—a footfall, faint but unmistakable. Then came a soft rap on the door, shattering the dream to fragments.

Broad awake on the instant, Ward sprang upright, his hand snatching at a nonexistent rifle.

"Yes!" he called guardedly; and wiped sweat from his forehead. It had been a gripping dream.

"Arthur!" came a small voice through the door. "Arthur, are you there? There's somebody creeping round outside the house! I heard him —and I'm scared." The faint voice quavered childishly.

With a soldier's celerity the boy sprang into trousers and shoes, and emerged, blinking. In the hall stood Alice Macy, her long black braids shining beneath the night light. She was just from bed; her little bare feet showed beneath a flowered kimono.

She came very close, plucking at the boy's sleeve. "I'm awfully scared," she confided in a very small whisper. "There's something creeping round outside, and everything's so queer—and so I called you. Oh, Arthur, do you suppose it could be—a ghost?"

The boy grinned; he was inured to darkness. "I guess not," he replied. "We'll see. Have you got a gun?" Then he bit his tongue, thinking of that revolver in the yellow roaster.

But the girl did not flinch. "Not here," she whispered. "But there's father's shotgun, out in the woodshed —and it's loaded."

Together the two tiptoed down the back stairs, groping through the darkness. Alice held Ward's hand like a child. They passed through the kitchen, instinctively avoiding obstacles.

"Out here," whispered the girl. "Right in that corner. Don't you want a light?"

"No," answered Ward. "Mustn't scare him away, you know. I want him." His exploring hand ran tentatively along the unseen wall. "Ah, here it is! Now, then; I'll believe he's a ghost if both barrels of this don't hurt him."

Slipping out of his shoes he crept stealthily toward the back door, a faintly lighter square in the Stygian blackness. From the direction of the little garage came an almost inaudible creak, as of closing doors; then silence.

Ward swung the screen cautiously back and dropped flat on the ground outside, pushing the shotgun before him. Alice, left behind in the shed, gave a shuddering sigh of terror; but the boy smiled in the darkness. He felt no fear; this was his work, this well-remembered midnight stalking. He sniffed the damp air luxuriously, with vague, whimsical regret for the absence of the appropriate odor, and hitched noiselessly forward.

Gradually his alert eyes made out the dim skyline, always more visible from the ground; his gaze roved for a moving bulk against this background. And so he crept, by painful degrees, to the corner of the house. From somewhere ahead he heard faint sounds; the rustling of the grass beneath furtive feet. But like the seasoned campaigner that he was, he withheld his fire for a visible mark. The footfalls, scarcely heard, seemed moving along the side of the house toward

Carson's window, where burned a dim night lamp.

"I can line him against that," thought Ward.

And then through the gloom came a long, shuddering groan; a hair-raising sound, there in the dark. It swelled, quavering, to a shrill, agonized scream:

"Jeff! Oh, Jeff—*don't!*"

At the cry Ward leaped up, hair prickling eerily. It had been a dreadful sound. Behind him he heard Alice's terror-stricken voice: "Oh, Arthur—Arthur!" and a tumult arose within the sick room.

But the boy heeded none of these things; his quarry was located. He raced toward a shadowy shape outlined against the wall beneath Carson's chamber.

At the sound of his coming the dim figure sprang forward and away. Ward stopped, shotgun ready.

"Halt!" he barked, in the crisp, arresting tones of the sentry, whose confident timber is eloquent of loaded guns and a cheerfully ferocious willingness to fire.

It convinced. The flying figure stopped dead.

"Who goes there?" challenged Ward, in the familiar formula. All this was taking on the cut-and-dried outlines of a familiar routine. The man had stopped; there was no need to fire. He suppressed a yawn, feeling vaguely disappointed.

"Who goes there?" he repeated sharply.

Dead silence.

Thereupon Ward departed from the manual of interior guard duty as many another good soldier has done upon due occasion. After all it would be a pity to shoot—unnecessarily. People were so apt to ask questions.

"I've got you clear against the lake, my friend," he remarked affably. "And in my hand is a double-barreled shotgun. I never qualified as an expert, but I think I could hit you with one charge, at least. Of course, it may be nothing but birdshot; still I think you'd better speak right up, or else stand very, very still while I take a look at you."

He advanced slowly, shotgun trained upon the motionless, silent shape. "Scared speechless, I expect," he reflected, half aloud.

At a light step behind him he flinched briefly; but he dared not turn lest he lose his mark.

"Don't shoot, Arthur," said a timid voice at his elbow. "It's only me. I was afraid to stay back there all alone. Oh, Arthur, did you hear that scream? It *is* a ghost, isn't it?" Her teeth were chattering audibly; the hand which grasped his arm shook.

"Well," replied the boy, "if it's a ghost he seems to have a healthy fear of firearms. Don't blame him much" —this louder, for the benefit of his victim—"at this range I could make a hole in him bigger than Mammoth Cave."

At the regulation five paces he halted, peering through the dark at a boyish, shrinking shape.

"Now then, my friend, speak up," he urged, "or a collander'll be watertight to you. Name, rank and organization—er, that is, who are you, and what are you doing, yelling under decent folks' windows at this time of night?"

And at last an unsteady, quavering voice stammered back: "Dud-don't shoot, m-mister. It's on'y me—Billy Jacobs, sir."

The girl gave a sigh of relief; then it was not a ghost! But Ward's anger began to rise. He grew suspicious of this youth.

"Oh," said he irritably. "Only Billy Jacobs. You're always round somewhere, *aren't* you, son? I'm tempted to spank you good. What are you doing here?"

"I was just cuttin' through t' get

home," answered the boy. The threatening muzzle had dropped; accordingly, his voice gathered assurance and became sullenly aggrieved. "It ain't no way to do, pointin' a gun at folks just fer walkin' past yer house. You c'd be 'rested fer that, mister."

"Yes?" queried Ward sweetly. "I suppose I could be arrested for pumping you full of buckshot, too, my son —and like as not I will be if you don't open up and explain yourself a little better than that."

"Wull," the boy went on resentfully, "I been to a dance, over to Ellery. An' comin' home my motor cycle broke down, back on the hill here, an' I had to leave her an' cut 'cross lots t' get home." His voice resounded with injured innocence. "An' then you had to come out an' yell after me—scart me out of a year's growth, ye did! That ain't no way t' do, mister."

"Yelled at you," repeated Ward sharply. "And what were you doing, yelling under a sick man's window?"

"Me?" whined young Jacobs. *"Me?* I—I—— Honest, mister, I never said a word." His voice hushed to a whisper. "But they was somebody out here behind me that yelled. 'Jeff!' she says, 'Don't!' I s'posed 't was somebody in the house. An' then *you* had to holler at me, too."

The colloquy had taken place perhaps a dozen yards from the house. Through it Ward had been conscious of some unusual stir within; now he turned toward Carson's window. It was brightly lighted; shadows passed across its screen. A voice spoke insistently, cutting across a wail of inarticulate protest: "Now, Mr. Carson, you must lie still. Better call the doctor, May."

Ward turned swiftly back. "Seems to be trouble in there," said he. "We must get in. Now, my son, I think you're a liar. I think you did that yelling yourself. And if you were grown, instead of a half portion, I'd take you apart, right here! But you listen to me: If any trouble comes of your foolishness to-night, I'll take you over my knee and spank you—good! Now get out."

He turned away in complete disregard of the boy's protestations of innocence, and hobbled back to the house on bare, tender feet.

Within there was bustling and calling to and fro. Lights were snapped on; a day nurse, kimono-clad, hurried downstairs as the young people entered.

"What's the matter, nurse?" Mrs. Carson called over the banister.

"Miss Evans just woke me," answered the nurse. "Mr. Carson's worse again. Oh, Mr. Ward, you're just the one. Go call Doctor Otis at once, please."

Arthur stamped into his shoes and raced across the lawn to the doctor's darkened house. He rang the bell repeatedly, so that its jangling insistence came back to him through the door.

In a moment Doctor Otis appeared, half dressed, the rusty wings of hair standing up grotesquely.

"Quit it," he advised sourly. "You'll pull the handle out. 'Smatter? What's that? Carson again? Be right there."

Reaching inside the door, he snatched up his bag and lurched swiftly after Ward, swaying on short, bandy legs.

Through the front door and into the sick room he plunged, slamming its door upon a shrill outburst from the wounded man:

"They've come for me—they're after me! Let me go—I tell you I heard her calling me, under the window!"

CHAPTER XX.

A DISCUSSION.

THAT was a long, long night. The sick man's ceaseless babble sounded through the house, making sleep impossible. It was a constant iteration: "They're coming after me—

ghosts, all ghosts!" But even in his delirium the man used no names, avoided everything which might have explained his fears.

Despairing of rest, Ward finally threw on his clothes and returned to the living room. Here Alice already sat, tragically beautiful in a loose, frilly housegown, her thick, shining braids coiled about the small, proud head. She welcomed him mutely, drawing aside her skirts that he might drop down beside her on the sofa, then returned to her somber contemplation of the sick-room door. Her slender, restless fingers twisted and untwisted as she listened to her father's crying: "Ghosts—all ghosts!" repeated with an accent of terror quite indescribable.

Mrs. Carson was wandering aimlessly about the house, dust cloth in hand, struggling to control her anxiety by familiar occupations. Her plump face quivered pitifully; her clear blue eyes held a child's pathetic bewilderment. Presently she drifted out into the dining room, and Ward heard the clink of silver. Then she returned, dropping into a chair with a heavy sigh.

"I was setting the table for breakfast," she quavered, "George's place and all. I don't hardly know what I'm doing, children; I'm so upset. Talk to me a little."

Alice sobbed once. "I c-can't, mother," she whispered.

Ward cast desperately about for a subject; he could think of nothing but the mystery of that old, deserted house.

At last, "Have you always lived in Minnesota?" he asked, striving to make his tones casual.

His hostess nodded. "I was born in Minneapolis," said she; "on Courtwright Street. In a big brick house; it had ivy all over the walls. I was married there—and Alice was born there. And my first husband died in that house. Folks sent such lovely flowers to the f-funeral. Oh, dear! I wish I were back—everything was so p-peaceful and nice. I wish——" She checked herself, looking affrightedly at the sick-room door. Ward wondered if she was regretting the marriage which had brought her here and to this hour of stress.

"And Mr. Carson?" he asked, with a sort of conscience-smitten urgency. It was cruel, he thought, to take advantage of her confused grief; but he might learn something from her of the man's unknown past.

"Oh, George," replied his hostess. "No, George was from the West. He used to have a grain business in St. Paul. I think he came from California. It's funny," she went on, as though the idea had occurred to her for the first time; "it's real queer, but I hardly know anything about George, up to the time we met him. He was always such a close-mouthed man; he never says anything about himself. I know he owned a lot of wheat lands out there—in Sacramento, I think. Somewhere out that way. He always seemed to love the West; he thought Minnesota, even, was too far east. And when Alice and I wanted to come here to Chautauqua he got quite excited about it, I remember." Unconsciously her hands were twisting the dust cloth; now she raised it absently to her wet eyes, leaving a grotesque smear beneath them. "Oh, dear! If I'd only listened to him this never would have happened. George always declared trouble would come if he went East."

Already the night was spent; dawn began to show gray in the east as Doctor Otis finally emerged from Carson's chamber. His face was drawn and white, so that its great freckles stood out with startling distinctness. He dropped into a chair with a dispirited sigh, his shoulders sagging wearily.

"Well, he's quiet, at least," he announced. "But I don't know. What-

ever started him off like that? Ghosts under his window calling him, and all that rot?"

"Why," explained Ward, "Alice and I heard somebody creeping around in the night, and I slipped out the back way with Mr. Carson's shotgun. The fellow seemed to be somewhere around the garage; then he slipped up along the side of the house to Carson's window and let out an awful groan and then yelled. It *was* a scary sound, out there in the dark. Well, I held him up, and it turned out to be young Jacobs from across the road."

"Billy Jacobs, hey?" ejaculated the doctor. "The young limb! What did he have to say for himself?"

"Why, he claimed he'd had engine trouble with that motor cycle; left it up on the hill and started to walk home, cross lots. And he denied that he'd made a sound; said he'd heard the yelling and thought it came from the house. Maybe he thought it was a ghost, too," he finished.

Alice gasped faintly.

"Ghosts!" Doctor Otis snorted, disgusted. "You, too? Rot! I bet he did the hollering himself, the brat. I'll tend to him! But whoever it was, and whatever they said, it surely set Carson off in good shape."

Ward nodded soberly, reflecting. The thought struck him that young Jacobs, too, was involved with this mysterious something which connected the shooting with that fourteen-year-old murder. "Oh, Jeff, don't!" These had been the last words of Grace Caldwell, according to the old man's story. Upon them she had gone into the long silence of insanity. Why should they have driven the sick man into delirium? Or was it no more than that eerie shriek, breaking the stillness of the night?

His mind fell back upon its weary round, and presently brought him again to the revolver discovered in Alice's roadster. Hopkins had seen it; would the discovery, heaped upon all the other suspicious circumstances, drive him to overt action? It had almost convinced Ward himself.

The thought, coming after this sleepless, stressful night, drove him to frenzy. He must see the constable at once, must learn what the man purposed to do. The sun was rising; no doubt he would be about by this time.

With some murmured remark about taking the air before breakfast Ward left upon the doctor's heels. Across the road Billy Jacobs' motor cycle lay upon its side in the grass, next to the little brown house. If it had really been left on the hill all night, thought Ward, its owner must have made a very early start after it.

He walked briskly down the road, while the fresh morning air cleared his aching head.

He found Mr. Hopkins busied about his tiny floating home, loading tackle and bait into a battered rowboat.

"Up mighty early, ain't ye, mister?" was his greeting. "Goin' fishin' with me? Got lots o' spare tackle, if ye be."

"No," said Ward soberly. "I want to talk to you."

The constable tossed his quid into the lake and turned back into the cabin. "Shoot," he drawled, gnawing a fresh chew from a hard black plug of tobacco.

"It's about that pistol," began the boy abruptly; "the one I found in Miss Macy's roadster."

"Uh-huh. Well, what about it?" replied Hopkins with provoking indifference.

"Why," said Ward impatiently, "that's what I want to know. It was a thirty-two; you saw it. It had been shot off—once. Do you think—suspect—are you going to——"

"Nope, I ain't," answered the constable, with a quizzical grin. "I ain't goin' to do nothin'—yet. I'm kinda like Abe Zwick, down to Ripley; I don't

never do nothing s' long 's it c'n be put off. Abe, he's always a great feller t' put things off, ye know. When he come t' get married, 'bout ten years ago, the time they set turned out t' be a awful cold, stormy night. Well, folks all come; preacher'd got there, an' even the girl was goin' to play that there weddin' piece, 'Low-*hen*-grin.' But they wa'n't no Abe. Got t' be nine-thutty—weddin' was t' be at eight —an' nothin' doin'. Fin'ly somebody hitched up an' druv over t' Abe's place, t' see what ailded him. Well, they found Abe in the kitchen in his sock-feet, smokin' a old corncob pipe an' sawin' on his old fiddle. An' when they asked him why wasn't he to the weddin'.

" 'Why,' says Abe, s'prised like, 'it's such a bad night, an' all, I s'posed o' course they'd put it off!' Heh, heh!

"Well, son, I've noticed if you put things off long enough, lots of times you don't have t' do 'em at all. An' as fer Miss Alice, son, you needn't to worry 'bout me 'restin' her. I ain't goin' to b'lieve she done it, less'n she says so—an' anyways, she ain't goin' to run away; she'll he right here.

"Y' see, this here's a kind of a mixed-up mess, the whole business, an' they's lots to it don't nobody know—yet. An' that's mostly because them that *does* know anything ain't telling it."

He fixed the younger man with a gaze of surprising shrewdness; Ward's opinion of the gangling, suspendered loafer, already kindly, took a sudden rise.

"That's right," the boy agreed fervently. "Alice knows something, but she won't talk. And old Mrs. Jacobs —and Carson himself——" He broke off. "Carson was awfully sick in the night," said he. "Somebody yelled under his window, and it seemed to set him 'most crazy. I went out, and it was Billy Jacobs."

"Uh-huh," said Hopkins slowly. "S'loam's boy. I kinda s'picioned S'loam was mixed into it, someway. What d' he holler, huh?"

"Why," said Ward reluctantly, "it was 'Jeff, don't!' or something like that."

"Yeah," commented the constable in a peculiar voice. " 'Jeff, don't!' Huh! Ye-ah. You was out to Lakeside yestiddy, wa'n't ye? Uh-huh. Seen old man Watson, too, I guess?"

"Yes," answered Ward. "He told me all about the Caldwell murders. And I drove on to the old place and looked into the barn. That same old car's still in there, and it doesn't look like it had moved for fifteen or twenty years. The doors were locked with a rusty old padlock, too—but there was fresh oil around the keyhole." And then he repeated the patriarch's fantastic tale of the ghost car that wandered of nights.

"Uh-huh," repeated the constable slowly. "So 'Gran'pa' says they's a ghost out there, too. Never heerd tell of a automobeel ghost—but mebbe he's right. Gran'pa ain't nobody's fool, if he *is* terr'ble old. Used ta be out there lots, when I was a kid. He was pritty old even them days."

He blinked quizzically at the boy for a moment, then spat out through the open door. "S'loam Jacobs—'twas Martin then—used ta work out there. Them Caldwellses is mixed into this thing somewheres. Son, did ye ever wonder if mebbe George Carson wasn't really Jeff Caldwell?"

Ward started. "What do you mean?" he cried. "I've thought he might have had something to do with that case. But Geoffrey Caldwell is in California, they say." Then he stopped, remembering his hostess' remark. Carson, also, had come from California; and Carson hated the East.

"Yeah," drawled the constable. "But he ain't *tied* there, is he? An' things bein' as they was, 'twouldn't be any

more'n nachrul fer him t'change his name."

"But even so," objected the boy, "it doesn't help much. It would explain why he never would go out past Lakeside; and it's no wonder he was frightened by seeing that old car. But somebody shot him—some woman. And Alice was out that way. That's what *I* want straightened out."

"Well," said Hopkins, "mebbe I'm all wrong. I never seen Jeff Caldwell on'y onct, when we was both kids. But I seen the old man, Sol, one time." He slapped a lean thigh. "By jolly," he cried, "that's where I seen that same high-headed look Carson give me, other day—when I was a kid, out to Gran'pa Watsonses. Old Sol, he druv up one time, hossback; he was mad at Gran'pa fer spankin' Jeff. He had a big black beard, an' just such queer green eyes. By jolly!" His faded eyes betrayed an unwonted excitement.

"'N' as fer the woman," he went on, "Alice Macy ain't the on'y black-eyed woman, neither. How 'bout Grace Caldwell, huh?"

"But she's crazy," replied Ward, "and locked up in an asylum somewhere."

"Crazy; yeah. But is she locked up? By jolly, le's find out, young feller."

He began rummaging in a locker and brought forth a disorderly heap of old newspapers and bills. "I got a piece here, some'eres, tells where they sent her," he explained. "Yeah, here 'tis: 'Caldwell Case Still Baffles Prosecution,'" he read slowly. "'Sister of Accused Man Hopelessly Insane, Sent to Private Hospital.' An' it tells where, down below, some'eres.

"Uh-huh. 'Rest Haven, in Buffalo, New York. Doctor Lawlor's sanitarium for nervous cases.' Hopelessly insane, they says; I s'pose likely she must be there yet. But I aim to find out."

He pawed through the locker, finally unearthing two or three crumpled yellow telegraph forms. Extracting a stub pencil from one hip pocket, together with a jackknife and his plug of chewing tobacco, he set himself to indite a message.

"There," said he finally, and passed the result to Ward. "You take that over t' the station, young feller, an' send it off."

This was the telegram:

DOCTOR LAWLOR, Rest Haven Hospital, Buffalo, New York.
Grace Caldwell, Westfield, still there? Wire collect. Rush.
EDW. HOPKINS, Constable.
Amidon Point, New York.

CHAPTER XXI.

ANOTHER ACCIDENT.

AS Ward started off with the message the other checked him. "What ye goin' to do to-day, son?" he asked.

"Why," said the boy, "I thought of going back to Lakeside; that is, if Mr. Carson is quiet. I want to take another look at that old automobile there; I didn't know, but I might break into the barn and see if the engine would turn over."

"Well, mister," drawled the constable, "if it does it'd be dreadful funny, after fourteen years. Makes no difference if they was stuff put in them cylinders, somebody'd of had to fix it up a whole lot—somebody that knew all about gas engynes, too. They couldn't no woman like Alice—ner Grace Caldwell, neither—start it right off. It'd take a good mechanic all his time to get her going. Huh! This ain't no morning fer fishing, anyways. B'lieve I'll put this tackle back an' ride out there with ye. I'd kinda like to see that old place again meself. You go send that there tel'gram, son, and git yer auto. I'll wait here for

ye. We'd ought t' get an answer, time we get back."

Thus it was arranged. Ward dispatched the message and walked back to the big cottage. Carson was sleeping quietly, his hostess said; he was exhausted after his night's excitement. No, there was nothing Arthur could do; everything was quiet. Alice had gone back to bed.

"If you can spare me," Ward ventured, "I think I'll take the car out for a little while."

"Why of course, boy. There's nothing to do here; run right along. This is a pretty poor kind of a vacation for you, I'm afraid," she apologized. "But you've been such a help to us!" The tired blue eyes filled with tears.

So Ward, feeling rather guilty, backed the big roadster out and drove down to the lake front for his passenger.

Mr. Hopkins climbed in and settled himself in the cushioned seat with a contented grunt. "Sets easier than mine," he commented. "Drive on, son. Step on her. Don't be afraid fer me, even if I *be* kinda slow when I have to do my own locomotin'."

The young man stepped on her accordingly; cutout open, the great machine sprang forward with a deafening roar, rapidly picking up to fifty miles an hour as it breasted the first rise of the long hill. Ward slid down in the seat, eyes just above the rim of the wheel. He was confident in his mastery of this huge creature of steel and rubber, whose veins ran oil, and whose noisy breath was gasoline vapor. The thrill of swift motion ran pleasurably through his relaxed body.

And then, at the crest of the hill, he became conscious of a jarring syncopation, breaking through the motor's deep song; a rythmical thudding which shook the stout fabric beneath him. Instinctively he slowed down.

"That other tire must have gone," said he. "I didn't hear it either; but we've got a flat wheel."

His companion was leaning far out over the running-board. "Nope," he snapped, his usual leisurely speech hurried and urgent. "Swing her off—right off'n the concrete—an' then stop, quick!"

Ward obeyed the insistence of his tone. And even as they lurched into the shallow ditch, going perhaps ten miles an hour, there came a plunging jolt under which the springs groaned again. The right side of the car dropped sickeningly, throwing him forward against the steering post.

Gasping from the impact, he looked forward, to see one wheel rolling merrily down the gutter ahead.

"Huh!" commented Hopkins, quite unshaken, and spat meditatively into the ditch. "It's softer to light here, anyways. I seen that wheel was comin' off."

He labored out of the slanting car, whose right-hand running-board rested on the ground, and slouched off to retrieve the errant wheel, a dozen paces down the road.

"Huh," he repeated. "Hub-cap's still on. Where's yer wrench, son? Le's see what happened. I ain't no showfeer, mebbe, but I used ta be reel handy about a thrashin' machine."

With lean, deft hands he unscrewed the hub-cap and thrust a finger exploringly into the bearings, then drew it out, grease-smeared.

"Bearings is all right," he announced, with a puzzled look; and walked back to the wrecked car and stooped over its front axle, half buried in dirt.

This he swept aside, leaning far over. "Well, by jolly!" he commented solemnly. "Looks like they was somebody round here didn't like you, young feller. They's a hole fer a key in that exe, but they ain't no key, ner no broken pieces of it, neither. An' no burr. Your bearings is all right; your

exe is all right. But they wa'n't nothin' t' hold that wheel on. No, sir. Somebody took your exe nut off."

The two stared at each other in silence for a moment, while the same thought grew in both minds.

"Billy Jacobs was out round your house in the night," drawled the constable. "I s'spect that hollerin' under the window wa'n't *all* he came fer, neither. This here wheel was left that way accidentally-on-purpose. Young feller, who do you s'pose put that glass in the road yestiddy?"

"Why," said Ward in growing anger, "young Jacobs passed me on his motor cycle just a few minutes before I ran into it."

"An' then them other fellers come along an' run into it. That there glass was fer you, son. 'Pears to me like them Jacobses didn't want you pirougin' round Lakeside; don't it, huh?"

"Why," repeated Ward, "I *did* tell the old lady I was going out that way, I guess. And I told Billy last night I'd probably go back to-day. Do you suppose that young—— Why, man, it's murder!"

"Well," replied the other, "I don't s'pose he reelly meant to *kill* anybody."

"I'll kill him, though," threatened Ward. His face was very stern.

"Now, now, son," the constable rebuked him. "That ain't no way t' talk. We c'd throw quite a scare into him 'bout this here wheel, I s'pose —but we can't *prove* nothin'. An' mebbe he didn't have nothin' at all t' do with that glass. Still I don't know but I'd ought to 'rest the boy, mebbe. But anyways, you leave this here t' me, son. You're too hot-headed. An' lissen t' me a minnit. They's *somethin'* up to Lakeside awful queer; must be—er S'loam wouldn't be so set t' keep folks away. Uh-huh. Son, looks t' me's if we'd begun t' strike bottom, even if 't is terrible muddy an' roily down there. Let's go home, an' see if they's a answer to that telegram yet. An' then I want you should come over to Doc Otises, an' talk t' him some. We're goin' t' need help—an' doc, he's a reel smart, eddicated feller. Come on. 'Tain't so fur but what we c'n walk back. I'll catch young Bill, an' put a flea in his ear!"

Leaving the broken car as it lay, they walked slowly down the hill and into the village. At the garage Ward would have stopped, but the other's lean strong hand drew him on.

"You leave young Bill to me," he ordered. "I'll fix 'im."

So they went on, and presently entered the dingy little telegraph office.

"Say, Walt," called the constable, above the busy clicking of the instruments, "is they a telegram here fer me yet, huh?"

The operator waggled a hand behind him; he was crouched at the desk, pencil in hand.

"Just comin' in," he averred. "Here 'tis."

He handed over the yellow slip, peering curiously at the two men. But they were oblivious.

For this was the message:

EDW. HOPKINS, Constable, Amidon Point, New York.

Grace Caldwell dead. Eloped August 11th, traced to Niagara River, where committed suicide. Body not recovered.

LAWLOR, Resident Physician.
Rest Haven Hospital.

The two looked at each other wordlessly; even in the constable's faded, quizzical eyes there was a hint of puzzled awe. They turned away.

"Hey!" called the operator after them. "Hey! You, Ed—that there message's collect!"

To be continued in the next issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

"Stop Thief!"

by Harvey Wickham

THE sight of an open door attracted Sutton's attention. If it had not been for that he might have gone on to the end of the street and reached the avenue, and if he had but reached the avenue he might have continued looking for a job—for there was business on that avenue. But the street was devoted to residences, of a rich if unpretentious sort. A careless servant had left the front door in the richest-looking residence of all slightly ajar. Sutton was lost.

His movements had been desultory, like those of a man who expected nothing but failure. Now they suddenly became quick and unhesitating. He turned from the sidewalk, mounted the steps, and entered the house as if he belonged there.

He found himself in an elegantly furnished hallway at the foot of a broad flight of stairs. There was not a soul in sight. His feet on the thick rug made not the slightest sound. The stairs themselves were of polished wood, but in the middle of each tread there was fastened a piece of carpet as soft as velvet. It was like an invitation.

He mounted to the upper story with all the stealth of a cat. Voices were to be heard now, but they came from some hidden part of the mansion. Sutton had found another door, that of a boudoir this time. He crossed the room to a dressing table. There lay a gold mesh bag stuffed with crumpled bills. Evidently the owner had no idea of the value of money. All the arrogant carelessness of life-long wealth was evident in this treatment of bills. It was an insult to the poor.

He picked up the mesh bag and thrust it into his pocket. At the same instant he was conscious that some one had entered the room adjoining.

It had been a hard day, coming at the end of a hard week. Preceding it were weeks and weeks—an endless chain of them it appeared on looking back—all filled with hardship, bitterness, and disappointment. A few years ago life had been soft enough; too soft if he only had known it. Brought up by an indulgent mother with a small income, he had been free to do as he liked. And what he liked was to row and to box and to run—to exercise rather than work. He had no special need for earning money. Then came the loss of his mother, and the discovery that all claim to the property which had supported them ceased at her death.

It was an unkind trick for fate to play, to let him lie on the lap of ease, and then suddenly to dump him all unprepared to the ground. Those optimists who declared that one without adequate training could obtain lucrative employment merely by asking for it had obviously never made the experiment of trying. If only he had been taught a trade or had learned a profession things might have turned out differently. As it was, a feeling of resentment, born when his old world went to pieces, took hold of him more and

more, and soon began to show in the drooping set of his mouth, and in the hard, dark glitter of his eyes. He was just the sort of man employers did not want. They read him at a glance, and sent him on. By the time he learned what it was to be hungry he had come to the conclusion that in all the world there was not a helping hand or a kind and unselfish heart.

So there he stood, a trespasser in a strange boudoir, a stolen purse in his pocket, and the sound of approaching footsteps in his ears.

He bolted for the stairs, which was precisely what he should not have done. An experienced burglar would have known better. He had succeeded in entering unobserved because he had kept his wits about him. He had only to retire the same way, without making a sound, and the chance of a clean getaway was still good.

But those footsteps frightened him. Arrest and imprisonment were things he had not learned to face, even in his mind, and at the thought of them now he completely lost his head. Speed seemed all at once the only thing which could save him. He struck the stairs in full panic, and his heels came down upon the slippery surface of the top tread instead of upon the carpeting. He lost his footing, and fell.

Fortunately he fell feet foremost and was not hurt or even interrupted in his flight. But the noise had aroused the whole house. Shouts seemed to come from every direction, and above them all arose clear and distinct the age-old hue and cry, the "view-hello" of the manhunt:

"Stop thief!"

When he reached the street he was no longer a man, but a wild beast with a pack of hounds at his heels. And now it was that his saving fondness for athletics stood him in good stead. Sutton, the spoiled child of an unwise mother, would not have had a chance in the world. But Sutton, the erstwhile amateur sprinter, with muscles of steel and lungs like a pair of bellows, had still—a chance. That was all, but perhaps it would be enough.

He turned in the direction from which he had come, though it was not with any idea of reaching home. He had no home. The cheap lodging house where he had retired to fight his losing battle as a respectable, law-abiding citizen had turned him out the day before, and he had spent the night in a park. But instinct told him to get away from the avenue where there was certain to be a policeman on every other corner. His pursuers no longer mattered. Having failed to prevent his exit from the house, they never could overtake him now. What he feared was the cry which they sent before them:

"Stop thief!"

He could not get ahead of the sound of that cry, and he would certainly be headed off and captured once it reached the ears of an officer. At every corner fresh recruits joined in the chase, but they were careful not to take advantage of their position and get in his path. They were afraid of him. A policeman, however, would not be afraid. He would have a gun—and the jig would be up.

Sutton turned a right angle at every block, so that for an instant he would only appear to passers-by as a man running. Sounds do not carry well around corners; and corners, too, cut off the view of those behind. If only some way of hiding would present itself during one of these momentary respites; some way of throwing the hounds off the track.

Finally it came. He turned into a street through which passed a trolley line, and there, right before him, was a man dressed not unlike himself, who was running his level best to catch a car. At the same instant a sign, "Room and Board," stuck in the window of

one of the dingy-looking dwellings which characterized this new quarter, caught his eye. He was up the steps in a bound, and, shrinking behind one of the jambs of the open vestibule, he watched his pursuers take the wrong scent. Then the inner door opened and he was face to face with a young woman of about his own age, who, quickly and without a word, stood aside to let him pass.

She was not at all the sort of young woman one would have expected to see in that forlorn neighborhood, where every unscrubbed porch and littered yard of pavement told of better days, long past and of present poverty and despair in a winning contest against happiness and thrift. She should have been prematurely worn and ugly, in a soiled and faded dress, with cheap finery, perhaps, and tousled hair, and the sallow, unhealthy look of those who eat only when and where they can. Instead she wore a tailor-made gown worthy of the daughter of a banker, and her cheeks were as fresh and sweet as any roses that ever grew. She was, in fact, like a bit of Sutton's old life come back to mock him.

Only—the girl did not mock. She swiftly closed the door. He had not rung the bell, and here he was already in the house out of sight from the street. But for a moment he did not realize how strange her conduct really was. He was too glad with the thought of his escape, and barely had presence of mind to stifle his quick breathing and to announce, with such a show of carelessness and ease as he could muster:

"I am looking for a room. Could you let me have one—right away?"

"Go up stairs two flights," she answered quietly, as if admitting breathless gentlemen and following them like a rear-guard were an everyday occurrence. "Up there you take the first turn to your right."

Already he fancied that he heard sounds from the street. It would soon be discovered that the man boarding the car was not the one who was wanted. This refuge might prove no better than a trap, once a search was instituted. But it was the best he could do.

"I'll take it. It's—it's just what I wanted," said Sutton after one glance at the room.

He had forgotten to ask the price, and was about to draw out the mesh bag when he suddenly remembered that whatever else he did he must not let any one get a glimpse of that. No, he must hide it somewhere, get rid of the girl, and then see if he could not make his way through the back of the house to the other street without being seen. He began fumbling with the catch of the bag in his pocket, and finally brought out a bill. It was already in the girl's hand before he noticed its denomination.

Sutton's jaw drooped.

"I—you'll have to excuse me," he said, stammering. "I haven't anything smaller."

He had given her a hundred-dollar bill. A man in a threadbare suit with his shoes run down at the heels and his collar in need of a laundering, asking for a room in a third-class house, offering a hundred dollar bill to clench the bargain!

The ghost of a smile flitted over the girl's face.

"The room is ten dollars a week—with meals," she said. "You'll have to wait a moment for your change."

She was gone. Madly Sutton flung himself against the door, but it was too late. He had heard a key turn in the lock, and the panels were calculated to last till the crack of doom. No flimsy work had been put into this old and once-elegant house. He was a prisoner.

"She saw and understands everything. She has gone to give me up,"

he said, groaning as he dropped hopelessly into a chair.

He heard the sharp burr of the doorbell. The pursuers had arrived. Perhaps they had seen him entering. Anyway, all the houses in the block would be looked into. There was no escape. And yet——

Sutton's heart gave a bound. He had just noticed that the room opened into a second, and that the girl had forgotten to close the door between. He passed through this second room into the hallway at the head of the stairs without difficulty, and crept down a flight to listen. The girl was talking with a man on the porch.

"No, sir," he heard her say, "no one came in just now."

"And you haven't any new lodgers—anybody you don't know much about, who might have slipped in with their own key when you weren't looking?"

"We haven't any boarders, or lodgers either, just at present. I am alone with my mother. And I've been at work right here in the front of the house for the last hour. Nobody could possibly have come in."

"All right. Thank you, miss. The scoundrel must have dodged into some other place. I'm afraid he has climbed out a back window by this time and made himself scarce. Too bad I had to bother you."

Sutton's legs were shaking so that he could hardly stand when the girl returned and discovered him on the landing.

"I'll have your change in a minute," she began. "And I do believe I absentmindedly locked you in your room. I remembered it just now when I was talking with a peddler at the door.

"The room next mine was open," said Sutton, staring like one dazed.

"Well, that was lucky. Go and put the key in your pocket before I do it again. There are no extra keys to the street door, though. I am afraid you'll always have to ring."

"You—you are very kind." He emphasized the words with some faint expression of his overflowing thankfulness, but there was that in the girl's look which forbade any clearer acknowledgment of what she had done or any protest against this peculiar arrangement concerning the street-door key. She no longer smiled even the ghost of a smile. Her eyes clouded with a look which it was hard to interpret. It might have been anxiety, it might have been a thousand other things.

Left alone, Sutton returned to his room and sat down to consider. That the girl knew him to be a fugitive there was of course no longer the slightest doubt. The so-called "peddler" must have given her most of the particulars. Yet she had shielded him, had even laid herself open to a charge as accessory by telling a story which might easily make her guilty knowledge capable of proof. Why had she done so?

Sutton felt the fire of hatred against his kind, which had been burning so fiercely in his heart, die down and give place to an inexpressible sense of relief and comfort. Here was a helping hand stretched out to him at last. Here was one capable of pitying the hare chased by the hounds, even to the extent of going heroically to its rescue.

He felt the cessation of long-continued pain. It was not only relief from immediate danger, but from the all-enveloping loneliness which had been his; from the intolerable consciousness of injustice suffered, of wrongs which could not be righted. Strange, it no longer made much difference whether the world at large was hard and unpitying or not. It was enough that one girl, a girl whom he did not even know by name, had thought enough of him to save him.

"But I must get out of this," he told

himself. "She is worried, and no wonder. That fellow may come back any minute. I must get rid of this little trinket and clear out.

He looked around for a hiding place. The idea of going away at once filled his thoughts. He wanted now to be off before the girl could bring him change. A hundred dollars would be little enough to pay for what she had done, but it would be something. Only, the mesh bag must first be put where it could do no harm. He did not dare to take it with him.

A thin but decent rug covered the floor. He turned it back and began searching for a possible loose board. But there seemed to be none. Like the rest of the house, the floor was well made. He did, however, finally discover a knot which with the aid of a pin he managed to lift out. It was hardly a knot, either. It looked more like a plug fitted into a purposely-made hole. Sutton reached into the hole with a finger and gave a pull. A section of one of the narrow boards came up, revealing as good a secret recess as one could wish.

Into this he dropped the telltale handful of golden, interwoven links. Then he began to count the money which he had taken out. Nearly all the bills were large. He was in possession of upward of fifteen hundred dollars. To be captured with that amount on his person would be almost as bad as to be caught with the purse itself. Even one large bill might lead to suspicion. He felt now reasonably sure that nobody had seen him at the house he had robbed, and those who saw him in the street could not have obtained more than a fleeting glimpse of his features. But he did not want to take unnecessary chances. The thing to do was to leave most of the money here, slip away, and return later when the trail was colder.

He was about to put this plan into operation when he was arrested by a second thought. Would it be fair to leave this incriminating evidence? The hiding place was not so good after all. Supposing that the police, made keen by their failure, should return and search the house? It might be found, and the girl—nothing would save her then.

"Confound it, I'll keep the stuff on me if I go to jail for it," muttered Sutton.

He was already a stronger man than he had been for many weeks; such is the magic of a helping hand. He felt now that he might be able to face the world, after all, and perhaps get a job. He no longer hated everybody with something to live for. He had something to live for himself. He had a friend.

Reaching for the mesh bag, his fingers encountered something soft which he had not noticed before. Another bag had been flung into the hiding place prior to his arrival—a bag of chamois skin held together at the top by puckering cord. Mechanically he took it up and opened it. What he saw made him blink his eyes, for the bag held a beautiful pearl necklace and at least a handful of rings.

It was a startling discovery, yet the explanation seemed plain enough after a moment. This girl, and the mother of whom he had heard her speak to the man at the door, had once been in affluent circumstances. No doubt this house was the old family mansion. And in their present poverty—they must be poor or they would not take a boarder—they clung to their heirlooms, either through sentiment or as a last resource. The occasional sale of one of these would also account for that touch of elegance and luxury which he had noticed about the girl herself.

Reassured, Sutton put his own stealings, mesh bag and all, back into his pocket, and restored the jewels to their

hiding place. He had just smoothed out the rug when the girl knocked at the door.

"Here is your change," she said. "I hope you don't carry many such bills around with you. It is dangerous; robbers, you know."

Her eyes were clear again and her tone was casual—determinedly so. But a faint flush suffused her cheeks, and Sutton knew very well that she meant to warn him. He made a sudden resolution.

"Look here," he began, "Miss——"

"Miss Minnie White," she prompted. "I have a sister who is older than I. She lives in the West, but as she is unmarried they call me Miss Minnie just the same."

"Very well, Miss Minnie. But don't let us beat about the bush any longer. I have got other bills in my pocket. You saw very well that I was being chased like a dog when you let me in. That peddler you told me about was a policeman. I heard you lie to him. It is the first thing that has happened in a long while to show that any one cared whether I was alive or dead."

"Yes, I saw," admitted Minnie White, looking Sutton directly in the face. "That is why I tried to help you. Whenever I see any one being set upon that way, as if it was a hunt—and we see it often enough in this street—I—I can't bear it. It must be terrible to have a mob at your heels. I couldn't help being sorry for you."

"But I haven't finished what I wanted to say," Sutton went doggedly on. "You were sorry for me because you thought I might be innocent. Wasn't that it? But I'm not innocent. Do you know what I was planning to do just now when you came here to the door? I was planning to get away. I stole that money I gave you, and a lot more. Now, hand me over to the police if you want to. I don't intend to hide here under false pretenses. And as for going away without any chance of seeing you again—I don't know but I'd just as soon be caught, after all. It sounds silly, I know. But you don't realize that I haven't a friend in the world—unless I can call you one."

"I had no idea that you were innocent," said the amazing girl. "If I had, I don't know as I would have taken the trouble to let you in. You could have cleared yourself without any help in that case—as the man did who was running for a car. He had friends on the car whom he had left on the corner only long enough to buy a cigar. That's why the police weren't thrown off the trail longer. But it is time I went to see if the girl hasn't dinner ready. You'd better eat up here to-night, in case any one drops in. And be careful to keep away from the front windows. That's why I tried to lock you in—to keep you out of sight for a while."

"Say, did you ever do this before?" Sutton called after her, with a trace of disappointment in his tone. "Are you one of these—what they call a philanthropist, a missionary, or something?"

"No, I never did it before," she paused to fling over her shoulder. "It was only what—what I would want anybody to do for me if I were in trouble."

Several days passed while Sutton kept strictly to the house. He became used to having long friendly chats with Minnie, but could never detect the slightest trace of patronage in her tone—no reaching down, as of one on a higher plane to a lower. And he decided that she was one of those unspoiled grown-up children who have none of the harshness of the world because they have seen the struggle only from a distance. He told her his story. She responded, not by telling him hers, but by introducing him to her mother,

who was a bed-ridden invalid. And each time he told it he thought that her attitude softened toward him.

And yet in some ways Minnie was as aloof as a wild creature of the woods. Sutton soon ceased to have any doubts as to his sentiments. She had come into his life like a burst of sunshine, and he was in love. He believed that she liked him. The gay little evenings they spent together, sometimes tidying up the house, which was too big to be kept in order by the one servant; sometimes in her mother's room, alternately reading aloud to the invalid or indulging in three-handed games of whist, with a dummy for the fourth; sometimes at the nearest moving picture theater or soda fountain, with the littered sidewalks and muddy crossings of the home neighborhood out of sight and forgotten—all this implied at least a growing friendship.

But progress toward any nearer relationship was always being interrupted by a cloud, not unlike that which he had seen on the first day of their acquaintance. It would creep into her face without the slightest warning, and seem to put him miles from her thoughts. This he could understand when it came after any conduct on his part which might be construed as an attempt at love-making.

"No wonder," he would say to himself. "She knows that I went wrong once, and she can't trust me. Why, she doesn't even let me have a key to the front door for fear that I'd get into trouble again if I could come and go unnoticed."

But there were other and more puzzling times when a chance word was sufficient to lower a barrier, invisible but as impassable as steel.

As soon as it was safe for him to show his head in the streets, Sutton had resumed his search for work. And this time, for some reason or other—and he knew quite well what it was—the world no longer turned a cold shoulder when he demanded the means to live, and he was soon on the pay roll of a large hardware company, with a comfortable prospect of advancement. Men, after all, were in demand, and Minnie's mother herself had given him a reference. Men! That was it. He no longer skulked along the streets as if he had no right to exist. He was one of those for whom the streets were made.

"The jinx is off," he told Minnie in high glee the night after he had secured his position. "I have broken a little into that wad I stole, but the minute I can make it up I am going to send it back, and start square. I don't blame anybody now for mistrusting a crook. But thank Heaven—and you—I'll be on the level again before very long. And I am going to stay there. Just watch me!"

Minnie received his news with proper expressions of approval, and yet he did not make quite the impression he had hoped for. Indeed, if he could have believed such a thing, a look of pain rather than of pleasure crossed her face, and she shortly afterward complained of a headache, and left him. He could not make her out. And this was but a single example of that puzzling withdrawal, coming without warning or apparent cause, which set him to asking an eternal "Why?" of himself and never getting an answer. Yet the sunny interludes, and the thought that he had forever done with crime, kept him cheerful and full of hope in spite of these occasional misunderstandings.

It was a ticklish business getting that mesh bag back to where it belonged. At first he had meant to mail it, but finally decided to go to the house in person and drop it through the letter-slot. He knew that there were mysterious ways of tracing packages confided to the mails. The writing, the ink, even

the paper and string would each make a tiny clew—something permanent and forever ready to be used against him; while if he delivered the bag himself and once succeeded in getting away unseen, the incident would be closed.

He chose a dark, foggy night for the enterprise, and all went well. Not a soul was to be seen about the mansion where he had once come so near to parting with his liberty. The slot in the door proved to be a regular mail-chute, which received the well-stuffed bag without difficulty. Sutton got away without being followed; he was sure of it. Then he went home.

The next morning the sun rose brighter than was its wont. Sutton went downstairs for an early breakfast with Minnie, whistling a tune. The girl seemed cheerful, and when he recounted his doings of the night before she smiled with just the right degree of relief and encouragement. Had she practiced the scene she could not have done it better. Perhaps the cloud which had seemed to hang over her at times was merely the fear that he would not stick to his determination to make full restitution, or the fear that he would be detected while trying to carry it out.

Sutton was gazing past her through the open window into the street—for the dining room was the front room of the basement and afforded a never-ending panorama of the feet and legs of the passers-by, their bodies being hidden by the top of the sash. He was contemplating the mutilated view and trying to keep his mind on it. He knew that if he permitted himself to look much at Minnie he would out with a momentous question, and he did not think that he had yet earned the right to ask it, even if he had been quite certain of the answer. A crook does not propose marriage to a respectable young lady the moment he has squared himself with the law.

"I must show her that I can not only go straight but keep straight," said Sutton to himself.

And then somebody entered the areaway.

He had seen the approach of a pair of legs incased in blue trousers with a white stripe. The legs had descended from the sidewalk, revealing successively a blue coat with brass buttons, and a fat face surmounted by a helmet. Yet Sutton's heart had given no forewarning jump, not even when the policeman stood fully revealed. What had he to fear from policemen? If they came to that house it must be to make some formal inquiries about the number of people boarding there, to complain of the position of the refuse can, or something like that. He let Minnie go to the door.

"Well, Minnie White," he heard a voice begin in tones of insolent familiarity, "what have you done with Mrs. Parkinson's jewels?"

The words held no meaning for Sutton whatever; they merely stunned him and held him motionless in his chair.

"We've traced the pearl you sold straight to you," the voice went on. "I had the dealer look you over yesterday when you were starting out for a walk. He identified you positively. The game is up, little one. Hand over the rest of 'em, and let's trot along. You may get a short sentence if you don't try to hold out on us."

"The dealer identified me?" calmly responded Minnie. "Why shouldn't he? I don't deny having sold a pearl. It was one of my mother's. But I don't know what you mean when you talk about Mrs. Parkinson. I never heard of her before, and I am sure that she has not identified the pearl."

Sutton got slowly to his feet. He had heard of Mrs. Parkinson. The story of her stolen jewels had been in all the papers. But of course that had nothing to do with Minnie. It was all some absurd mistake. As she had just

pointed out to the officer, it was not the pearl which had been identified. Evidently the officer saw the weak spot in his case, too, for his tone had lost some of its assurance when he continued:

"Never mind that. Let's see the rest of your mother's necklace. Perhaps I can do a little identifying myself."

"But there is no more of it left. We have been very poor ever since my father died, and mother is an invalid who needs bright and cheerful things about her. I've had to sell it, bit by bit. And now there isn't a piece of jewelry left in the house."

Sutton started. No jewelry in the house? Hadn't he seen himself the contents of the chamois bag? But the policeman seemed to be impressed.

"Maybe you're telling the truth," he said doubtfully. "Hang me if I don't hope you are. You look like a good girl, and I hate to see your kind go wrong, even if it is to my interest to catch you at it. But you'll have to let me call in my men. I've got a search warrant, and we're going over this house with a fine-tooth comb."

He blew his whistle, and two bluecoats emerged from a doorway across the street. Sutton gave one final glance through the window, and dashed silently for the kitchen, thankful that he knew the place well enough now to locate the back stairs without an instant's loss of time. Already he had a theory. Some real crook had formerly had his room, and had left his "swag" there without Minnie's knowledge, expecting to return and get it later. For if she didn't know of its existence, of course it couldn't be her mother's necklace in the chamois bag. Innocence itself could hardly save her if the bag were found, and he had no very high idea of the safety of that cache. A knot hole and a loose board —these would be the very first things which the police would look for.

Sutton reached his room, threw back the rug, transferred the jewels from the recess to his pocket, replaced the board and the rug, and made his way to the garret—all without a sound audible to the searchers who were by this time stomping about the lower rooms. There was no panic in his veins as there had been when he was in that other house, with nothing to save but his own skin. His mind worked faster and better than it had ever worked before. Too much hung upon the issue for him to give way now.

He reached the roof, and, lying down flat on his face, peered cautiously over the gutter into the back garden. As he had feared, that way was blocked as well as the way in front. A slouching figure in a uniform was in fact seated at that moment on an up-turned flowerpot planted in the very middle of the walk leading to the alley in the rear. The fellow's eyes were on the house. It was useless to think of dropping from the gutter to the fire escape. He might as well give himself up as to attempt that.

In the center of the roof, however, he was hid from view, but he did not deceive himself with the idea that he was more than temporarily safe. Failing to find what they sought in the house, the searchers would certainly take a look at the roof as a matter of routine. It was apt to happen at almost any minute.

Sutton carefully approached the gutter on the side toward the house adjoining. He could no longer see either the man in the garden nor any one out in front; consequently they could not see him. Now was the time to seize the only chance which opportunity offered. Once on the roof of the next house, he might well hope to get away. But beetween him and that possibility there yawned a veritable chasm.

He measured it critically with his eye,

and thanked Heaven that he was still a trained athlete. The leap was altogether beyond the powers of an ordinary man. He had never covered such a distance himself. Well, so much the more reason for accomplishing the unprecedented.

Quickly he took off his shoes and fastened them by their laces about his neck. Next he secured a short pole used to hold up the middle of a rotted and sagging clothesline. He retired to the center of the roof, ran on tiptoe and at full speed toward the edge, thrust the end of the pole into the gutter as he passed, and launched himself in a dizzy arc through space. It was only a simple pole-vault after all, however impossible as an unassisted jump, and the danger was over the moment the pole-end safely touched the gutter. If there had only been a parapet against which to brace it, the whole thing would have been child's play. As it was, with the roof sloping gently from a raised center toward the four sides, and nothing but that shallow gutter to afford a purchase for his lever, it was more like playing touch and go with life and death. Indeed, when he had landed safely and softly on the next roof, and looked back, the accomplished feat had an air of the miraculous. All the better. It would not be dreamed that any one had even attempted such a thing, especially as the pole which had made it possible would be no longer in evidence.

Sutton hid behind the protection of a chimney, and sat down. He had intended, if he got thus far, to look for another fire escape and make for the ground. But if he did that, any chance eye might see him, while if he stayed where he was he would be comparatively safe. Of course there were risks, but ill-considered action would only increase them. Best wait till something feasible presented itself, even if he had to wait for darkness; and in the meantime he might think of some way of getting rid of the jewels.

Instinctively Sutton felt in his pocket to see if they were still there. And then he was seized by an uncontrollable desire to examine them. He wanted in particular to examine the necklace, without realizing why.

It was the first time he had given it more than a hasty glance. He had supposed it to be a mere rope of pearls, but there, shimmering in the morning sunlight, it proved to be a magnificent piece of workmanship with complicated loops terminating in front in a pendant beyond price. Perfect in every other detail, there was one place where the pattern was broken. A single pearl, apparently of a readily marketable size, had been cut off.

Sutton had listened to Minnie's story to the policeman without its even occuring to him to doubt it. Why shouldn't her mother have had a necklace, sold bit by bit to keep the family in comfort? He had even been able to swallow his own theory of a thieving previous tenant. It seemed the only way of accounting for Minnie's denial of the present existence of any jewels in the house. How could she be ignorant of the true state of affairs unless the culprit was some former boarder? But now, having for the first time a chance to think, he saw suddenly that there was a simpler explanation. Perhaps she wasn't ignorant. She admitted that she had sold a pearl. It resembled a pearl from Mrs. Parkinson's necklace. Here was Mrs. Parkinson's necklace undoubtedly in his hand. One of its pearls was missing. Could there be two necklaces, two sales of pearls, and both of the pearls coming from under the same roof at the same time? No, such coincidences do not happen. Moreover, there was her unwillingness to let him have an outside door key. Wasn't it clear that, instead of being afraid to expose him to temptation, she

had been unwilling to sleep behind an unchained door? He remembered now that she always put up the door chains at night. That clenched it. She feared unexpected visitors—detectives, perhaps. She was a criminal herself.

So that was why she had understood his misery; that was why she had taken pity on him and saved him. It was the fellow feeling of one outcast for another. How blind he had been to suppose that an honest person could look through the barrier which divides the innocent from the guilty, and see that the guilty were simply human beings a little more unfortunate than the rest. And her fits of moodiness—they were nothing but chagrin, or shame, perhaps, at the thought that he, in climbing back to honest living, was mounting above her. Why, then, she loved him! There had been only that cloud in the way for some time now. Her glances, the way she came to meet him, the color which mounted to her cheeks when their eyes met, the warm pressure of her hand when they bid each other good night—barring the cloud, it was impossible to account for all this on the theory of friendship.

What a fool he had been! How often he must have wounded her with his nonsense about honesty and respectability. If a girl like Minnie could be a thief—well, he would be a thief too. He would never offend her again with any pretense of superiority.

But first he must get back to her. Would darkness never come? The sun rose higher and higher, drenching him in its glare until it seemed as if the whole world must see him. It became blistering hot there on the roof. What a day to dry clothes! Suppose some one in the house beneath should take a notion to dry them on the roof! But he no longer thought of moving. The world around him hummed like a beehive. To remain inert was dangerous; but to attempt to escape was certain detection. He had not realized at first how utterly visible daylight made things.

Once, during the middle of the afternoon, he had to endure the suspense of hearing Minnie and the policemen come up through the scuttle next door and remain for some time talking and moving about.

"No use looking any longer," he heard one of the man say finally. "If she ever had anything to hide she must have gotten away with it. This house is practically isolated. Nobody could have left it since we came. Maybe that jewelry dealer made a mistake. He's little better than a fence anyway. Shouldn't wonder if he gave us the wrong steer on purpose."

That part of it was over then. And finally the sun did actually begin to descend from the zenith. The sky commenced clouding over, and by the time night came it was as dark as he could have wished. He must look for a fire escape. The chasm—a blind man might as well attempt to leap it now.

But he could not find the fire escape. Come to think, the family in this house, which was the best in the block, took in no lodgers, and as a private residence it would not be required by law to have any fire escape. Should he wait for the first light of dawn? Nonsense! He would be faint with hunger by that time. Besides, was he to sit there eight or ten mortal hours longer without a sight of Minnie?

"I guess not," he said, chuckling softly to himself. "I'll make another try at that little old jump, darkness or no darkness. It's easy. It would take a lot more than than that to stop me now."

That was how he felt. Nothing could hurt him, now that Minnie was as good as his. He was—no, he wasn't exactly happy. He was in an ecstacy of excitement; and reckless. After all, he was going to be a crook again. That

sure, tender sort of bliss which he had hoped for—it was not going to be. Their happiness would have to be of the hot-blooded, adventurous kind—a blind passion that never looked into the future and tried to forget the past. There was a sense of loss within the idea of it all which he could not quite hide from himself.

"I don't care," he muttered as he picked up the pole and prepared for his desperate venture. "It's good enough for me—any kind of a life with her. If she can stand it, I can."

He ran toward the edge of the roof, his pole held firmly at the necessary angle. There was a parapet now—a low railing all around the roof—no mere gutter to depend on. He felt the pole-end strike firmly against the foot of this providentially provided barrier, and himself go rising in a grand sweep into the air. Yes, it was going to be easy. Below him was the blackness of a bottomless pit, but it did not matter. He began to descend. He knew just when his feet ought to touch the farther roof. In another instant he would be safe.

The instant came, and his feet touched—nothing. Somehow, he had fallen short. Either the parapet had upset his calculations by interfering with the movements of the pole, or in the darkness he had instinctively and unconsciously hesitated in his run. Yes, he would soon be safe now, safe from worldly dangers forever. He closed his eyes, as if the black gulf beneath was something which could be shut out and rendered non-existent by a movement of the lids. Minutes, hours seemed to pass. Then the darkness took on a new character. It invaded consciousness and wiped it out as a sponge wipes a picture from a slate.

What surprised him was to find his eyes opening again and trying to see what had happened. He knew at once that his head was resting in a woman's lap and that a woman's soft hands were caressing his forehead.

"Did I fall?" he asked, afraid to stir lest he find his body to be a painful wreck.

"No," answered a voice—Minnie's voice. "I found you lying here unconscious on the roof just a minute ago. You didn't seem to be hurt. I was coming up to wait for you."

"How did you know that I would be here?"

"I missed the clothes pole when I was here with the officers, and knew what you had done. After they had gone I had to stay and take care of mother. The shock of having all those people here turning the house upside down gave her a bad spell. And I was so afraid that in the dark you would make some miscalculation."

She shivered, and Sutton, struggling to a sitting posture, took her in his arms. She did not resist, but there was something purely passive in her attitude. The old, impalpable barrier had returned.

"What is it, Min? I guess I did misjudge the distance. Can't quite figure it out yet, but I must have grabbed the gutter when I was falling, and dragged myself up, though the shock of not landing on my feet had already put me so nearly out that I didn't know that I was doing it. But what does that matter now? You know I love you, and I've come back to be your kind of folks once and for all."

"Are you sure?" He felt her hand touch his cheek, doubtfully, as if she would read his features in the dark. "Then why did you do it? Why did you run? What made you think they were looking for you? Is there any reason—which you have never told me—why you shouldn't feel safe?"

"You might as well trust me—you've got to, now," declared Sutton. "I see they didn't find that loose board in the floor of my room. But I found it."

"Oh, yes, they found it," said the girl listlessly. "How did you know it was there? Had you been hiding something?"

"Look here, Minnie, are you playing with me?" Sutton withdrew his arms. He felt hurt. "I found it, I say, and what was in it. Here you are."

He took the chamois-skin bag from his pocket and tossed it into her lap.

"You can't see them in the dark," he went on, "but you'll find Mrs. Parkinson's jewels all there—except the pearl you've already sold."

"Mrs. Parkinson's jewels?" Minnie's voice came to him strangely.

"Oh!" she continued unsteadily after a pause. "And you took them, and risked your life so that they wouldn't be found—where they would ruin me."

"Of course. Can't you understand? And I've come back to play the game with you till it's all over with both of us. You needn't hold away from me any more. I've given up all those foolish notions about going straight. Since you're a thief, too, thieving is good enough for me."

"I understand. You thought I was a thief, and——"

"I know you're a thief."

"But I'm not," said Minnie. "It was true—what I told the officer. I did sell my mother's necklace piecemeal. But the last pearl went before you came. I've sold nothing lately. It was my sister that the dealer thought he was identifying. She is not out West, as I pretended; she is here in the city. And she is the perfect image of me. She hasn't any record, but she is—what you were once. Of course, when I found there had been some mistake, I helped it on—for her sake. But I never dreamed she had hidden anything here."

"It was your sister who took Mrs. Parkinson's jewels?"

"Yes, it must have been. She—she can't help doing such things."

A cold sweat broke out on Sutton's forehead. He had made a fatal error. Minnie had suffered the agonies of the outcast through her sister. Her understanding had come from that. Her moods had come from that, too. Every time he had mentioned crime she must have remembered her sister, and have been racked by the thought that at that very moment, perhaps, the wayward one, her own flesh and blood, was being nabbed by the hounds of the law. It was all plain enough now. And he had ruined everything by betraying his own weakness, his willingness to descend again into the slough from which he had climbed. It was all over. What folly had possessed him to mistake Minnie for a crook?

He buried his head in his hands, wishing that she would go. Then he would sneak off and lose himself somewhere. Yes, he would be a crook indeed. It was all he was fit for. Several minutes passed while the bitterness grew in his heart. Would she never move? Why did she prolong the agony in this fashion?

"Give me your sister's address and I'll take her the plunder," he finally burst out. "I'm off. I won't come back to trouble you. There's no use stringing out this good-by. I understand."

And then—could he have lost his senses again, or were two arms actually flung about his neck and a kiss imprinted upon his lips? Certainly he could hear Minnie saying:

"How can you talk of going? Didn't you mean it when you said you loved me? Do you think I would ever let you go now, after you have done all this for me? Certainly we'll send the jewels back—to Mrs. Parkinson, though, and not to my sister. If you were willing to take me as a thief, aren't you willing to take me and both go straight?"

Sutton sat rigid with astonishment.

"I don't understand, after all," he said, at last. "You were always afraid to trust yourself to me because you were afraid I wouldn't prove strong enough to keep on being honest. I see that. But now, when you know I'm not strong enough, when you know I was willing to turn crooked——"

"It isn't just that," Minnie answered with a catch in her voice, but resolutely pillowing her head upon his unyielding shoulder. "After I knew what you had done for me—that awful leap in the dark, and everything—I couldn't have helped it anyway. But now—can't you understand? When a woman finds that her hand is strong enough to pull a man like you down, she has no reason to fear that it won't be strong enough to hold him up."

Sutton tried no longer to resist happiness. He had discovered something. There were those, even among the good, who could look beyond the pale, and see more than one meaning in that expression, "Stop, thief!"

STRANGE TALES OF "KLONDIKE" FARM

ROUND a poor farm in Iowa there hovers a gripping mystery which may never be dissolved. The land, which is pitted with holes, is the well-known "Klondike" Farm owned by the Huntsman family. Stories of buried treasure and of dreadful crimes there have been told in court, but the mystery has never been lifted entirely from the land and the actors in what was, perhaps, a tragic drama.

Certain it is that two people have told extraordinary tales of happenings there, and that one of the principals in the affair left behind him a large amount of money not satisfactorily accounted for. Samuel Anderson, owner of the property adjoining the "Klondike" Farm, entered into an agreement many years ago to aid the Huntsmans to locate some treasure which the latter asserted was buried on their farm. For years Anderson dug in the Huntsman property whenever called upon to do so, and at last his spade rang upon an iron box. Then he was told by the Huntsmans that they would open the box and, after learning its contents, give him his share. But nothing was delivered to the hard-working farmer, so he finally sued the Huntsmans.

Then the State officials became interested in the case and began an investigation. Their research led them to make a charge of murder against four men, two of them over seventy-five years old, for a crime committed years before. The principal witness was a white-haired woman of sixty, who told a remarkable story. She said that when she was sixteen years old she had seen the defendants and four other men carrying a heavy object in a blanket past her home one night. From the blanket protruded a hand. Upon her presence being discovered the girl was threatened with death if she ever divulged what she had seen.

Cross-examination confused the old woman so that her account of what had happened did not convince the jurors, "beyond a reasonable doubt," of the guilt of the accused. The men were therefore freed.

Another mystery centering around the "Klondike" Farm came to light when one of the persons named by the aged woman in her accusation was found dead. He had been a taciturn doctor without much practice, but the walls and floor of his little shack yielded up forty-five thousand dollars in hidden money. Where it came from has never been discovered. The "Klondike" Farm has kept its secret well.

More Inside Histories of Famous Crimes

by George Munson

The Crimes of the Marchioness

IT is now more than two centuries since the notorious Marchioness of Brinvilliers lived and died, but her crimes have not been forgotten. They have formed the subject of many a romance; she has been pictured as a martyr, a woman driven to her inhuman acts by jealousy, love, or the extremity of need. But stripped of its romantic aspect, the fact remains that this woman who lived in the time of Louis XIV, when France was at the height of her power and glory, was one of the most sordid and conscienceless of murderers.

Incidentally the circumstances attending upon the discovery of the deeds offer a curious justification for the methods of police procedure then in existence. Torture was freely used to extort the truth from reluctant witnesses; and but for this there is little doubt but that the marchioness would have escaped the fate which so deservedly overtook her.

Portraits yet exist of the infamous marchioness. Pretty and petite, blue-eyed, with abundant fair hair and shapely hands, she proved a useful asset for her father, a gentleman named D'Aubray, who had affianced her to the Marquis de Brinvilliers. Their married life seemed to be happy enough, and five children were born to them before the marquis began to seek other and perhaps more sprightly company. The marchioness, not to be outdone, consoled herself with the friendship of a gentleman named St. Croix, a friend and brother officer of her husband, who himself introduced him to her. St. Croix, who was a man of engaging address, handsome, accomplished, soon gained the good will of the lady, and scandalous stories concerning their relationship began to go the round of the gossips attached to the court of Louis.

The marquis only smiled at these, but his father-in-law, a country gentleman of stricter views, was scandalized. Perhaps he felt that, having succeeded in marrying his daughter well, he was justified in resenting any possible scandal in a family of such distinction which he had allied to his own. At any rate, Monsieur D'Aubray went to Louis, the king, and obtained a *lettre de cachet* against St. Croix, consigning that gentleman to the Bastille pending his majesty's pleasure. St. Croix was promptly apprehended and cast into the royal dungeon, and from that moment the trouble began.

St. Croix had a companion in his cell, an Italian by name Exili, a noted alchemist of the day who had been imprisoned for some trifling cause—possibly failure to find the philosopher's stone on behalf of some impecunious great lord. If Exili could not discover this great object of search among his

kind, however, he had obtained a dangerous knowledge of poisons in the course of his researches. The acquaintance of the two men ripened into friendship, and Exili imparted all his knowledge to his companion. When in course of time the whirl of fate brought about St. Croix's release, he saw to it that Exili was also set at liberty.

At a subsequent period some horrible discoveries were made in a garret of a house in which Exili had had his laboratory. But this is mentioned merely as confirming the truth of the allegations against St. Croix. From the time of his release Exili disappears from the story. St. Croix, set free, professed a change of heart. He married and settled down to the task of caring for his family. Apparently the ancient friendship between himself and the marchioness had been effectively disrupted. Nevertheless, it was he who furnished her with the means of revenge upon her father for sending her lover to the Bastille, and, incidentally, with the medium whereby she might secure the inheritance of the family property.

Monsieur D'Aubray, satisfied with having broken up the friendship which had threatened to deprive him of the alliance with the Brinvilliers family, forgave his daughter, and, in the fall of 1666, took her to live with him upon his country estate. Very soon afterward he was attacked by a mysterious malady. After great suffering he died in agony, and the physicians in attendance were of the opinion that the cause of death was gout, driven into the stomach. His daughter nursed him with the most tender solicitude during his fatal illness.

There now remained three lives between herself and the family property—those of her two brothers and of her eldest brother's wife. The elder of the two brothers succeeded to the family inheritance, and, enlarging his staff of attendants, was induced to accept the service of a new valet named La Chaussée. On one occasion during the succeeding winter, calling for a glass of wine and water, he received some mixture from this man's hand, and, after drinking a small portion of it, he threw the remainder away, saying:

"I believe you want to poison me, you rascal. That stuff burns like fire."

The dregs in the glass were tasted by others present, who agreed that the mixture apparently had contained vitriol. La Chaussée emptied the glass with many apologies, stating that he had inadvertently given his master a receptacle from which a fellow servant had taken some medicine.

A short while after, while Monsieur D'Aubray was giving a dinner party upon his estate in Beauce, the whole of the diners were seized with a serious illness after eating a pie. Upon this occasion La Chaussée had accompanied his master to the country seat. The rest recovered, but Monsieur D'Aubray continued to grow worse. He returned to Paris, but on June 17, 1670, he died, apparently from progressive anæmia. A post-mortem examination was made by the doctors in order to determine the cause of death which was attributed to "malignant humors."

It was not longer than a few weeks before the second brother was attacked by the same disease. He grew progressively weaker, and died before the end of the year. Again the doctors performed a post mortem, and suspicion of poisoning arose. They could discover nothing, however, but one of them declared that "the liver and heart were destroyed."

But one life now remained between the inheritance and the marchioness. The sinister La Chaussée, having accomplished the death of the two masters, sought a position with the widow of the elder brother. But the

widow instinctively realized the peril that threatened her. She withdrew to her country estate and lived actually secluded from all but her oldest servants and most intimate friends. La Chaussée, baffled in his attempt, and having no means of livelihood, wandered miserably about the Paris streets.

Meanwhile suspicion had been rife, and it had fallen upon two persons—the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, as the one who stood to profit most by the death of her brothers and sister-in-law, and La Chaussée, the valet. Investigations were set on foot as to the relationship that had existed between them. La Chaussée had been in the employment of St. Croix, and this seemed to prove a connecting medium. Before any action was taken, however, St. Croix suddenly died, and a new phase of the affair opened.

St. Croix died in Paris on July 31, 1672, after an illness of several months. When his estate was examined it proved to be almost bankrupt. The only article likely to hold valuables was a small strong box, which the deceased by the terms of his testament specifically desired should be handed to the Marchioness of Brinvilliers. The widow of the deceased man opposed the surrender of this box, believing that it contained valuables to which she was more entitled than the legatee. The box was therefore opened in the presence of the lieutenant-civil. It contained two papers—promises to pay certain sums of money, signed by Monsieur D'Aubray, the father of the marchioness, and by a certain Pennautier. Among these two papers were several small packets of powder, two bottles full of a mysterious fluid, a pot containing opium, a small box with an "infernal stone" inside, and a little bundle of prescriptions marked "curious secrets."

The discovery of chemicals in those days always excited terror and suspicion. In the opinion of the lieutenant-civil this box was the receptacle in which a poisoner had kept the tools of his trade. He ordered the contents to be tested immediately. A pinch of the powder thrown into the fire produced a violet flame. The paper packets were found to contain "corrosive sublimate, roman vitriol, antimony, and powdered vitriol." One of the bottles contained a colorless fluid which defied analysis; the other had a deposit of whitish powder. This was administered to a pigeon, a cat, a dog, and a turkey, and all died almost immediately; yet, when the bodies were opened, no internal injuries could be discovered. The report of the analists was to the effect that the poison resisted every test that science could apply.

The discovery of this fatal legacy to the marchioness furnished a clew to the mysterious death of the two D'Aubray brothers. Three persons were clearly implicated now: The marchioness herself, La Chaussée, and Pennautier, the man whose name appeared upon the paper in the box. Orders were issued for the arrest of La Chaussée, and the valet was picked up in the streets of Paris, where he wandered homeless. He was searched at the police station and in one of his pockets was found a small packet of white powder exactly similar to that in the strong box, which, he said, was used for sharpening razors. The marchioness had gone into seclusion in a religious establishment at Picpus when the storm gathered around her; but, learning of La Chaussée's arrest, she escaped by night from a window and managed to cross the frontier into the bishopric of Liège, where she sought and obtained asylum in a convent and gave herself up entirely to devotional exercises. Even then her husband did not abandon her, but he had become bankrupt and was unable to furnish her with means.

La Chaussée, interrogated, denied all knowledge of the poisoning, although it was speedily discovered that he had been intimately connected with the marchioness. Two maids of the marchioness' testified against him. Torture was applied in vain; but, upon threat of its renewal, La Chaussée confessed that he had poisoned the two D'Aubray brothers with poison given him by Monsieur St. Croix, who had told him that the marchioness knew nothing of his design. Nevertheless he had acted as go-between for her and the dead man and affirmed his belief that the marchioness had been cognizant of the entire murder conspiracy.

Let us consider for a moment Reich de Pennautier, whose name was found in the strong box attached to the paper. This was a man of lowly origin who had risen to become receiver-general for the French clergy at a salary of $50,000 a year. He had worked his way up from the bottom of the ladder by his astuteness, and his rise had been partly due to the most opportune and mysterious death of several of his superiors. It was proved that he and St. Croix had come from the same part of France, that they had been intimately acquainted, and that considerable business relations had existed between them. Pennautier's complicity in the murders was strongly suspected. But he was "too rich to be convicted," as Count de Grammont put it. One of the famous letters of Madame de Sevingné contains an allusion to this case. "Everyone, the whole world, is working to save Pennautier," she writes. "He has nothing to fear but the indiscretions of La Brinvilliers."

The penniless marchioness and La Chaussée could not purchase the indemnity which Pennautier was fortunate enough to obtain. The valet was found guilty of the murders and broken upon the wheel. As for the marchioness, everything seemed to point to her guilt. She was proved to have uttered foolish phrases since the time when the box was opened. Even then the undisguised distress which she displayed was strongly and unfavorably commented upon. She had exclaimed angrily that a plot was in progress to ruin her, had hinted that the police who had custody of the box were not incorruptible, and that the incriminating evidence might be destroyed. The confession of the valet that he believed her to be an accessory in the crimes, and her own flight, sufficed to convict her. Her husband, having wasted his inheritance, had come down to last sou and was in hiding from his creditors. He could offer her no assistance nor obtain protection from the courtiers of Louis. A decree of death by decapitation was pronounced against her.

In those days extradition was a thing unknown. But the arm of French justice was a long one, and it was determined that she should be brought back to the jurisdiction of Louis by stratagem. Even in those days the countrymen of Vidocq, who rose to fame long afterward, had begun to produce renowned police spies, and a certain François Degrais was intrusted with the task of luring the marchioness back to French soil, or, failing that, of kidnaping her. He was a man of polished manners, insinuating, totally without scruples of any kind. If he failed in his task none other could succeed.

Degrais put on the habiliments of an abbé and went to Liège, where he at once succeeded in obtaining admission to the convent in which the marchioness was immuned. At once he began to seek her friendship. The marchioness, deprived of the gay society of the court, to which she had been so long accustomed, could ill endure the enforced discipline of convent life. Their friendship progressed rapidly, and the abbé proved that beneath the

monastic severity of his exterior he could conceal a love for the pleasures of female companionship. One day he proposed that they should drive into the country and take breakfast at a rustic inn. The marchioness gladly accepted the invitation, but when they arrived at their destination a carriage came bowling along the road and stopped, and a number of police officers descended and placed the marchioness under arrest. Quite unmoved, Degrais then declared to her his identity and the ruse which he had adopted. The carriage was driven at full speed across the frontier, and the arm of French justice had proved itself strong enough to seize its victim.

The marchioness was interrogated in the first place by a commissary. She assumed a resolute attitude and denied knowledge of everything.

But she had committed one incredibly foolish act. She had actually made a written confession of her deeds, for what purpose no one has ever discovered. Degrais obtained leave to make an investigation of her effects and discovered this incriminating paper among them. In it the marchioness not only admitted that she had been guilty of the murder of her father and brothers, but that she had committed numerous other offenses, many of a most degrading character.

"I accuse myself of having poisoned my father," ran this document. "I was angry with him because he had sent my friend St. Croix to prison. Furthermore, I coveted his property. I also caused my brothers to be poisoned, and for the commission of this crime a servant has been broken on the wheel. I have often wished that my father was dead. Thirty times I have desired the death of my brothers. I was anxious to poison my sister, and I gave poison five or six times to her husband, but afterward I regretted it and took great pains to cure him. Nevertheless, he always suffered from the ill effects of the dose. I accuse myself of having taken poison and also of having once given it to one of my children, because she was growing tall."

When taxed with these admissions the marchioness did not attempt to attribute them to forgery on the part of the police spy. She claimed, however, that she had written them when in the depths of despair. Distraught, an exile, penniless in a strange land, her mind, she said, had given way; no credit must be placed in what she had written.

On the way back to Paris she made several attempts to commit suicide by swallowing pins and other articles. Degrais now instructed Barbier, one of his assistants, to pretend to sympathize with her and to offer her assistance. The marchioness was once again deceived, and obtaining pens, ink, and paper, she wrote a letter to an old friend who lived at Maestricht, a town which they would pass on the road to Paris. In this letter she implored her friend to attempt to rescue her. It would be easy, she declared, for there were but eight spiritless creatures in her escort, and five men would be amply able to account for them. If he did not rescue her and also carry off the incriminating documents her cause was lost.

Degrais, having read this letter, allowed it to go to its destination, but the friend had no taste for the attempt and left the marchioness severely alone. Still she continued to confide in Barbier. She would make his fortune, she promised him, if he would assist her to escape. All that was necessary would be to seize and bind Degrais during one of the night halts, to kill the watchers, set fire to the house in which they were lodged, and flee. Even after her consignment to the Conciergerie prison she continued to have faith in Barbier, who upon receipt of these

varied communications which the marchioness made to him in her despair, immediately proceeded to lay them before Degrais, who in turn carried them to the authorities. These letters were considered merely as so much further evidence of her guilt. Among other persons she wrote to Pennautier, and the police eagerly scanned these, hoping to find therein conclusive evidence of his complicity; but without success.

In spite of the decree already pronounced against her, the murderess was again put upon trial. But the evidence was overwhelming and her conviction was a foregone conclusion. The sentence pronounced by the court was that she should proceed "to the principal gate of the church of Paris, to which she shall be carried upon a cart, barefooted, with a rope around her neck and carrying a lighted torch two pounds in weight, and there upon her knees she shall say and declare that she has wickedly poisoned her father and her two brothers for vengeance and through the desire to possess their property." After the fulfilment of this task she was to be taken to the Place de la Grève, where her head was to be cut off and her body burned, the ashes being afterward scattered to the winds. Before the execution of the extreme penalty, however, she was to be put to the torture, ordinary and extraordinary, in order to compel her to reveal the names of her accomplices. The question was to be applied by water.

At the sight of the apparatus of torture the marchioness declared that she would make a full confession. She did so, and acknowledged that she had given poison to her father twenty-eight or thirty times with her own hands, and that she had used the valet La Chaussée as a medium for killing her brothers. She had been careful, she added, to administer the drug in small quantities, so that the consequences might not become immediately apparent. She implicated a chemist, then deceased, who, she said, had been sent to Italy to obtain drugs.

It is stated that until the last moment the marchioness refused to abandon hope of a reprieve. The executioner spent a quarter of an hour trimming her hair, in order that it might not interfere with the sweep of his sword.

We find an account of the execution in the memoirs of Madame de Sevigne.

"It is all over at last," she writes "The Brinvilliers is in space. Her poor frame, cast into a furious fire, has been consumed and the ashes thrown to the winds in order that we may all inhale the poison, with surprising effects to ourselves, as some foolish minds think. She died as she had lived, resolutely. On her way to the scaffold she only asked that the executioners would walk between her and Degrais, the scoundrel who had betrayed her."

POLICE DOG GETS GOOD HOME

SO attached had he become to Hans, a shepherd dog, in the course of his work, that Sergeant Hickey bought the animal himself when it was sold at auction recently. Sergeant Hickey is in charge of the police kennels in New York City, and Hans was under his care. When the dog proved too light in weight for the work required of it the city decided to sell it. The police officer parted with seventy-seven dollars and fifty cents for the pleasure of insuring the dog a good home with him.

The Disappearance of Kimball Webb

by Rowland Wright

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

EARLY on the morning of the day set for his wedding to the beautiful Elsie Powell, Kimball Webb, a playwright, disappears from his home. When the only door giving egress from his room is broken open, the windows are found securely fastened. The room is examined by Detective Sergeant Hanley, who, however, discovers no secret exit.

Webb and Wallace Courtney have chosen the same subject for the plays they are writing, and there is intense rivalry between them. Courtney also disappears, but is later found, working on his play, at the home of Lulie Lloyd, Webb's stenographer. He declares that Webb had said his room had been entered mysteriously several times at night.

Mrs. Webb, a spiritualist, believes that her son has been carried off by supernatural powers, while Elsie accuses Henrietta Webb, Kimball's sister, of having imprisoned him in order to prevent the marriage.

Under the will of an eccentric aunt, Elsie becomes possessor of millions provided she marries before she is twenty-four years old; otherwise, the entire fortune will go to Joseph Allison, a distant relative. The time limit for fulfilling this condition is drawing near. Both Allison and Fenn Whiting, Webb's best man, ask Elsie to marry one of them, and she is urged by her mother and sister, who are financially dependent upon her, to marry some one in time to inherit the money.

Coleman Coe, a private detective, takes up the case, but makes so little progress that Elsie, in despair, says she will marry Whiting before her birthday, and then commit suicide.

CHAPTER XIII.

DUPED!

FENN WHITING was not unversed in feminine ways, and especially did he count himself familiar with the ways of Elsie Powell. Though the average woman would make a threat of killing herself as a melodramatic bluff, not so Elsie. Whiting knew for a certainty if she had made up her mind to such a desperate step she would assuredly take it. No interference or hindrance could prevent her. She might be foiled in several attempts but she would succeed finally if she had set her face that way. And she had. Further conversation only revealed the depth and steadfastness of her purpose. She was willing to die for her mother and sister but not live for them.

"But, Elsie, darling," Whiting urged, "I can't marry you that way. You must choose some one else, then. Could you live with Allison?"

"No! I couldn't live with any man except Kimball Webb. And I never will! But my people have hounded me about that money until I can't stand it another minute. I must marry before my birthday in order that they may get it, but I don't have to live on after that!"

The big brown eyes were wide with despair, and the suffering, hunted look on Elsie's face went to Whiting's heart.

"Marry me, dearest," he said softly; "I'll engage that you shan't kill yourself afterward. Why, sweetheart, I'll make life a continuous round of pleasure for you; you shall have your own way in everything—everything! I'll be your humble slave, and you may command me."

"Hush, Fenn! I've told you the

course I shall take. Now, I think I may as well marry you as any one else. Then I'll be legally entitled to the money. I've made a will, which I must sign before I'm married, and then——"

"Don't, Elsie! You're talking rubbish! Girls don't kill themselves so easily, with friends around to prevent."

"Never mind about that." Elsie smiled mysteriously. "The way is already provided. I shall make no horrible scene; I shall merely go away from this horrir, horrid world!"

"But I shall transform the horrid world into a world of light and flowers and love! Give me a chance, Elsie, let me prove my words."

"Don't discuss it, Fenn"—Elsie was imperious—"you know nothing of my heart; you couldn't even appreciate my feelings if you knew them. But I do like you, and you are a friend. Marry me, then, and the rest is in my hands."

"No, Elsie. I refuse to marry you under such conditions. What man would?"

"That's the trouble, no man would! That's why I've decided on you as my only hope. Marry me, Fenn, to save the money for my people. I'll leave you a goodly share, too."

"Elsie!" Whiting's look made her flinch.

"Well," she defended herself, "that's only fair, if you're my husband."

"But I won't be, I can't be, the way you've arranged things!"

"Yes, you can, and you will! Don't desert me, Fenn; it's the only thing you can do for me. I'd marry some one else, and not tell my plans, but I don't think it fair to any man."

"I should say not!"

"But you—you have always been a friend of Kim's and I want you to be friend enough of mine to go through the ceremony with me, and for me. Why, Fenn, there's no way for me to get that money without marrying, and no way else to secure the happiness of my people."

"If only Gerty would marry Joe——"

"That would fix it all right; but in the first place, Gert wouldn't marry anybody just yet—it's too soon—and, oh, Fenn, it's an awful thing to tell, but I sounded Joe, and he—he doesn't want to marry Gerty."

"Of course he doesn't! He's insanely in love with you!"

"I know it; and he's too nice a boy for me to marry him and then carry out my plan."

"So'm I, for that matter!" Whiting tried to speak jocularly.

"I know you are; any man would be. But you're my only hope. I've thought this thing out to the bitter end. Whoever took Kimball away has killed him. That I am sure of."

"Oh, no, Elsie, I don't believe that."

"I know it. He isn't in this world. And so I want to go where he is—I don't care where that may be."

Elsie's gaze was a little wild, her voice a trifle hysterical, but she was in complete control of her speech.

"Well, let's wait a bit, anyway. There's nearly three weeks yet before the birthday, and in that time you may hear something from Kim."

"No, I won't. And I'd rather get it over with. Marry me at once; won't you, Fenn?"

"Well, for a young woman whom I've begged and coaxed to marry me, it's turning the tables to have you urging me to marry you!"

"All the same, will you?"

"Not this week. Do wait a few days and consider matters a little more fully. I promise to tell nobody of this plan of yours, so you can revise it when you wish. But, oh, Elsie, my little girl, if you'll marry me and stay right here on earth with me, I'll engage to make earth a heaven for you!"

"Nobody could do that but Kimball." Elsie's eyes filled with tears.

True to his promise, Whiting told no one of Elsie's gruesome plan. For, he decided, to tell her mother or sister would only stir up trouble in their household, and he hoped Elsie would change her mind. It was a forlorn hope, for the girl was so positive in her decision and was rarely, if ever, known to change one. He thought of telling it all to Coley Coe, but decided against it, for he could see no use in passing the hateful secret on to anybody.

Any other woman he would have expected to weaken when the time came for the tragic deed. But he knew Elsie's determination well enough to believe that she had the means already at hand —poison, probably—and that if prevented several times would finally manage to turn the trick.

The more Whiting thought it over, the more he was convinced he would marry her. If he didn't, she would pick up somebody else and marry him without telling her plan, for she could never secure a bridegroom who was in her confidence. Then, he argued, he would stand a better chance of persuading her to give up her tragic course than if he were not her husband. He thought he could watch her so closely that she would have no chance for a time, at least, and then if he couldn't persuade her to live for him and with him he could offer her the privilege of divorcing him—and the money, the great object in Elsie's dilemma, would be all right.

So Whiting determined that if nothing transpired to change the situation he would soon urge Elsie to announce their engagement, and trust to fate that all might yet turn out well.

Elsie, after her talk with Whiting, felt better than she had since her sorrow came to her. She was filled with an exaltation that buoyed her spirit up.

It may be that her strange experiences had affected her brain a little, but except for a slight absent-mindedness she showed no eccentric impulses.

And then, in her morning's mail, she received a letter. A letter that she had subconsciously looked for, a letter she had vaguely expected, a letter from the people who had stolen Kimball Webb!

Realizing its purport, she went off to her own room to read it by herself.

Written in a strong, bold hand, on inconspicuous paper, it read:

MISS ELSIE POWELL: We have Kimball Webb hidden and in confinement. Where he is neither you nor your smarty-cat young detective can ever discover. We make no secret of the fact that we abducted him for ransom. How we secured his person, though a clever performance, will never be known by any one, not even himself. The whole point of this message is, do you want him back enough to pay us fifty thousand dollars, and no questions asked? If so, follow our directions implicitly; if not, the incident may be considered closed, and neither you nor any one else will ever see the gentleman in question again. We are no bunglers; we have covered our tracks, and have no fear of being caught. If you want to pay the money, and if you are willing to agree not to refer this matter to anybody, not to speak of it to your people or to the police, you may hang a white towel or a handkerchief out of a window of your own room any time to-morrow afternoon. This will be taken to mean that you agree to our terms. If you play any tricks, Mr. Webb will vanish at once from this world of ours. We inclose a bit of a note from him that you may have faith in the reality of our story.

The letter was not signed, but the inclosure was. It was from Kimball himself; there was no mistaking his small, scholarly writing, and even before reading it Elsie pressed it to her lips in a frenzy of joy. Then she read:

Elsie, darling! do as the note says. It is the only way. I love you! KIM.

It was no forgery; every word, every letter was the work of the hand of Kimball Webb. Elsie knew his writing too well to be deceived. There were peculiar little quirks and twirls that

made it impossible for the note to be a forgery. It was the real thing.

Noting the date on the letter, Elsie suddenly bethought her that to-day was the day to hang out her flag of truce! Her white handkerchief—no, a small towel would be more visible—must be displayed that very afternoon.

Quivering with excitement, she got out the towel, and was of half a mind to hang it out at once, but desisted, as she wished to follow instructions implicitly.

How to get all that money troubled her not a whit. She hadn't a tenth of it at her command, but get it she would, if she had to break a bank! And then she began to think. A wild suggestion of breaking a bank meant nothing; she couldn't do it, with all the will in the world. And how could she get it from Mr. Thorne unless she told her story? And if she did that the writer of the note would find it out—already she pictured him in her mind as omniscient—and the whole deal would be off!

But even with no plan for getting the money, she obeyed the written instructions. She told no one of the letter. That afternoon she hung out a small towel, and it hung undisturbed until sundown.

Then next morning she received a second letter.

This one was as explicit as the first.

MISS POWELL: Glad to see you're amenable to reason. Now, you may have plenty of ways to raise the cash, but if not, use the inclosed card. You may go to that address without fear of any unpleasantness or publicity. Remember, if you give us the money as we direct, you will have your lover in time for you to secure your inheritance by marriage with him. Here are the directions. You will not hear from us again. Have the money in cash, with no bill larger than one hundred dollars. Go to Bonman's department store to-morrow morning, and when you come out, take a taxicab that will be waiting. You will know which one when you see a driver with a yellow plaid cap. We are relying on you not to have anybody with you or in watching; if you do we shall know it, and the whole deal is off. You will not hear from us again. If you attempt anything, anything at all but the most perfect good faith and honesty in your course, you will be more than sorry. In a word, you will then bring about the sudden death of the man you love. There is no more to be said on that score. Get into the taxi, and when it stops near another taxi, make a quick change. Have the money with you in a small, compact parcel. The second taxi will take you along a certain road. When it meets a certain car it will slow down and you will hand the parcel to the man who leans out of that car for it. That is all. Good-by.

Elsie read and reread the missive.

She was uncertain what to do. Her impulse was to lay the whole matter before Whiting or Coleman Coe, and follow his advice.

But suppose either one should say, as so many people do: "Make no bargains with the kidnapers. Treat any such communications with silent contempt, or arrange for police protection, even if it is forbidden."

The more she thought it over, the more she was inclined to manage the whole affair alone. She could do it, and she was not afraid. It was all to be done in broad daylight; there was no danger if she herself acted in good faith. If she brought any one else into it there was grave danger, not only to herself but to Kimball.

She looked curiously at the card.

It was an address on Broadway, and was evidently, even to her inexperienced mind, the office of a loan broker.

From him she could get the necessary money on the assurance of her near-by wedding and consequent inheritance. Arrangements had, of course, been made by the perpetrators of the crime against Kimball Webb. They must be a clever and powerful set, they were so unafraid of anything or anybody. The thought of her restored lover and their wedding at last so thrilled Elsie that she began preparations at once.

She could scarcely control her impatience to get to the broker's office.

Once there, she found, indeed, that all had been arranged. The affable man who presided over the establishment was confidentially minded, and was quite ready to advance the large sum required, in return for Elsie's signed promise to pay, with exorbitant interest, the day after her marriage.

For Elsie Powell and her affairs were well known to newspaper readers, and the affable loan broker felt no qualms of doubt as to his future reimbursement and his usury.

The parcel, made up neatly and inconspicuously, was handed to Elsie, and her signed document carefully put away in a big safe.

The transaction meant little to Elsie, herself, so wrapped up was her whole soul in her coming adventure. She would get Kimball back! That was all she knew or cared about.

She went to Bonman's, her precious package in her handbag, which she carried with seeming carelessness, but with a watchful eye.

She had a strange feeling of security because of the character and appearance of the notes she had received. Had they been illiterate scrawls she would have hesitated to go ahead as she had done, but the educated and socially correct tone of the letters gave her the impression of brains and character, however big a villain the writer might be.

With a beating heart, but with a steady step, she came out of Bonman's shop and seemed to glance casually about for a cab. Seeing a driver with a yellow plaid cap, she beckoned him and got into his cab.

No word was spoken as she settled herself on the seat and watched the man start the car.

He, too, was nonchalant of manner, and drove away toward Madison Avenue.

From there they followed a devious course, turning often, returning on their own tracks, wheeling suddenly, performing various eccentric detours, all, doubtless, in an endeavor to detect a follower, if any.

Elsie sat quietly, unmoved by these strange motions, and full of buoyant hope that all would be well, since she had not betrayed her trust.

After a time the taxicab stopped at a curb, another cab drew up at its side, and Elsie stepped from one to the other.

The second cab had also a taciturn, grave-faced driver. Though he said no word, gave no look of intelligence, Elsie felt a sense of safety with him from his very silence. She was free from all fear and looked forward eagerly to the consummation of her errand.

This time it was a long drive. On they went, northward from the city and into a pleasant, wooded locality. Swiftly the car flew, and after an hour's journey they were on a smooth road, with groves of trees on either side. But it was a traveled road, and its well-kept asphalt proclaimed its nearness to civilization.

Elsie kept her eyes open and her mind clear. She grew impatient for the end of her trip, but she preserved her poise and her balance.

"Here's the car, miss," the taxi driver said suddenly; and she saw a red roadster approaching swiftly.

Both cars slowed down and then stopped.

From the red car a man leaned out. He had a small mask on that concealed most of his features, but Elsie caught a gleam of many gold-filled teeth in his lower jaw. Into his outstretched hand, conveniently near, Elsie placed the packet from her hand bag. She felt a shock of disappointment that she did not receive Kimball in return right then and there, but she had no time to speak. In a flash the driver on the cab she was

in sprang from his seat, jumped into the red car, and like a streak the roadster disappeared.

Alone, in a driverless taxicab, Elsie sat, unable for a moment to realize what had happened.

Slowly it dawned upon her that she had been tricked, swindled. But no, she couldn't believe that! She felt sure that the men had only carried out their plans for safety. That they feared pursuit, and had made off with the money and would restore Kimball in their own good time, she had no doubt. The thing was, now, how was she to get home?

She wasn't greatly alarmed, for the well-kept road gave hope of frequent travelers, and somebody would take her back to New York.

And, after a time, somebody did. She let several cars pass before she asked help, and though curious looks were cast at her, no one intruded upon her. But when she saw a car come by, with a good chauffeur, and a benignant-looking lady in the tonneau, she asked for a ride to New York.

The benignant-looking lady was not all that could be hoped for in the way of cordiality, but when Elsie explained that the taxicab had refused to go and the chauffeur had gone for help and that she was in great haste to get to the city the lady agreed to take her, remarking, however, that for a girl who wanted to get to New York in haste, her cab was turned astonishingly in the opposite direction!

But Elsie's smile and winning manner soon overcame the other's asperity, and they were affably chatting long before they reached the city.

Naturally enough, the kind lady asked the name of her passenger, but Elsie, knowing the necessity for caution, gave an assumed name and address and made up a story of her life that was as plausible as it was false. But she dared take no chances on breaking her pledge of inviolate secrecy, lest she lose her chance of getting Kimball back, and after all she had gone through, that would be unbearable.

She asked to be set down at the Grand Central Station, as she was going back to her home—avowedly in Boston—that night.

Warmly friendly by this time, the benignant lady set her down as requested, after exacting a promise to hear from her by letter.

Alone again, Elsie flew for a taxicab and went straight home. She glanced at the mail arrived since her departure, but was not surprised to find no letter in the writing of her new correspondent. He had said he would not write again, and she did not think he would.

She had nothing to do now but wait. She had conscientiously fulfilled her part of the bargain, and she had utter faith that the abductors of Kimball Webb would do the same. They had their money—what more did they want?

She waited all that evening, dully patient, quietly serene of manner, but with a heart that beat wildly when the doorbell or telephone sounded.

Occasionally she telephoned to the Webb house, hardly thinking Kimball would go there before coming to her, but unable to resist casual inquiry. At bedtime she had heard nothing from him, and resolved to go to bed and to sleep in happy hopes of a blessed meeting to-morrow.

She could not sleep—slumber does not come for the willing of it—and as she tossed in wide-awake suspense, her thoughts took a new turn. Suppose, just suppose she had been tricked! Suppose the notes had not come from the men who stole Kimball. Ah, they must have done so. She had Kim's own note to prove it! Nothing ever could make her believe that note a

forgery. She knew his dear writing too well; she knew every stroke of his pen, every peculiarity of his really unusual handwriting, and she felt in every letter of that note that he himself had penned it. There was no chance that he had not. Therefore, the letters from the kidnapers were in good faith. They proved the fact that Kimball had been abducted and held for ransom. Well, now they had the ransom, and Kim would be returned. Of course he would! She would not think otherwise, or she would die! She knew he would come to-morrow, and in that knowledge she at last fell asleep.

She awoke with a start. Throwing on her night light, she found it was three o'clock in the morning. She felt a strange numbness of mind, a peculiar feeling as if the end of the world had come. Striving to determine what it all meant, she realized that she had lost hope, that she was now persuaded that she had been tricked. The notes were from the kidnapers, but they had no intention of returning her lover!

Something, she could not tell what, brought the conviction to her soul that she had done very wrong in following their bidding blindly, in giving them the money on such uncertainty. She remembered clearly the smile of the man in the red car, the smile that had disclosed those gold-filled teeth, and she knew she had been duped, deceived and swindled!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HOTEL ROOM.

THOUGH slow to anger, Elsie was a little firebrand when roused. The more she thought over the matter the more furious she grew at the game that had been played on her. The fact that she brought it all upon herself only made her more angry.

And yet she didn't blame herself utterly, for she had felt so sure that only by following instructions implicitly could she accomplish her end.

She didn't for a moment believe that some one had tricked her who knew nothing of Kimball Webb, for she had his own letter to disprove that. She concluded they had tricked him, too, and had forced him to write the note and had cheated him as they had her.

Still, he might come home yet; the day might bring him or news of him.

But when the slow hours passed and morning melted into afternoon poor Elsie gave up hope.

By the time Coe came in the evening, Elsie had decided to tell him the whole story, assuming that since the money was paid, it was now no breach of trust.

Coley Coe stared at her as she unfolded the surprising tale.

"You chump! You easy mark!" he cried angrily, quite forgetting in his astonishment to whom he was speaking.

"I beg your pardon," he said, as he noted her rising color; "I oughtn't to say such things; but, oh, Miss Powell, how could you go off on such a wild-goose chase—and a dangerous one, too?"

His thatch of hair bobbed wildly about in his excitement, and he clutched at it as if almost frenzied.

Then he calmed down and looked at the thing squarely. His blue eyes seemed to grow darker as their concentrated gaze fell on Elsie's troubled face.

"It's outrageous," he cried; "it's a shame! But, Miss Powell, the villains may have overreached themselves. They may have started something that will lead to their own undoing. We've learned a heap from this experience of yours. Now tell me all over again every smallest detail."

So again Elsie went over the whole story and told of every stop of the way.

"Clever! clever!" was Coe's grudging tribute to the ability of the abductors.

"You see, the first taxicab was a real one. They engaged the driver to do just what he did do. The second was a fake one, their own car and one of their own men. Then, when the time came, the car was abandoned, and so were you. They knew you'd get a lift back to the city, and they didn't care whether you did or not! In one way I can't blame you, Miss Powell, for I see you didn't dare tell me. Yet you might have known they'd not release their prisoner."

"I don't agree," cried Elsie; "how could I know that? And if they had given him to me the money was well spent."

"That's so; it wouldn't have been surprising if they had let him go; they'd doubtless be glad to get rid of him. But I think your quick willingness to give the money made them greedy for more, and I think they'll try the same game right over again."

"Oh," Elsie cried, "I couldn't do it again!"

"No, indeed! And you're not going to throw away another fifty thousand dollars if I can prevent it! Now let's consider. What have we learned? What sleeping dogs have we stirred up? Much depends on the positive fact that this note is really from Mr. Webb himself. You're sure?"

"Absolutely," declared Elsie. "I know Kimball's writing, and I know that's it. Nobody could forge so skillfully; you can see that yourself. It's dashed off."

"Yes, that's so. A forgery would show a little hesitation or painstaking effort. But I'm going to show it to an expert. He can tell, if he has some of Webb's other letters."

"Anybody could tell," insisted Elsie. "Wait; I'll get some letters."

She ran away to her own room and returned with a packet of them.

Comparison soon made it evident that the note in question was beyond all doubt the work of Webb himself. A thousand little points proved it. Coe was satisfied, and went on with his conclusions from it.

"You see, it proves a whole lot of things," he cried jubilantly. "Perhaps your money, enormous sum though it was, brought worth-while evidence."

"Such as what?"

"Well, to begin with, we know now that Webb was really abducted, and is now held against his will. This does away with all thought of his having decamped on purpose; also, to my mind, precludes the theory of his mother or sister being implicated. Miss Webb is a Tartar, if you ask me, but she never managed the affair of yesterday!"

"No, she never did! Henrietta is not acquainted with those——"

"Loan sharks! Right! Kimball Webb was carried off by desperate and clever men—and here's a strong point—he was unconscious when removed from his room."

"How do you know?"

"Because in his first letter, it says the means used will never be known by any one, not even himself. So, as I imagined, he was taken from his room, from his home, while unconscious—in a drugged sleep probably, and therefore we must assume a secret entrance!"

"But there isn't any!"

"There is! There's got to be! They couldn't take him through the door and fasten it behind them! They couldn't get him out of that six-inch opening at the top of a window! There *has* to be a secret way out. And, by George, I'm going to find it, if I have to tear the house down!"

"I'd rather you'd find Kim," said Elsie sadly.

"You poor child! Of course you would. Forgive me; I'm afraid I seem to think less of the quarry than the chase. But I don't, really. We're going to get Kimball Webb back, and we're going to do it by means of the infor-

mation you unconsciously achieved through this adventure of yours!"

"And you don't think they meant to give him back after I did my part?"

"I do not. They look on you as an inexhaustible gold mine. They'll wait a while and then make a stab for another big sum. Less maybe than the first, but exorbitant. Apparently they're not afraid of anything or anybody. Clever chaps, but sure to come a cropper yet!"

"How do you know?"

"Oh, they're *too* cocksure; they're bound to overlook or forget some little thing, and now I know there is a scent to be followed, I'm all for following it. Now I know there's a sleeping dog, I shan't let him lie! Take that letter—the two letters from them. Look at 'em! No attempt at disguising writing. Plain, bold penmanship, not printed, nor words cut from a newspaper, nor any of those hackneyed stunts."

"Well?"

"Well, that proves they were written by some one who never could, by the remotest chance, be suspected. Somebody so outside suspicion that they're willing to send his handwriting."

"Proving?"

"Proving a clever, bold master spirit, who stops at nothing and who knows just what he dare do and what not. I believe he fully intended to set Mr. Webb free on the receipt of the money; then, when you proved such a ninny—pardon me, it slipped out; but you were—then he concluded you were good for one more touch, at least."

"Well, if what I learned, or made it possible for you to learn, restores Kimball Webb to me I'll never begrudge the money."

"That is, if we get him home in time for the wedding."

"Oh, I don't care for the fortune!"

"Then, just how are you going to pay your indebtedness to the loan shark?"

Elsie's face fell. "I hadn't thought of that!"

"It's a big thing to think of, Miss Powell. You can't get out of that obligation, you know. And while the receipt of your aunt's money would make it easy for you to pay it, yet if you are not married by your birthday——"

"And do you think if I had acted differently in any way I could have held those men to their agreement?"

"I can't say positively, but I do think so."

"What ought I to have done?"

"Demanded the person of Mr. Webb before you gave up the money, or at least asked for some assurance of his return, and asked when and where you might expect to see him."

"I was too frightened."

"I know you were, and they knew it, too."

"And, anyway, even if they had made me promises then, they wouldn't have kept them."

"Likely not. Now, Miss Powell, here's a hard fact: If Mr. Webb is not here by your birthday you'll have to marry somebody in order to get the money so you can pay off that loan."

"What?" Elsie's face went white, and her eyes were filled with horror at the sudden realization of the truth of Coe's statement.

"I won't; I'll kill myself first!"

"Oh, come now, don't talk about killing. That would be a cowardly thing, for your people would be hounded, whether legally or not."

"Mother and Gerty! Oh, no!"

"I don't say they could be made to pay it, but there'd be some mighty unpleasant experiences coming to them! No, Miss Powell; don't kill yourself. Surely a marriage with some man other than Mr. Webb would be a better fate than suicide!"

"No, not to my way of thinking. But I must think of my mother and

sister! Oh, Mr. Coe, do help me! I think I shall go distracted!"

"Small wonder! You poor child! I wish we had more time. The birthday is drawing perilously near. Something must be done. Of course you can't describe either man well enough for positive identification?"

"No. The taxi driver, the second one, was a decent-looking man, of medium build, with a grave, rather stern face. He was dark, I think, with brownish hair. I saw his back mostly, and didn't notice his face at all. I thought of him merely as a means to an end, and when the red car came along I thought only of giving up the money. And the man in the red car wore a mask—just a small one, but it covered his eyes and nose and came down partly over his mouth. But I noticed several gold-filled teeth in his lower jaw. Unusually bright they were."

"That would be a help if we could get any other hint which way to look. But, as I said, the master mind behind all this scheme is so diabolically clever that he has discounted all chances of discovery, and, I've no doubt, feels secure from police or detectives.

"Now, I'm for spending another night in that room of Kimball Webb's, and I'll bet there'll be no *poltergeist* this time!"

"Why?"

"Why, don't you see it? The arch villain—I feel sure there's one principal and two or more subordinates—the chief devil, we'll say, has a means of access to that room. It was he who was responsible for all the *poltergeist* performances, he who pulled bedclothes off Webb, and, later, off of yours truly, he who made a ghost appear."

"How?"

"Oh, lots of ways for that, I'll tell you some other time. I must hustle now. Go to sleep and dream of Webb's return. But—and this is very serious, Miss Powell—if I don't succeed in getting him back; if the villains are scared off, or any such matter, you must make up your mind to marry somebody else. For I should hate to see you in the clutches of that wretch of a loan broker! You've no idea what it would mean!"

Coe went away, and Elsie hurried straight to her room. She denied admittance when Gerty begged for it, and said she wanted to rest.

But rest she did not; in fact, she was such a victim of unrest, worry and anguish, that morning found her in a high fever and grave danger of nervous collapse.

The doctor came, a nurse was summoned, and for a few days brain fever was feared. But Elsie's strong constitution and brave will power conquered, and she pulled through without the dreaded attack.

The doctor ordered, however, a change of scene, were it ever so small a journey, and after some discussion Elsie agreed to go to Atlantic City for a few days.

Coley Coe was the one who finally persuaded her to adopt the plan. He promised to keep in constant touch with her and tell her any bit of information he could gain. He said he would come down to see her as often as necessary for their mutual conference, and he felt sure that she would be better off in every way away from her family for a time.

He had slept in Kimball Webb's room several nights since, and, as he anticipated, nothing at all had happened.

"You see," he said, "the rascal thought he could make it appear supernatural; now he knows I'm on his trail, he has given up that idea."

"How does he know it," asked Elsie; "is he omniscient?"

Nearly so. You may depend he knows every step that is taken toward

his discovery! Why, Miss Powell, he's a man 'in the know,' every way. He may not be one of Mr. Webb's own particular circle socially, but he's enough in his set or in his life somehow to be in touch with everybody even remotely connected with the case."

"Have the police done nothing at all?"

"Yes, they're working at it. But their methods are different from mine, and while they're all right I doubt if they get anywhere. Sometimes I doubt if I will, either. Howsomever, you toddle along to Atlantic City with nursie, and I'll try to corral a nice young man for you to marry before the fatal thirtieth gets much nearer. You wasted some good time with that illness of yours, though I don't wonder at it, I'm sure."

"Why, what could I have done if I hadn't been ill?"

"Nothing definite, but I feel sure the abductors would have written you another of those good-looking notes, and if you had gone on another taxi ride, I should have been in the offing somehow."

The nurse, a Miss Loring, was a pleasant, sympathetic girl, and as she knew all about Elsie's tragedy from the papers, she was deeply interested in her young charge. She was experienced and capable, and Elsie found herself really glad to go away with the kind and gentle nurse.

They were pleasantly located in The Turrets, a new hotel, and after twenty-four hours of rest and sea air Elsie felt wonderfully better.

"I'm not really ill, you know," she said; and the nurse agreed.

"No, Miss Powell; but it was a real nervous breakdown, and another will follow unless you try to keep it off."

"I'll try."

Elsie voluntarily became an obedient patient.

It was just one week before the thirtieth of June when the two went for a ride in the rolling chairs. Sometimes they rode together, but this day they chanced to take two single chairs.

The man who pushed Elsie's was a big, husky chap, with an engaging smile. Miss Loring's man was a slender youth, but of a wiry strength.

For a time they rode close together, chatting casually, and then, as Elsie grew silent, the nurse ceased to bother her with talk. Thus it chanced, now and then, one chair or the other forged ahead, by reason of the traffic or danger of a collision.

And one time, when Elsie's chair was pushed ahead of Miss Loring's it did not fall back beside the nurse's chair as promptly as usual.

Elsie looked around for the nurse, but failed to see her.

"Where's my companion?" she said over her shoulder. "Don't let us get separated."

"No, ma'am." The big man who pushed her smiled, and she settled back into her seat, thinking deeply.

A moment later she looked around again, and, still not seeing the nurse, told the man to wait for her to come up to them.

"Why, the other lady is ahead, ma'am; I'll catch up to her." He moved her chair more quickly.

Elsie looked about with a sudden thrill of alarm and saw no sign of the nurse anywhere.

"Here we are, ma'am; she just went in here." The man stopped her chair in front of a tall hotel.

"Went in here? What do you mean?"

"Yes'm, the lady who belongs with you—the nurse, ma'am, she went in here in great haste and motioned for you to follow her. Better go in, ma'am."

Bewildered, Elsie allowed herself to be assisted from the chair and ushered inside, not thinking at the moment that

it was strange for the chair-pusher to be so officious.

"What in the world did Miss Loring come in here for?" she asked, as they stood a moment in the hall.

"I don't know, ma'am; but I just saw her go up in this elevator. She beckoned for you to follow."

Elsie hesitated a moment, but it was a first-class hotel, not a large building, but tall, and handsomely appointed.

She got into the elevator, the man following, indeed urging her in by a guiding hand on her elbow.

"Tenth," he said to the elevator girl, and the car shot upward.

"It was not until they were walking along the corridor on the tenth floor that Elsie felt a thrill of fear. What did it mean? Surely Miss Loring never came up here, expecting Elsie to follow!

"Here you are." As they reached a closed door the man swung it open and led Elsie firmly inside. "Sorry, miss, but I'm only obeying orders. Good-by." He jerked off his cap, closed the door behind him and went away, leaving Elsie alone in a strange room in a strange house.

She flew to the door, but she could not open it. She was trapped—and she had walked into the trap unresistingly in broad daylight! What would Coley Coe say to her now?

She went to the window and looked out. The familiar sight of the ocean and the board walk cheered her. She didn't know what she was to experience next, but she felt a sense of relief at sight of the throngs of people.

She was alone in the room for what seemed hours, but was not more than twenty minutes, when the door was flung open and in rushed, not the man with the gold teeth, whom she had rather expected to see, but Fenn Whiting.

"Oh, Elsie," he cried wildly, "am I in time?"

"Time for what?" she asked bewilderedly.

"Why, I met Miss Loring and she said she had lost you, and I chased madly about asking everybody questions, and finally traced you here! Who brought you? What does it mean?"

"I know no more than you do, Fenn."

So relieved at sight of a kind and a familiar face was she, that Elsie burst into tears on his shoulder.

"There, there, darling," he soothed her, "never mind; it's all right. Stay there, dearest; that's your rightful place. I hope it will always be your haven in troublous times. Be quiet, my love; don't try to talk yet. When you can, then tell me what happened."

"Yes, I can talk! I'm all right." Elsie stopped her crying. "I'm only mad! Why, Fenn, somebody trapped me into this room!"

"Trapped you! What do you mean?"

"Just that!" Elsie told how the chair-pusher had led her to the house and urged her up in the elevator and into the room, and then had locked her in.

"Why, the door isn't locked," Whiting exclaimed; "I walked right in!"

"How did you know I was in here?"

"Asked the elevator girl; she told me."

"Well, the door was locked on this side; must be a spring catch."

"It must be, then." Whiting went to examine it. "Yes, it is. Thank Heaven I could open it from outside. Well, dearest, we'll go home; shall we?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But I want to know what it all means."

"Didn't you know your chair man?"

"No; we pick up different ones every time, wherever we happen to be. He wasn't a real one, of course. He must have been placed there so I'd engage him, by those villains."

"What villains? What are you talking about?"

Elsie bit her lip. She had promised Coe to reveal no slightest word regarding her experiences with the kidnapers of Webb, and now she had given a hint!

"Nothing," she said; "nothing, Fenn. Oh, I am ill! Please take me home!"

"You're not ill, Elsie, but you're terribly frightened. Tell me what about and tell me who are the villains who are troubling you. Let me settle with them! I am your rightful protector. You are engaged to me, and in less than a week is our wedding day! Can't we announce it at once, and let me be known as your proper protector? You shall not leave this room until you say yes!"

CHAPTER XV.

ABDUCTED!

"IS that a threat?" Elsie turned on Whiting with sudden rage.

"Not unless you choose to take it so." But the man's steely gray eyes were commanding rather than imploring, and his thin lips were set in a straight line that bespoke determination. "Don't make me threaten you, Elsie. Why should it be necessary? I love you and I want you, but more than that I want your promise to marry me at once to save yourself from persecution and trouble. You were trapped here, you say; you just referred to some villains, who have, I must infer, already annoyed you. Why haven't you told me of it?"

"Why should I? I can't marry you, Fenn, after all. I know I said I would, and you know what I said I'd do right afterward. But I can't do that. Perhaps I'm too much of a coward to take my own life; perhaps it would be a cowardly thing to do, anyway. But I can't marry you."

"You must, Elsie; you promised."

"Such promises have been broken before this. A consent to marry is not a marriage contract. Sue me for breach of promise, if you choose—I refuse to marry you!"

Her voice rose at the last to an almost hysterical shriek. She was both nervous and frightened. The knowledge that she had been abducted—for that was what it seemed to be—scared her, and though grateful for Whiting's rescue and his presence, yet she felt a strange fear of him, too.

"Let me go," she said at last, starting toward the door.

"No!" Fenn strode across the room, locked the door and pocketed the key. "No; you shall not go until I have your promise—and an unbreakable one this time. In fact, Elsie, I want you to marry me right now and here. I'll arrange all details; I have arranged most of them. Just consent, dearest, and then you'll be mine to love and care for and to protect from these villains you speak of."

"Fenn, are you crazy?"

"No, I'm not; but you'll be if you keep up this nervous tension you're living under. Be guided by me, Elsie, darling; marry me out of hand, and we'll go away to some beautiful, quiet spot, and all care shall be lifted from your dear shoulders."

Elsie looked at him curiously.

"Suppose I agree to marry you the day after my birthday," she said; "will that do?"

"Do perfectly, as far as the loss of your fortune is concerned. I've told you before I'm no fortune hunter. You must believe it by now. I'd rather marry you at once, for your sake, and for my own, but not for the sake of the inheritance. So promise me sacredly to marry me the day after your birthday, and I'll take you home now."

"Oh, no, Fenn! Don't you see, if I marry you it must be before the

thirtieth, to get the money for mother and Gerty. They'd never forgive me otherwise. And, too, why should I wait? I'd like the money all right, if only I didn't have to marry to get it. What an awful will! And yet it all seemed so lovely when I had Kimball with me!"

"It will seem just as lovely when I'm with you. Let me try, dear; give me a chance to make good! I'm not overconceited, but I'm sure I can make you happy. If you choose to marry me in time to get the money we can do wonderful things—take wonderful trips, see beautiful places, but beautiful to me only because you are with me!"

There was a deep thrill in his tones that moved Elsie by its genuine passion and devotion. She looked into his gray eyes, their steely glint softened now, and read there a great, unconquerable love for herself. Should she cast this aside for a chance, an uncertainty? She must get the money for her people—she had decided on that—and she felt it her duty to sacrifice herself for them. But when she tried to say "yes" to Whiting's pleas the word would not come.

"I can't! Oh, Fenn, I can't!" She moaned. "I love Kimball—oh, I love him *desperately!* I can never marry any one else. I can't—I can't do it!"

"Hush, Elsie; don't sob so. Listen, dear; the time for that sort of thing is past. There are only seven days now to your birthday; you can't wait till the last minute to decide. And if Webb had been coming back he would have been here before this. He will never come back; I'm sure of it!"

"You can't be sure of it, Fenn; but will you arrange it this way—you said you would, once: Let the wedding take place the day before my birthday, and if Kim comes home let him be the bridegroom, and if not, I'll marry you."

"No! I'll not do that! You've played fast and loose with me long enough! I've stood for it because I love you so, and I want you so. But I won't be that sort of a cat's-paw! You'll say right now you'll marry me, or I'll drop out of it all, and you can marry anybody you choose, to get your precious legacy!"

Whiting's face was distorted by passion and by rage at the idea of being baffled at the last. "I don't think for a minute that Webb would show up, but if he did I'd not stand having my bride snatched from me at the very altar. No!"

"Then you may drop out!" Elsie's determination was as great as his own. "I refuse to promise. I'd rather marry Joe Allison at the last minute, and so keep a chance for Kim, than to promise you and have no chance at all!"

"Allison! You would, would you? We'll see about that!" Whiting quite lost control of himself and flew into a veritable frenzy. "You'll marry me now and here; get that?"

Elsie was horror-stricken. Fenn's teeth were set together, and his expression was that of a hungry, wild animal. She wasn't afraid that he could force her to marry him, but she was afraid of what he might say or do if he were further defied.

"Fenn," she said gently, "Fenn, dear——"

"Don't 'Fenn, dear' me unless you mean it! Don't think you can placate me by soft words that mean nothing! Will you marry me now?"

"I will not."

Elsie's hauteur was the last straw.

"Then you'll stay here until you will!"

Whiting flung himself into a chair and looked at her as if he held the whip hand.

"What do you mean?" Elsie said icily.

"These are my rooms. You are locked in here with me alone. How

long must you stay here before you decide it's wiser to be my wife than——"

The look the girl gave him made him quail.

"Elsie," he said more gently.

"Hush! Don't dare speak to me again. Let me out!"

She flew to the door, but it was locked, the key in Whiting's pocket or the spring catch holding it, she didn't know which. She pounded on the door with her soft fists, but made little commotion that way.

"Useless, my dear," Whiting said calmly. "These rooms are in a wing containing but few guests. Nobody will hear you. Pound away if you like."

This wasn't true. As a matter of fact, Whiting was very much afraid somebody would hear her, but he deemed this the best way to stop her—and it was.

Elsie believed him and quit pounding. Nor did she scream. An idea had come to her. Whiting had said rooms. Therefore there was more to the suite than the one they were in. Covertly she glanced at the doors and decided that while one rather narrow one was doubtless a closet, the wide one, the other side of the room probably opened into an adjoining room, which was likely to give on the hall.

At any rate it was worth trying.

Cleverly she seemed not to be noticing these details but sat, her handkerchief to her eyes, apparently subdued and dismayed. And in fact she was both but not to the point of surrender, as she appeared to Whiting's anxious watchfulness.

Cautiously looking about, with seemingly a vacant stare, she saw many little personal belongings that convinced her the room was Whiting's sitting room. Doubtless the next room was his bedroom. All the same, she determined to dash through it in an attempt at freedom. If she were quick, and the other hall door was not locked, she could get to the hall, while if she were trapped in the other room her plight would be no worse than it was at present.

She rose and walked disconsolately about, looked from the windows, stared, unseeing, at a picture on the wall, and generally appeared to be aimlessly wandering, while she thought matters over.

Whiting watched her, but so cannily did Elsie mislead his thoughts that he didn't notice she drew nearer and nearer the bedroom door.

At last she was almost against it, her eyes fastened on a small clock which stood on a table at the opposite side of the room.

"What time is it?" she said dully, as if her decision depended on the flight of the hours.

The ruse succeeded. He followed the direction of her straining eyes, and looked at the little clock instead of taking out his own watch. Like a flash Elsie tore open the door, found that it opened into a bedroom with a hall door, and, crossing the room in the fewest possible steps, wrenched open the hall door. It was not locked, and she flew through it and down the corridor toward the elevators, of which there were two, side by side.

Elsie pushed the bell so violently that the car came up immediately and she sprang into it just as Whiting came racing down the hall after her.

He rang, a long steady ring, and though Elsie's prayers persuaded the girl in the car with her not to go up again, the other car shot past them, flying upward.

And now Elsie achieved a master stroke. Thinking swiftly, she knew Whiting would make the other car drop without a stop and would await her on the ground floor.

Determined to outwit him, she

ordered the girl to stop between floors and change gowns with her.

Willing enough when Elsie offered her all the money in her bag, and also told her she would be aiding a crime if she refused, the little elevator girl slipped out of her uniform, Elsie dropped off her own gown, and in two minutes they were transformed, even the cap of the girl in place of Elsie's pretty hat, and the hat on the other's head.

A little bewildered, the girl then ran her car on down without a stop.

At the ground floor, acting on Elsie's orders, the other girl stepped from the car in a furtive, hunted manner, and ran swiftly down a long cross hall, Whiting full tilt after her.

Elsie, meanwhile, stepped briskly out the front door, sprang into a taxicab and was whirled away.

Her spirits rose. She had outwitted Fenn Whiting, and she had escaped from a situation more dangerous than that of the deserted taxicab of a few days before.

She went straight back to the hotel where she and the nurse had been staying. Here the desk clerk told her that the nurse had packed up everything and had returned to New York.

Elsie was amazed. She trusted the nurse absolutely, but she now began to fear her sincerity. To the poor girl it seemed as if there were nobody in whom she could place confidence. And there was the ever dreadful question of the fortune. Had it not been for her insistent family, she would have given up all thought of the money and would have run away to hide by herself until her birthday had passed.

But, she argued, this was not the way to feel. For she must be at home, in case Kimball should somehow miraculously appear.

Unable to fathom the meaning of the nurse's departure, though, since she had taken all their luggage, Elsie couldn't think she was honest, she concluded to go right back to New York herself.

She couldn't hope to escape Fenn Whiting's presence much longer, for, having learned the trick played on him, he would of course come at once to The Turrets.

Moreover, Elsie was attracting curious looks, and even disapproving ones, by reason of her standing about in the hall, dressed in the uniform of an elevator girl! She wondered what the poor girl was doing who now wore her clothes. Perhaps she would lose her position! Elsie determined to look after her as soon as she could secure and count on her own safety.

And now a new dilemma presented itself. She had no money. All she had carried with her in her handbag she had given to the girl in the elevator, thinking she would go back to the hotel where she had her check book. But that was gone with her trunks. Even the unpaid cabman was already clamoring for his fare!

"Why did Miss Loring say she left?" she asked the clerk.

"She said you had sent her word you had already gone home, and she was to follow at once," he returned, glancing at her severely. "She packed quickly and caught the first train she could get."

"She paid the bill?"

"Yes, to the time of her leaving."

"I will ask you, then, to pay this cabman and to let me have money enough to get to New York. I will send you a check from there."

But the desk clerk didn't seem to care for this plan at all. He paid the cabman, who was becoming a nuisance, but he declined to advance money to such an erratic person as the lady before him seemed to be.

She had made no explanation of her strange garb, and his manner had so roused her indignation that she kept her own counsel.

But she was at her wit's end. It was after four in the afternoon and a hotel man who wouldn't lend her a few dollars would doubtless object to her reregistering there with no money, and in most eccentric costume.

As she thought it over a man approached and asked if he might be of assistance. It was the man of the gold-filled teeth!

Any fear of him she might have felt vanished in a strange sense of seeing an old friend. For so helpless and friendless was the poor child that even this man, presumably one of the "villains," seemed a godsend! And he was polite and deferential.

"Well," she said, her poise returning, "all things considered, I think I am privileged to ask you for the loan of a few dollars."

"I'll do better than that," he said with a really cordial smile; "I'll escort you back to New York. I'm going myself on the four-forty-five. You need have no fear," he said, coming nearer. "I've no reason to wish you any harm. I'll deliver you safe and sound at your own home on Park Avenue."

There was something about him that inspired confidence. And Elsie was tired, faint and exhausted. She thought this plan offered her, however it might turn out, a lesser evil than to stay alone at The Turrets, even if this new friend gave her money, for there she was still in the vicinity of Fenn Whiting. Indeed, he was liable to appear at any minute.

She made up her mind quickly.

"I'll go with you," she said. "Will you lend me enough money to buy some sort of large cloak or cape, and a hat?"

"Yes," he said; and he looked at her uniform with the queerest glance.

But it was not to be wondered at; doubtless he was striving to keep from bursting into laughter. The cocky little cap, above Elsie's lovely, troubled face, was a picture!

So the strangely assorted pair took a cab, stopped at a goods emporium, and Elsie procured a hat and a large, full cape, and then they reached the station just in time to take the desired train.

In the car he left her to herself and went away to the smoker. He was most deferential, most polite.

"And why shouldn't he be?" Elsie asked herself. "I've paid him or his gang fifty thousand dollars. Surely they owe me something! I've a mind to ask him something about Kim, he seems so nice."

But thoughts of Coley Coe kept her silent on any save the most casual subjects.

She felt, during the ride to New York, as if she ought to plan some way of trailing the gold-toothed man after he left her. But how could she do it? Vague thoughts of telegraphing from the moving train, of having policemen meet her at the station—all sorts of plans went through her mind, but none was practicable. So she determined to talk more with the man and find out anything she might that way, and then do the best she could to get Coe quickly, as soon as she was safely at home.

For she dreaded any further abduction or trapping, and she longed only to be at home once more and safe from impending danger.

As they neared the big station the gold-tooth man returned.

"Sure," he replied to her request, "I'll tell you my name. It's Pike—Richard Pike. And now, miss, you're bound for home?"

"Yes, as soon as I can get there. Please leave me at the platform; I can get a taxi myself."

"Desert you at the last post? No, indeed, ma'am. Don't be afraid; I'm not going to carry you off!" He laughed good-naturedly, and again Elsie's fears were drowned in a sense

of his honest intention to treat her with courtesy.

So they walked to the taxicabs, and, after she got in one, he followed.

So amazed was she at this that she made protest.

"Oh, it's right on my way," he said; "so why pay two fares?"

The ride was not long, but when the cab stopped it was not at Elsie's home.

It was at a house, a fine-looking brownstone house, that had the appearance of being closed for the summer. The windows were boarded up, the front door likewise, and all was silent and still.

"Where's this?" Elsie asked, refusing to get out.

"Hush!" Pike put his finger to his lip. "The taxi driver is a bad one! Get out, miss, quick!"

Scared at his serious tone and his secret manner, Elsie got out, through sheer force of the other's will, and in a moment the fare was paid and the cab had disappeared down the street.

"No, miss"—the hitherto kind voice had a hard note in it—"you'll stop in here for a minute on your way home. Don't refuse, now, it wouldn't be healthy!"

The cold little ring of an automatic pressed against Elsie's temple, and, with a glance at Pike's face, she knew in an instant she was trapped again!

Almost without volition, for this new terror seemed to deprive her of her senses, Elsie stumbled along through the gate the man opened, and which led to the area entrance.

Through the basement door they entered the house, and in the doorway Elsie was met by a woman, a decent, middle-aged body, who took the fainting girl to her breast.

"There, now," she said in the kindest tones; "there now, miss, brace up. It's faint you are, dearie. Sit there, now, and let me fix you up."

She bustled about and gave Elsie a glass of warm milk; then, taking off her shoes and her wraps, she laid her down on a wide couch in the front one of the basement rooms.

"Sakes alive! What's she got on a uniform for?"

"I don't know," Pike returned; but he winked at the woman to make her refrain from further queries.

Elsie was exhausted, but not to the point of going to sleep.

After a second glass of milk and some bread and fruit she was quite herself again, and, buoyed up by excitement and anger, was ready for combat.

"What does it all mean?" she asked the woman, thinking it wiser not to show her indignation at first.

"Don't ask me, miss; I don't know," the woman returned.

"That's right, miss," Pike broke in; "my wife don't know anything about it at all, and neither do I. We're paid tools; that's all we are. Now there's the matter in a nutshell. We're paid to look after you good and proper. We'll do it, too; and if you let us we'll be kind and gentle with you. But if you force us to it we may have to use stronger means. I'd be sorry to lay a hand on you, miss, and I hope to goodness you won't make it necessary, but I'll say straight out, you've got to obey our orders."

"I've no objection so long as you're merely taking care of me, as you say," Elsie returned coolly.

She felt a conviction that her best plan with these people was to placate them in all possible ways. It could do no good to combat them, and might do great harm.

"Who pays you?" she asked so casually that she hoped for an answer.

"We're forbidden to tell," Pike said simply. "And you must see, miss, questions will not get you anywhere, for we're paid to keep our mouths shut, so it stands to reason we're going to do it."

"Of course," Elsie agreed. "But suppose I pay you better, far better than your present paymaster?"

The woman looked up quickly, her small black eyes shining with cupidity; but Pike said in a voice that rang with truth:

"I wouldn't dare, miss. I wouldn't dare even listen to you!"

Elsie remembered Coe's theory.

"Oh," she said, "you're afraid of *him*. And then she whispered: "The master mind!"

"You said it!" Pike exclaimed. "Nobody dares stand up against *him!*"

At that moment a shout rang through the house. The two Pikes turned white and fairly trembled with terror, but Elsie cried out:

"That's the voice of Kimball Webb!"

To be concluded in the next issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, out on Tuesday, December 2d. Do not forget that, as the magazine is published every week, you will not have long to wait for the final chapters of this extraordinary serial.

DETECTIVE SAYS TRANCE AIDS HIM

RELYING upon what he calls the "trance method," Gabriel Hansen, of Memphis, Tennessee, has come to a conclusion as to who murdered Robin J. Cooper, a prominent Nashville attorney, whose body was found recently near his abandoned automobile in Nashville. Not only has Hansen announced that he believes Dennis E. Metcalf, gardener in the Cooper home, was responsible for the death of the lawyer, but the mystic detective has so far influenced the police of Nashville that they have arrested Metcalf and Nora Lee Jones, a cook. The latter, who was also employed by the Cooper family, is accused of complicity in the murder.

Hansen told the police that while in a trance, he had had a vision of the carrying out of the crime, and that the gardener had killed Cooper in the garage behind the lawyer's house. Bloodstained clothes, he asserted, would be found in Metcalf's home.

Having cleared up an assault case that had baffled the authorities of Memphis, Hansen was listened to with respect when he told of his mystic deductions in regard to the Cooper mystery. Detectives followed the tip given them and searched Metcalf's home, with the result that the two servants were lodged in jail.

MOVIE OFFICE OR GAMBLING JOINT?

ALTHOUGH to the general public room number seven hundred and eight of a building on Seventh Avenue near Forty-ninth Street, New York, was the office of a moving-picture concern, it was really, until recently, a well-established center for placing bets on horse races, say the police. Nineteen men were found in the office when detectives raided it, and racing charts and several telephones seemed to support the officers' contention that the film concern was nonexistent, while a gambling place was very much in evidence. The wire connections and switchboard were ripped out by the police, and the patrons found in the office were arrested.

From a Shoe String

by Stephen Lee

BIG, coarse-limbed Captain Cavanaugh, of the detective bureau, chewed his cigar energetically as he deciphered the untidy scrawl. Then, with a chesty grumble, he looked at the superscription on the envelope and examined the cancellation stamp. Finally he picked up the tiny metallic object which, wrapped in tissue paper, had come with the letter.

"What the dickens does the fellow mean?" he queried irritably. "Got the wrong man, have we? Somebody is trying to kid us, I guess. Well, I'll just let Phayle take a squint at this and see what he makes of it. Sapley," raising his voice and addressing a dyspeptic-looking youth seated at a desk across the office, "is Phil Phayle out there?"

"I think so, sir."

"Get him!"

A few minutes later a small, mottled-faced individual with outstanding ears, a vast promontory of nose, and deep-set, ferretlike eyes entered the office and strolled up to the captain's desk. He walked shufflingly, with hands deep in coat pockets, and with a tired and listless air.

"Phayle," began the captain, shifting his bulk in the squeaking swivel chair, "anything new in the Golotti case?"

"Nothing, sir," admitted Phayle with a scowl.

Captain Cavanaugh grinned sarcastically. "You're stubborn as a mule, Phayle," he commented. "Why in darnation a sane man like you should spend all his spare time hunting for clews in a case that's open and shut, is more'n I can figure out. Wasn't Tommie Welkin pinched an hour after Michael Golotti's body had been found? Didn't Welkin have Golotti's gold watch on him when the pinch was made? Didn't Welkin admit that he'd been prowling about the old miser's house about the time the job was done? Didn't everything he did and said prove him guilty as the devil? Didn't the jury find him guilty, and didn't the court sentence him to die in the electric chair on the fourth of next month? What more do you want?"

The captain leaned back in his chair, inserted his thumbs in the armpits of his vest, and looked at the detective with challenge in his eyes.

"All that's true enough," admitted Phayle dejectedly, scratching the tip of his big nose, "but I don't think Tommie Welkin did it. Welkin is a cheap crook, and he's got about as much nerve as a new-born chick. He might have been frisking Golotti's house on the night of the murder, but somebody else did the killing. The marks around Golotti's throat showed he had been strangled to death—garroted with a piece of string or something like that. It takes nerve and some skill to kill a man that way. When a crook of Welkin's type commits a murder he uses a gun or a knife or a piece of gas pipe."

"That's all right," said Cavanaugh in a tone of finality, "but Welkin was convicted, wasn't he?"

Phayle nodded. "And unless the murderer is found soon an innocent man will die in the electric chair on the fourth of next month."

"You're a curious cuss," muttered

the captain. "Sometimes I can't make you out at all. You say Welkin couldn't have done the job because he's the type of crook whose favorite weapon is a gas pipe. That's making a mountain out of a molehill. Don't you see that if your theory is right you're running up against a whopper of a coincidence at the start? If Tommie Welkin didn't do the murder how did he happen to be on the scene the very same night that Golotti was croaked?"

"Such things do happen," declared Phayle stoutly.

"Yes; once in a blue moon. Anyhow, here's somebody who seems to agree with you. Just put your brilliant wits to work on these things and let's hear what you think of them."

A look of animation crept into Phayle's deeply furrowed face as the captain passed the letter and the little metallic object across the flat-top desk. After a glance at the envelope the detective read the enclosure aloud:

"You've got the wrong man for the Golotti job. Welkin didn't do it, and if he dies in the chair you will be his murderers. I inclose a clue for you. You ought to be able to get something out of it."

"Short and sweet, eh?" observed Cavanaugh as the detective raised his eyes from the letter. "What do you make of it, Phayle?"

"It was probably written by a man," ventured Phayle, whose methodical mind always worked from details to essentials. "I should say he is fairly intelligent. He wrote with his left hand to disguise his writing."

"But why didn't he tell us more?"

Phayle hesitated for a moment. "Either because he didn't know anything more, or because he supposed we would guess the rest."

"Uh-huh. Then you think the letter was written in good faith?"

"No telling," said the detective dubiously. "It may be a trick, a false steer, or somebody's practical joke."

"What about the clew?"

Phayle turned his attention to the little metallic object. It was a slender, concave piece of tin, about an inch long and slightly battered at one end. A muffled cry of excitement fell from the little man's lips as he examined it.

"Just a piece of tin, isn't it?" asked Cavanaugh. "I've hardly looked at it."

Phayle's small, gray eyes fairly snapped. "We know Golotti was strangled to death with a piece of string," he remarked briskly. "We couldn't tell what kind of string because the murderer took it away with him, leaving only a blue and black indentation around Golotti's throat. If this is an honest-to-goodness clew, it may mean that it was a shoe string."

"A shoe string? How do you make that out?"

Phayle permitted himself one of his infrequent smiles. "This thing," exhibiting the piece of tin, "came off the end of somebody's shoe string."

"The devil!" exclaimed the captain, leaning forward for a closer view of the clew.

Phayle's slight figure was quivering with eagerness. "The murderer must have lost it somewhere. Maybe it fell off while he was strangling Golotti. It might have loosened when he took the string out of his shoe. The writer of this letter, who is probably a friend of Welkin's, must have found it and sent it to us in the hope that it might help us to get on the murderer's trail."

"Maybe," said Captain Cavanaugh dryly. "But aren't you going a bit too fast, Phayle? There are some two hundred million shoes in this country and most of them are equipped with shoe strings. How do you know the murderer took the string out of his own shoe? He may have found it in an ash barrel, for all we know. Anyhow, all shoe strings look pretty much alike, and I don't see that that strip of tin is much of a clew."

Phayle, who had been comparing the metal tip with those of his own shoe strings, did not seem to hear the captain's words. "There *is* a difference," he observed elatedly. "Look, captain. The tips of my shoe strings consist only of a thin wire coiled around the end of the string. Yours," critically examining the captain's substantial footwear, "are something like the one that came in the letter, but not quite so large."

"Right, b'gosh!" muttered Cavanaugh. "I never thought of it before, but there seems to be considerable variety in the styles of shoe string tips. Just the same this strip of tin don't mean anything unless it came off the murderer's own shoe, and the chances are that it didn't."

"We can't be sure," declared Phayle after a moment's reflection. "If the murderer had decided beforehand to kill Golotti by garroting, he probably went to the house with an extra shoe string in his pocket. But we can't know that. It's just as likely that he took a gun or a piece of gas pipe along, later on deciding that garroting would make a neater job, and less of a mess. In that case it is reasonable to suppose that he took the string out of his own shoe."

"Well, maybe," admitted Cavanaugh grudgingly, "provided he had lots of time on his hands."

"The evidence indicated that he probably found Golotti asleep," suggested Phayle. "Anyhow, I would like to look into this matter more deeply."

Captain Cavanaugh scowled. "Got your mind set on cheating the chair of Tommie Welkin, eh? Well, go ahead, and luck to you. All I've got to say is that I'm a bit suspicious of clews that come with anonymous letters. You're a pretty good man, Phayle, though you've got your funny notions, and I'd hate to lose you. This thing may be a trap."

"I'd enjoy a little excitement for a change."

"All right. Go to it."

Phayle's eyes twinkled as he pocketed the letter and the metal strip. Then he walked out of the office with a firm and sprightly step.

II.

The task which Phil Phayle had set himself proved one of those tedious and seemingly useless varieties of patient plodding that occupy a large part of every detective's life.

Visiting one shoe store after another he was repeatedly informed by the managers that their stocks contained no shoe equipped with strings having such a tip as the one Phayle exhibited. Several of them obligingly showed the detective a number of different shoe string tips, and two or three ventured the conjecture that the particular style of shoe Phayle was interested in was probably manufactured abroad.

Paradoxically enough, Phayle's spirits rose a trifle after each rebuff. Though so far his search had been unavailing it had proved that the tip was of a distinctive make, and that therefore there should be a way of tracing it. It was possible, of course, that, even if he should succeed in identifying the metal strip, his quest would yield no tangible results, but at present he was not thinking of that. His scant five feet six of stature was a dynamo of physical and mental energy, and he hurried along briskly.

It was almost closing time when he entered a large but remotely located establishment and stated his errand to the manager. The latter looked closely at the metal tip, then gave Phayle a half-amused, half-questioning glance, and finally stepped to the wall and pulled out one of the hundreds of boxes that extended from floor to ceiling. Opening it he displayed a pair of large

and heavy tan shoes with thick soles and heels.

"They seem to match exactly," he remarked, comparing the tip Phayle had handed him with those on the strings in the shoes.

The detective felt a quiver of elation as he verified the statement. "Got many of these shoes in stock?" he inquired.

"No; we bought an odd lot early last spring. As you see, they're really winter shoes. We picked them up at a bargain, and have been holding them for the late fall and winter trade. I don't suppose we've sold half a dozen to date. They come only in the larger sizes, and we wouldn't have bothered with them at all if the manufacturer had not given us a rock-bottom price."

"I see," said Phayle. "I don't suppose your salesmen would remember the purchasers of the half-dozen pairs you've sold."

"It's doubtful. You see, we sell hundreds of pairs of shoes here every day. If you will wait a minute I will ask them."

The obliging manager walked away, and Phayle saw him accost each of the salesmen in turn. In a few minutes he was back.

"One of my men remembers selling three pairs to an old customer who was starting on a camping trip with some friends," he reported. "Another has a hazy recollection of selling a pair to a man who was troubled with bunions and wanted an extra large shoe."

Phayle expressed a desire to talk with the clerk who had waited on the man with bunions, and the manager beckoned a flaxen-haired and foppish youth. He shook his head in response to the detective's question whether he could describe the purchaser.

"About all I remember is that he was the grouchiest customer I have ever waited on," he declared. "Nothing seemed to suit him."

"About how long ago was it?" asked Phayle.

The salesman considered. "It was a few days after we received the shipment. That would be about the middle of April."

The detective nodded thoughtfully. Michael Golotti had been murdered one night in early May. "Did he by any chance tell you his name?" was his next question.

"No, sir; he did not have the shoes sent, but took them with him."

"How old did he seem to be?"

The salesman appeared to be prodding a hazy recollection. "Perhaps thirty-five; maybe forty. I wouldn't say for sure."

"I wish you would try hard to remember whether there was anything peculiar or distinctive about his appearance."

The young man tipped his chin against his hand and looked very thoughtful. Finally, as if the questioning had stirred a slumbering memory, he smiled. "He was a rough-looking party—not the kind of customer that usually comes here," he said hesitantly. "While I was waiting on him I felt all the time as though he would run a knife through my back if he had a chance. I seem to recall he had a scar on the left side of his face."

"He must have been a beauty," said Phayle genially, reflecting that the scar was a definite item of description even if the rest was very vague. The salesman could remember nothing further, and Phayle thanked him and walked out. Though he had not learned much, he felt that he had made progress.

"It's just possible," he ruminated as he wedged his way through throngs of returning shop and office workers, "that if I find a rough-looking party, between thirty-five and forty years of age, with an ugly mug and a scar on the left side of his face, I'll have found the guy

that bumped off Michael Golotti. But to find him will be some job!"

At the criminal identification bureau, to which he repaired after leaving the shoe store on the vague chance that he might find some one with a scar on the left side of his face, he could find no records that gave him the faintest hope. An old detective who bore the reputation of knowing the underworld from one end to the other scratched his bald head and confessed that he could give Phayle no information on so hazy a description. A stool pigeon, a night-prowling rat who knew all the nooks and crannies of criminal haunts, whom Phayle met in one of the corridors, asserted in shrill tones that he had never seen such an individual as the detective attempted to describe.

Phayle set his jaw with a determined air and took a street car for his boarding house. The difficulties in the way only strengthened his determination to find the evil-looking man with the scar. There was a great deal of wiry tenacity in the detective's nature. Having decided that Welkin had been unjustly convicted, he felt it incumbent upon himself to produce the murderer of Michael Golotti. The first logical step, he believed, was to find the individual described by the salesman, and to find him would be an irksome task. It would mean a patient and painstaking search throughout the byways and dark niches of the underworld, and nearly every step of his progress would be attended by dangers and difficulties.

After a hasty dinner Phayle locked himself in his room, and during the next half hour he underwent a startling transformation. His natty gray suit was exchanged for a set of misfit and dilapidated garments which he took from the bottom of his trunk. He thanked his lucky star that he had overslept that morning and had not had time to shave, with the result that his face was covered with a tough stubble of beard. He rumpled his hair and smeared into it a sticky and grimy substance from one of the boxes in his make-up kit. Tiny particles of dirt he rubbed into the pores of his face and hands and beneath his finger nails. Finally he drew an old and weather-bleached slouch hat down over his forehead.

"You're a sight," he told his reflection in the mirror after a minute of gratifying inspection. "Your own mother wouldn't recognize you."

His mind had been busy during the process of altering his appearance. Among other things he wondered who had sent the anonymous letter and the metal tip to Captain Cavanaugh. It might, as the captain had said, be a trap set for his undoing, but Phayle was inclined to doubt it. He thought it more likely that a friend of Welkin's had written the letter, and that for reasons of his own he preferred to remain unknown.

The little metal strip and what the salesman had told him of the man with the scar had turned his thoughts in a new direction. They did not alter the principal aspects of the crime, but some of the minor details began to take on a new significance in Phayle's mind.

There were two or three questions which had never been answered to his satisfaction, and in order to clarify them he tried to reconstruct the murder in his mind. It was not easy, due to the absence of an objective setting, and Phayle decided that, before beginning his search for the man with the scar, he would make another visit to Golotti's house, which had stood vacant since its owner's death.

It was dark when he left the car which had taken him within a few short blocks of the dismal and tumble-down dwelling which the miser had occupied. Located in the remote outskirts of the city, and in a district that had never been considered desirable for residen-

tial purposes, its nearest neighbors were a long and squatty factory building, and, on the opposite side of the block, a little fringe of workingmen's homes. The house, surrounded by a few scraggy trees, seemed as aloof and friendless as its owner had been.

Looking about him to make sure that he was not being followed Phayle slunk into the shadows that hovered about the miserable dwelling. It had been locked since the murder, but a loosened shutter swung squeakily in the wind, and it was a simple task to shove up the window sash and enter. He drew the shutter to behind him, struck a match, and proceeded across the creaky floor. As he had expected the gas had been shut off, but he had prudently provided himself with a candle, which he lighted and placed on a rickety table.

The air was stale and dank, and the room contained only such dilapidated pieces of furniture as the executor had not thought worth the expense of hauling away. The murky wall paper had peeled off in spots, and in places the plaster in the ceiling sagged ominously.

Phayle had made a diligent search for clews a few hours after the finding of the body, but something prompted him to search again, although nearly three months had passed since the murder. The fact that some one seemed to have unearthed an additional scrap of evidence in the form of a shoe string tip suggested to him that others might be lying concealed in unexplored nooks and crannies.

But his search revealed nothing, and he was about to take the candle and proceed to the inner room when of a sudden his gaze became riveted on a design in the thin layer of dust that covered the table. Leaning forward and examining it intently he was startled to see the outlines of a hand. The impression was fairly distinct, and seemed of recent origin.

"Queer!" he muttered. "Somebody's been here. A tramp, maybe."

Not satisfied with his guess he took the candle and went to a smaller room in the rear which the miser had used as a bedchamber. Along the outer wall stood the rickety iron couch, covered with a frayed and dirty mattress, on which Golotti's body had been found. Beside it stood a three-legged chair, and on the other side of the room was a small writing desk. Phayle gave a little start as his eyes fell on it.

"Funny," he mumbled, staring at the tracings of a finger in the dust. "Wonder who's been here."

Once more, as he placed the candle on the desk, he tried to tell himself that tramps must have invaded the house. It was nothing new, he reflected, for people of that sort to infest empty dwellings. Dismissing the tracings from his mind he looked at the corner where the safe had stood, an antiquated but substantial steel receptacle in which Golotti, distrustful of banks, had kept his money and the jewels he occasionally bought for investment.

The police had found the safe locked when they reached the scene, and there had not been so much as a nick or a scratch to indicate that it had been violently handled. After it had been opened by a locksmith nothing but an account book and a bundle of documents had been found, although Golotti was supposed to have been worth upward of fifty thousand. The presumption had been that Welkin had hidden the major portion of his loot before falling into the clutches of the police. How he had managed to enter the safe had never been explained satisfactorily.

It was this circumstance, as much as anything else, that had convinced Phayle of Welkin's innocence of the murder. Welkin was a clumsy and lubberly fellow, and to gain access to

a safe by subtle and ingenious means would have been quite beyond him. The story told by the prisoner on the witness stand, to the effect that he had found Golotti lying dead on the couch when he entered the house, and that he had appropriated only two or three minor articles which the murderer had overlooked, had been credited by Phayle from the start, though his colleagues, superiors, and the prosecuting attorney, as well as the jury, had scouted it.

There were several details which in Phayle's opinion required elucidation. One of them was the murderer's course of procedure. A slayer, argued the detective, does not ordinarily adopt such an odd method as garroting unless he has a good reason. How the murderer had managed to open the safe without mutilating its surface was another thing that puzzled Phayle, for it would have been utterly out of character for a miser like Golotti to neglect locking the safe before retiring for the night. Too, he wondered where the murderer had concealed the jewels which he must have found in the safe, and which the police so far had been unable to locate.

He ran his eyes over the narrow, low-ceiled room as he pondered the questions, trying to reconstruct the scene that had been enacted there on the night of the murder. Suddenly, as he stood fingering the tough growth on his chin, a flash of understanding swept through his mind. Two of the questions that had baffled him—why the murderer had chosen the method of strangulation, and how he had contrived to open the safe—were answered.

"The murderer forced Golotti to tell him the combination," was Phayle's conjecture, "and he did it by winding the shoe string around the old miser's throat and tightening it by degrees until Golotti came to terms. You can't wring any secrets out of a man who's been stabbed or shot; that's why he used a shoe string instead of a knife or a gun. Of course, he had to kill Golotti, just the same, to keep him from informing the police. The old skinflint sure got a rough deal. The guy that did it ought to be——"

Phayle's musings came to an abrupt stop. He had schooled himself in the trick of seeming absorbed in a certain object while in reality looking at something quite different. Now he appeared to be studying with great intentness an old newspaper which he had picked up from the floor, but out of the corners of his eyes he was contemplating a face which had suddenly appeared in the door.

III.

It was one of the most villainous faces the detective had ever seen. Beneath the tangled mop of yellow hair protruding under the brim of the slouch hat, a pair of bloodshot, red-lidded eyes glittered malignantly. The long and crooked nose distended into a thick lump at the nostrils, and the coarse lips were set in a hateful sneer. The man, big and powerful, stood in a crouching attitude, his arms hanging like huge flails at his side.

For a moment Phayle thought the evil-looking creature was about to spring upon him, and he knew that, physically at least, he would be no match for his brutish strength. He felt no fear, however, for his lithe muscles and subtle wits easily made up what he lacked in the way of brawn and sinew. Adroitly feigning ignorance of the other's presence he tensed his body in preparation for an encounter.

But the man in the doorway did not move. Phayle, still pretending complete absorption in the paper, saw that his lips had parted into a ghastly smile that revealed a row of yellow, uneven teeth. This, together with the crooked nose and the evil eyes, reminded him

of a phrase used by the salesman in the shoe store: "He was a rough-looking party." The description fitted, but the detective looked in vain for the scar mentioned by the clerk. Still, he reflected, some kinds of scars are removable.

He flung the paper aside and opened the drawers of the desk as if searching for something. For a moment or two, while he struggled with a drawer that stuck to the casing, his squinting gaze left the other's face, and when he looked up again the man was gone.

He tiptoed to the door and looked into the adjoining room, but the mysterious prowler was not there. A cool draft sweeping through the stagnant air told him that a door or window had been opened in the rear, and he stepped softly in that direction, entering the little kitchen in the back of the house. The door stood partly ajar, but a thorough search of the vacant and weed-grown lots on either side of the house revealed no sign of the evil-looking man.

"He gave me the slip," muttered Phayle resignedly as he reëntered the dwelling. "Maybe it's just as well, since I haven't got anything on him yet. I'll run across him again, and when I do I'll stick to him like a leech till I find out why he is prowling around a dead man's house at night. It's a lucky thing he doesn't know that I saw him."

He tried to resume his interrupted investigation, but he had an odd impression that a pair of red-lidded eyes, gleaming malevolently over a crooked nose, were following his every footstep. He wondered what the strange prowler's errand might have been. Had he, like many another wretch hounded by an evil conscience, returned to the scene of his crime to see whether he had left any telltale clews behind? Phayle chuckled grimly as an idea came to him. It was a farfetched guess, of course, but it was not altogether unlikely that the man with the crooked nose had come to the dead miser's house to search for a missing shoe string tip. A murderer's conscience was a strange and fearful thing, and responsible for many queer vagaries.

Finally Phayle blew out the candle and left the house. He had made up his mind to play his rôle consistently until he had caught Golotti's murderer, and instead of going to his boarding house he proceeded to a cheap hotel, frequented by members of the underworld, and engaged a room for the night. He slept in a chair, for the bed did not tempt him, and awoke late the following morning. Unshaven, unwashed, and uncombed, his appearance of one of society's outcasts even more marked than on the day before, he breakfasted at a hole-in-the-wall lunch room before starting out on his quest.

Adopting the slouching and furtive gait of a derelict he plodded patiently till nightfall, making the rounds of ill-smelling restaurants patronized by criminals of the lowest type, dark basement resorts where vile substitutes for whisky were ladled out to tottering and shriveled wretches; gambling dives that masqueraded as coffee houses and pool rooms; foul back rooms of tenements where, behind locked doors, crimes were plotted and loot divided. In none of these haunts would his life have been secure for an instant if by a single slip or false move he had betrayed his identity, but Phayle, having had a thorough schooling, was playing his rôle well.

Everywhere he made crafty and guarded inquiries for a man with a crooked nose, red-rimmed eyes, and certain other characteristics, but in the main his efforts went unrewarded. A former bartender recalled having seen a man vaguely answering the description given by Phayle, but could give no in-

formation as to his present whereabouts. Finally, tired but far from discouraged, the detective entered a squalid basement restaurant and ordered a meal.

The place was thronged with criminals of the lower orders, several of whom Phayle recognized, though he felt confident that none of them saw through his simple but highly effective disguise. Congratulating himself on having a robust stomach, he ate his meal slowly, meanwhile resolving to make another visit to the dead miser's house. He thought it not unlikely that the man with the crooked nose, unaware that Phayle had seen him there the night before, would return.

He was deep in reflections concerning his quarry when a broad-chested and muscular individual walked into the restaurant, and, growling an order to a waiter, slumped into a wooden arm-chair not far from Phayle's table. As soon as he saw the newcomer's face the detective's heart gave an exultant skip. It was the man he had seen in the miser's house the night before.

In another moment the man had seen and recognized him, but Phayle gave no sign that he was aware of the scrutiny. He pretended to be devoting himself to his pork and beans, but all the while he was studying the other man and planning a course of procedure. As yet he could not be sure that the board-chested individual was the man he wanted. The shoe salesman had mentioned a scar, but had said nothing of a crooked nose; otherwise the rather indefinite description fitted the man well. His footwear did not resemble the heavy tan shoes Phayle had been shown in the store, but that meant nothing, for the man had probably purchased a new pair since the murder.

The detective's mind worked quickly as he pushed aside his plate and began to sip the nauseating coffee. He decided that there was a strong chance that the man with the crooked nose was implicated in the murder of the miser. If not, why had he visited Golotti's house the preceding night, and what had been the reason for his strange behavior? This was the argument that almost convinced Phayle that he had found the murderer.

At any rate, he resolved, he must find a way of getting into conversation with the man and cultivating his acquaintance. It should not prove difficult since the latter could not know that Phayle had seen him the night before. Once they had become acquainted, Phayle would constantly watch the other's movements, gradually insinuating himself into his confidence until, by some slip of the tongue or some injudicious admission, he betrayed himself.

The man sat hunched in his chair, a seidel of foaming liquid at his elbow. A look of troubled brooding accentuated his repulsive appearance, and caused Phayle to hesitate about approaching him. Finishing his coffee he slouched up to the bar, requested a match, and drew a stogie from his pocket. On his way back to the table he lurched against the man's outstretched legs.

"'Scuse me, pard," he mumbled humbly.

The other looked up, but now there was no sign of recognition in the red-rimmed eyes.

"It's all right, Jack," he declared with a rough attempt at geniality. "Sit down and have a drink."

"Don't mind if I do." Phayle took a chair and the other bawled an order to the waiter, who presently brought another froth-capped seidel. The detective wondered for a moment at his new companion's unexpected display of sociability, but reflected that the man would naturally be curious about him.

"My name's Larry Hooker," confided the other man, essaying a feeble grin that rendered the expression in

his eyes ghastly by contrast. "What's yourn?"

"Phil," said Phayle truthfully. Like that of many another good detective his name seldom appeared in the newspapers, and was known to only a select few. "How's tricks?"

"Rotten," grunted Hooker, sending a sidelong glance to one of the dim corners of the restaurant, as if interested in a stockily built individual seated there. This man's face was averted from them, and Phayle was unable to gain a clear impression of him. "What sort of kite do you fly, friend?" added Hooker casually.

"Oh, I crack a kittle now and then, if the lay looks good," admitted Phayle, thereby conveying the suggestion that he was not averse to plundering a safe occasionally, if the risks involved were not too great.

Hooker chuckled hoarsely. "Just what I thought the minute I lamped you, friend. I figured that'd be your line. Pickings ain't none too good, eh?" As he spoke Hooker shot another sly glance at the man in the corner.

"Fierce," said Phayle surlily. "I've bumped up against a bloomer twice in a week."

"Tough luck," commiserated Hooker. He regarded the detective closely, as if trying to read his mind. "Say," leaning across the table and lowering his voice to a whisper, "you ain't busy tonight, are you?"

"Not so you can notice it," replied Phayle gloomily. "I almost wish I was."

The other seemed to hesitate. Again he looked toward the corner, and Phayle, following his glance, gained the impression that the man seated there was furtively watching them. At intervals he turned slightly in their direction, but as yet the detective had not obtained a glimpse of his face.

"I've got a peach of a lay," whispered Hooker, his repulsive features taking on a mysterious expression, "and tonight's a good time to tap it, but I can't handle it alone. Want to go in with me on a fifty-fifty split?"

Phayle did not betray the bewilderment he felt. Hooker was offering him half of the proceeds if he would lend a hand in some criminal enterprise, and the detective wondered what the man's real intentions might be. That the projected crime was a subterfuge he was almost convinced. If he accepted he would be moving blindly among untold lurking dangers, yet it was his only chance to learn what he wanted to know about Hooker. His hesitation lasted only a moment.

"Sure thing," he declared carelessly, reflecting that it was not the first time he had plunged recklessly into a maze of perils, and emerged with hardly a scratch. "Where are we bound for?"

"There's a chauffeur waitin' round the corner," said Hooker. "He's a pal of mine, and will give us a lift. We'd better start in about an hour."

The detective pretended to be satisfied with the evasive answer. Hooker, seemingly regarding the matter as settled, took a long swallow from his seidel, wiped his lips with his sleeve, and slumped a little deeper into the chair.

"Wonder who he thinks I am," mused Phayle. "There isn't a chance in a million that he's guessed the truth. He is up to some queer game, and I'll be hanged if I can dope it out. It looks as though the fellow back in the corner was in on it, too. This little——"

At this point the detective's thoughts were sent helter-skelter by something his companion was doing. Hooker sat with one leg resting across the knee of the other, and for some moments he had been idly playing with his shoe string. Now, suddenly holding the string taut, he came out of his reverie with a start, and it seemed as though

the string had awakened a frightful memory in his mind.

An instant later his eyes, flaming uncannily with an emotion which Phayle was at a loss to fathom, were fixed squarely on the detective's face. The stare of the red-streaked orbs was so ghastly and penetrating that for a moment Phayle could scarcely restrain himself.

Then Hooker jerked himself together. "Have another?" he asked, indicating the empty glasses.

Phayle, not daring to refuse, nodded. While the waiter refilled the glasses Hooker stole another swift glance at the man in the corner, then fell into an attitude of morose silence. Neither man spoke until finally Hooker looked at his watch.

"Time to start," he declared in low tones, rising and motioning the detective to follow. As they passed through the door a quick backward glance told Phayle that the man in the corner also had risen. The whole impressed him as strange, and he tingled with a foretaste of adventure. If he was walking into a trap, he reflected, he was at least walking with his eyes open.

As they reached the corner Hooker opened the door of a dilapidated taxicab and whispered a few words to the chauffeur. Then the two men stepped inside, and the car jolted down the street at a brisk clip. They made numerous turns, and, the blinds being drawn, Phayle had soon lost all sense of direction. He noticed that from time to time Hooker was raising the flap covering the little window in the rear, as if he expected pursuit, and Phayle wondered whether they were being followed by the man who had sat in a corner of the restaurant.

"I'm in for something, but I don't know what," he told himself philosophically, glancing at the big, silent man at his side. It seemed to him that they had been traveling for nearly an hour when at length the cab stopped. Hooker opened the door and told him to step out.

"This way," he said curtly, taking the detective's arm. They were in a gloomy, sparsely settled neighborhood, and only a few isolated lights punctured the darkness about them. They seemed to be traversing a number of vacant lots, but his companion hurried him so fast that Phayle had no time to get his bearings. Finally they stopped at the rear of a small house.

"Get in," muttered Hooker, opening a door. Phayle hesitated only for a moment before he plunged into the pitch-dark interior. They fumbled their way through one room and entered another, Hooker maintaining a constant grip on his companion's arm.

Finally Hooker struck a match and lighted a candle, and then the detective opened his eyes wide. He was unable to choke back a little murmur of amazement as he realized where he was. He would have known it sooner if they had not come by a devious route and approached the place from the rear.

They were in the house of Michael Golotti, the murdered miser.

IV.

Quickly drawing himself up, the detective screwed his hairy and unkempt face into a bewildered scowl. "Say," he muttered in suspicious tones, "where's the crib we're going to crack! This kipp don't look good to me."

"Don't get excited," warned Hooker gruffly, and Phayle noticed a marked change in his speech and bearing. He was utterly at a loss to comprehend why his companion had brought him to the house of the dead miser, but he resignedly resolved to go on with his assumed rôle and await developments.

They came so quickly that the reply Phayle had been framing was strangled into a gasp. With an agility surprising

in so big a man Hooker lunged forward, seized the detective by the shoulders, and with a twist of his powerful arms brought him to the floor. The attack was so unexpected that Phayle could offer but feeble resistance, and a moment later his arms had been pinioned at his back and a piece of stout cord twined about his wrists. The whole had been managed so deftly and expeditiously that the detective's bewilderment was mixed with a strong feeling of respect for his companion's strength.

"Get up," ordered Hooker.

Phayle struggled to his feet. The other's lips were twisted into a cold and malignant smile. Phayle, his mind swimming a little, wondered whether by any chance Hooker could have discovered that he was a detective. He knew that if the big man had guessed his identity his life was already trembling in the balance.

"This way," commanded the big man, seizing Phayle's arm and leading him into the adjoining bedroom. "Sit down," he added, and Phayle, realizing that he could do nothing but obey as long as his arms were manacled, sat down on the edge of the couch.

"This is a funny way to go about crackin' a crib," he protested feebly. "What's your game, anyhow?"

Hooker, standing at a little distance, did not answer. The eyes, glittering like points of flame in the unsightly face, seemed to be boring straight through the detective's being. Suddenly the big man snatched a short length of thin rope from his pocket, bounded forward agilely, and with a deft maneuver secured Phayle's feet.

"That's better," he muttered. "You won't get away from me now."

"It was a plant, eh?" queried Phayle, feigning hot indignation. "I'll be hanged, though, if I see what you want to bother with me for."

The other emitted a dry chuckle. Standing with arms folded across his chest he seemed to be straining his ears. Phayle, following his example, heard a faint sound outside the window, as though some one were furtively moving about. He wondered whether they had been trailed to the miser's house by the man who sat in a corner of the restaurant.

Then Hooker drew a long rag from his pocket. With a mighty wrench he forced the detective's jaws open and thrust the cloth into his mouth. Phayle sputtered and squirmed, but to no avail. Moving as noiselessly as if he had been a child in satin slippers the big man slipped out of the room, and a moment later the faintest of sounds told that he had opened the door.

Phayle gazed absently at the fluttering candle, pondering over the strange turn the events of the night had taken. He sensed vaguely that some one was standing just outside the window, and again he thought of the man who had followed them from the restaurant. Were he and Hooker in cahoots, and had the big man gone out to confer with him? Or was——

A muffled cry, followed by a dull thud, interrupted his cogitations. He knew intuitively that a brief encounter had taken place outside the window, and that one of the two men had struck down the other. Then followed a scraping sound as though a body were being dragged over the ground. A minute or two passed, after which Phayle heard the door open, and then a continuation of the scraping sound told that the body was being brought inside the house.

Phayle's mind reeled before the succession of strange events. He knew that the assailant and his victim were in the adjoining room now, but he could not see them from where he sat. Presently he heard Hooker's voice, thick and gloating:

"Coming to, are you? Didn't mean

to hit your bean so hard. Just keep still and don't make any fuss, and you'll be all right."

The whole affair seemed like a dream to Phayle—so weird, inexplicable, and bizarre. He wondered why Hooker's victim remained so still, and it occurred to him that he, too, might have been gagged and bound. But why, and what was the meaning of these strange proceedings?

In vain he scanned Hooker's face for an explanation as the big man reëntered the room, and, placing the three-legged chair against the opposite wall, sat down on it. There was a mocking glitter in the man's evil eyes.

"Old man Golotti was laying on that couch, right where you're sitting now, the night he was choked to death," he observed in queer tones, as though addressing himself rather than the detective.

Hardened as he was to sensations of that sort, Phayle squirmed a little.

"Guess you've heard about the case, ain't you?" the big man went on. "Old Golotti was strangled to death, and fifty thousand or so in cash and about twenty thousand bucks' worth of sparklers was taken from his crib. They say a guy named Tommie Welkin did it. He'll go to the chair for it next month unless——"

The speaker broke off and fixed Phayle with a venomous glance; then continued: "There's no telling what the croaker did with the cash, but he must've salted the sparklers. You see the joolry might have been identified; that's why he didn't dare to soak it. H'm. Wonder if Welkin did it. Since the dicks say he did the chances are he didn't. Those dicks gen'rally get things wrong."

He laughed hoarsely and bitterly. The foul rag in his mouth gave Phayle a stifling sensation, but his physical discomfort was eclipsed by a constantly growing amazement. The big man leaned back in his chair and for a long time sat silent, but his hideously piercing gaze did not for a moment leave the detective's face.

As the minutes dragged by Phayle began to feel as though the red-rimmed eyes were exerting a weird hypnosis upon his senses. The stillness, broken only now and then by a faint rustling sound from the next room, was becoming almost painful. He stirred uneasily on the couch. Though he prided himself on having a hard head and an unemotional nature he could not forget that, in the very spot where he was now sitting, a man had been slowly choked to death. The thought came to him that strangulation must be a fearful end. He pictured mentally the torment and anguish of the dying man's last moments.

Tiny beads of sticky sweat were standing out on his forehead, and something within him revolted against the big man's pitiless scrutiny. He tore at the rope that gyved his hands, but it was strong and securely tied. He felt no physical fear, for his wits had more than once helped him out of corners even tighter than the present, but the mental anguish that was gradually creeping over him was becoming unendurable.

Finally Hooker rose, sauntered over to the couch, and removed the gag. Phayle drew a long breath of relief, unmindful of the foul atmosphere.

"It won't do you any good to holler, for it ain't likely anybody will hear you," declared the big man, sitting down again. "You said your name was Phil, didn't you? Well, Phil, I want you to tell me something."

Phayle straightened his body a little as he awaited the question, but another long and torturous pause intervened before Hooker spoke again.

"I want you to tell me," he said, measuring his words, "why you were snooping around this house last night.

You needn't do any stalling, for I lamped you, though you didn't spot me. What was the idea?"

Phayle managed to make a faint show of surprise. "Lamped me, did you?" he exclaimed, shivering as though in fear.

"That's what I said. Now come out with the straight goods."

Phayle worked his wits furiously, wondering whether, after all, the big man suspected he was a detective. He forced a squealing laugh.

"If you piped me here last night you ought to have been wise to what I was doing. I was frisking the joint, of course, though all I got was an old newspaper. And say, you sure handed me a jolt when you brought me out here to-night."

The other chuckled contemptuously. "You're a darned poor liar, Phil," he asserted dryly. "You weren't after any swag last night. I could tell. A man that's out on a job don't act the way you did. You were looking for something. Want me to tell you what it was?"

Phayle strained forward a little, but he could not repress a start at the big man's next words.

"I've got a hunch you were looking for one of them metal things that come on shoe strings," said Hooker, transfixing him with his uncannily glittering eyes. "Maybe you'd been here before looking for the same thing. I've been kind of expecting you. That's why I was here last night, though I wasn't quite ready for you then. Better come clean. You croaked old man Golotti, didn't you?"

The question gave Phayle such a mental jolt that for several moments he sat speechless and staring, all his conjectures and theories lost in a hopeless jumble.

"You're going to tell before the night's over," declared Hooker in ominous tones, "and you might as well tell now. A guy's conscience is a funny thing, ain't it? It's almost three months now since Golotti was croaked, and I s'pose you've been worrying all that time about the little metal thing you lost the night you killed him. Last night you couldn't stand it any longer, and so you took a bracer and came out here looking for it. Wasn't that it?"

"You're way off," said Phayle, but his teeth were chattering.

"That so? Maybe you'll tell me, then, why you were snooping around the joint last night. And while you're at it, maybe you'll explain why you almost jumped out of your boots back there in the feed joint while I pretended to be playing with my shoe string. I did it on purpose just to see how you'd act, and you sure gave yourself away. Ain't a guy's conscience the queerest thing, though?"

"Who—who the devil are you?" Phayle managed to ask.

"Not much of anything." Hooker laughed thickly. "Tommie Welkin's a pal of mine—best pal I ever had. Saved my life oncet. I know he didn't croak Golotti, and I've made it my business to see that they don't send him to the chair for a thing he didn't do. Welkin's in a tight squeeze, and I saw the only way to help him was to dig up some evidence the fool dicks had overlooked. Well, finally I found that metal thing wedged between two boards in the floor, and I did some tall guessing about it. Couldn't make much of it, though, and so I mailed it to the police, thinking they might. Fool thing to do, all right. Might have known the police wouldn't bother about it. They never do. All they care about is to send somebody to the chair, no matter whether he's guilty or not. Well, I wasn't sure the metal thing meant anything till you came here looking for it last night. Then I got wise right away."

Phayle sat dumfounded while the big man spoke. The revelation that it was Hooker who had sent the metal strip to the police headquarters had come as a shock to his already dazed senses.

"You're mistaken," he declared. "I wasn't looking for the metal tip last night. I'm a detective."

Hooker laughed boisterously, convincing Phayle that he had played his rôle too well. His appearance and the manners he had assumed were anything but those of a detective.

"Let's see your badge," said Hooker sarcastically.

Phayle winced. When engaged in enterprises like the present one he never carried anything which might identify him as a detective, experience having taught him that it was too dangerous. But Hooker could not be expected to believe this, and Phayle saw that he was in an awkward dilemma.

The big man laughed again—a taunting, evil laugh. "You were snooping around the joint last night looking for something. To-night, when I fussed with the shoe string, you jumped. Now you say you're a dick, but you won't show your badge. I don't like to use rough words, but you're something of a liar."

"Call up headquarters," suggested Phayle, "and——"

"And spoil everything. Nix on that. You've going to quit stalling, and then you're going to tell me where you salted the sparklers. After you've done that you can just bet your sweet life that I'm going to call headquarters. Better cough up the truth quick."

Phayle's mind groped for a way of convincing the man, but his dazed senses found nothing that seemed feasible. He could see that Hooker was one of those stubborn natures which, once having conceived an idea, are impervious to reason or argument. Again he wondered who the man in the next room might be, but he realized he could hope for no help from that quarter.

"I've got a hunch you hid the stuff not very far from here," said Hooker. "Maybe it's somewhere in the house. That's why I brought you out here, where you'd be handy to it. I've looked for it myself, but my eyes ain't very good. I'll give you exactly one minute to come across with the truth."

With a show of great deliberation he placed his watch on the writing desk at his side. The next moment a cold tingle began to course through Phayle's veins. The big man had elevated his left foot to his knee, and now, with a malevolent smile on his lips, he started to undo the shoe string. In a twinkling the hideous meaning of what he was doing flashed through the detective's dazed mind.

"Time's up," declared Hooker, pulling the string out of the shoe and advancing toward Phayle. "I've been told that the best place to hand a guy the third degree is the spot where the job was pulled off. You're going to get a little of the same stuff that you gave Golotti. Raise your arm when you've had enough."

A cry of horror rose in Phayle's throat, but in the next instant the string was already cutting into the flesh of his throat and neck, strangling the exclamation into a gurgling rattle.

V.

"Had enough yet?"

After minutes of shuddering agony, during which the big man had gradually tightened the murderous coil about Phayle's throat, the string slackened a little. The detective, a roar in his head that sounded like a distant waterfall, drew in his lolling tongue and gasped weakly for breath. He knew he could never forget the dragging minutes of horror that had just passed.

Hooker, grim and silent, the fires of a fanatical zeal burning in his eyes, leaned over him threateningly as he waited for his answer. Phayle tried to exercise his wits, but his brain seemed to have been tortured into an insensate lump. All that was clear to him was that he must gain a respite, and if possible prevent a repetition of the awful experience he had just undergone. He nodded feebly.

"Did you kill Golotti?" demanded the big man.

"Yes," whispered Phayle, feeling as though nothing mattered as long as the deadly loop was not again tightened about his throat.

"Louder," commanded Hooker with a glance into the other room.

"Yes, I killed him." Phayle could scarcely recognize the hoarse and quavering voice as his own.

"Where did you salt the sparklers?"

Again the detective strove hard to rally his wits, conscious of nothing but that he must stretch the interval of respite as far as possible.

"I'll show you," he mumbled dazedly. "I'll lead you to the place."

"Louder!" ordered Hooker.

Phayle repeated the words. Hooker bent over him and bored a glance from his blood-streaked eyes into the detective's face. "If you're stalling you'll be mighty sorry," he declared in ominous tones. "You make a single false move and the string goes back around your neck again. And next time I'll draw it tighter."

Putting the shoe string into his pocket the big man released Phayle's feet, but did not remove the rope around his wrists. Then, taking the candle, he seized the detective's arm and led him into the adjoining room. Despite the shattered state of his nerves Phayle felt a fresh quiver of amazement at what he saw.

A man, with hands and feet bound, and a gag clamped between his teeth, was lying on his side on the floor. His face was ghastly pale, and a look of intense fear was staring out of his bulging eyes.

"You heard what he said, didn't you?" demanded Hooker, snatching the gag out of the man's mouth. "He admitted he killed Golotti, and he's going to show us where he hid the sparklers. Did you get it all?"

The big man's voice trembled with exultation, but the other's only response was a dazed nod.

"Who is he?" asked Phayle, gradually recovering his wits. He studied the reclining man's profile intently.

"A dick, of course," replied Hooker contemptuously. "He don't know that I know it, but I do. The fathead's been trailing me off and on for a month. Trying to get somethin' on me, I guess. I treated him to a little surprise party all right."

"I don't see," muttered Phayle, stroking his aching forehead.

"Don't see, eh?" Hooker laughed thickly. "Well, when I caught him prowling around the house I handed him a little tap on the head, put some ribbons around his hands and feet, and made him lay here and listen to the niftiest third-degree performance that was ever pulled off. I had to squeeze the confession out of you, and I didn't want him to butt in and stop me. All I wanted him for was to witness what you said. There'll be a mighty sour pill for the headquarters boobs to swallow. They'll have to believe Welkin didn't kill Golotti when one of their own men tells 'em so. Ain't it rich?"

Phayle, his bewildered gaze still fixed on the recumbent figure's profile, saw a glimmering of understanding.

"Why was he following you," he asked, "and how do you know he's a detective?"

"Because he wanted to get somethin' on me, I'm telling you. I pull a little rough stuff now and then, though lately

I've been too busy with other things. How do I know he's a dick? Ha, ha! Why, a friend of mine pointed him out to me oncet. Besides, I heard him telling somebody the other day that he got that scar while making a pinch in a tough joint."

"Oh!" said Phayle with a start. "I think he lied about how he got the scar. Let's have a look at it."

He gave the reclining man a shove with his foot, forcing him to turn over on his back. Phayle contemplated his face for a long, illuminating moment, noting the scar in particular.

"I know him now," he declared in tense tones. "He was on the force once, years ago, but got kicked off for crooked work. He didn't have the scar at that time. You've done some very nifty work, Hooker, but you've made one little mistake. *This is the man that killed Golotti.*"

The man on the floor uttered a squeal of terror, while Hooker, dumb with amazement, stared at the detective. Phayle, slowly recovering from his terrifying experience, grinned elatedly. He did not blame Hooker for his mistake. The man had merely been overzealous in his efforts to secure justice for a friend. And Phayle, even when undisguised, always carefully avoided looking and acting the part of a detective. As he appeared at present, not even the most observant person would have taken him for a sleuth.

Now that he saw the scar on the man's face he knew that the shoe salesman's description, vague and indefinite though it had been, fitted him; but, even with this disfigurement and the look of abject terror written on his features, he looked at the present moment far more like a detective than Phayle, unkempt, ragged, and filthy.

At last Hooker found his voice, and he fixed his ominously glittering eyes on Phayle's face. "You hadn't better stall," he warned crisply. "Why was this guy trailin' me if he wasn't trying to get something on me?"

"He probably knew you were a friend of Welkin's, and that you'd been working to get him cleared. He naturally was afraid of you, and wanted to see how you were progressing. That's why he was trailing you."

Hooker still seemed suspicious. "You said yourself, a while back, that it was you that croaked Golotti."

"Sure thing. Start choking a man, and you can make him say anything. Look here, Hooker."

Phayle pointed at the heavy and frayed tan shoes worn by the man, showing signs of long and constant wear. He plucked at the end of one of the strings and raised it for Hooker's inspection.

"The tip's missing," he announced, "and this man never noticed it. Hooker, I think that if you take that shoe string out of your pocket and wind it around his neck he will tell us where he hid Golotti's jewels."

With a muffled cry of terror the ex-detective rose to a sitting posture just as Hooker produced the string.

"Don't choke me!" he begged shrilly, beads of anguish standing out on his forehead. "I'll tell everything. I'll show you where I salted the swag. Don't——" He choked on the words. "But say," he added hoarsely, "what's this about a shoe string tip? I noticed it was gone, but didn't think anything of it."

"That shows you were never much of a detective," said Phayle dryly. "Hooker, I'm going to hunt up a telephone and get in touch with headquarters. Then I'm going to take a little trip. I want to be the first to tell Welkin the glad news. The satisfaction I'll get out of it will almost make up for the choking you gave me. And, say, you might hand me that shoe string for a souvenir of the worst quarter of an hour I've ever gone through."

The Governor's Wife

by Edith Waring

LUNCHEON was over at the State house, and the governor had departed with his distinguished foreign visitors for an inspection of the military cemetery five miles away. There would be a reception later and a banquet that night, followed by more brilliant, tedious ceremonies on the morrow; the governor's wife had a score of immediate duties on her hands, yet she paused at the study door.

Wilbur Stacy, the governor's private secretary, bent absorbedly over his desk unconscious of her presence, the spasmodic click of the typewriter and rustle of papers alone breaking the silence.

"Mr. Stacy," Georgette Hosmer advanced a step or two and impulsively addressed the back of the sleek, blond head, "have you had an opportunity of mentioning the Mulqueen matter to my husband?"

The young man whirled about and rose precipitately.

"I—I really couldn't, Mrs. Hosmer," he stammered, his mild, nearsighted eyes blinking deprecatingly behind their shell-rimmed glasses. "I said that I would if it were possible, but you realize my position. I cannot undertake to influence or suggest a course of action to the general, and in the Mulqueen case he has been adamant from the beginning. He would not even see the delegates who came this morning to intercede for his clemency. The man must die. But really, I'm afraid I shouldn't discuss this, even with you."

"I understand." Mrs. Hosmer sighed and went slowly to the door, then turned. "It seemed on the surface to be a clear case of common, brutal murder, of course, and yet from the newspaper account I feel almost sure that something was being held back, something which might have had a vital bearing on the verdict."

"But what could there have been?" the secretary expostulated feebly. "The Mulqueen lawyers never denied from the first that he killed the man."

"Extenuating circumstances," Mrs. Hosmer said quietly. "You believe, perhaps, that there can be no extenuating circumstances in connection with the deliberate taking of human life, but opinions differ; and if there are such circumstances in this case my husband should listen and act. Don't think, please, that I am criticizing him; my only desire is to save him from possible remorse later. It is a solemn, dreadful thing to hold in one's hands the power of life and death."

She paused with a little catch in her breath as though swiftly conscious of her unwonted outburst, but the secretary was impervious to it.

"It is a part of the responsibility of the general's office, Mrs. Hosmer, and let me say that no man ever sat in the governor's chair who was more fitted for its duties." The young man's face

flushed and his pale eyes glowed with enthusiastic fealty and affection. "His decision must be for the best."

Mrs. Hosmer smiled faintly.

"If all his constituents were as loyal as you, Mr. Stacy, there would be no question of his reëlection."

"There will not be!" Wilbur Stacy's voice rang with confidence. "It will be a walkover, Mrs. Hosmer. You'll see!"

Still smiling, she left the study and mounted slowly to her own apartments, while young Stacy with a sigh of relief turned to his accumulated work. He had a tremendous admiration and respect for the governor's wife, but he wished most heartily that she would not meddle with affairs of State. This was the first occasion within his memory on which she had attempted it and it made him tremble for his own peace of mind in the future. The general—as the governor was still almost universally called by those close to him because of his rank as major general won in the war with Spain—would brook no interference in the exercise of his prerogatives, gentle and considerate as he always appeared toward his wife; there would be no petticoat government while he ruled in the State capitol.

"Your gown for to-night, madam. It has just arrived from New York." Mrs. Hosmer's maid greeted her at the door of her dressing room. "Will madam have time to try it on now?"

"Yes, at once." Mrs. Hosmer spoke quickly, but her tone was absent.

"The young woman who brought it from the modiste's, madam. May she enter? She says it will be necessary for her to give it a final touch, a few stitches. She has come from New York for the purpose."

"Let her come in, of course."

Mrs. Hosmer permitted herself to be divested of her gown, and throwing a light negligee about her shoulders she dropped listlessly into a chair. The unending ceremonies and festivities attendant upon the visit of the post-bellum foreign mission were more fatiguing than she had anticipated, despite her like experiences of the past, and she was in no mood to lend herself to the petty annoyance of a fitting; but the governor's wife must shine resplendent before the distinguished visitors, and she could not shirk her portion of the burden which her husband had assumed.

In the ripe bloom of her glowing maturity she was a perfect type for her exalted position. Tall and stately, not too slender, but with the grace which came of a well-poised mind as well as body, she bore herself with an unaffected, native dignity which made her the cynosure of all eyes. She dressed her part as she did everything else—in perfect conformity, yet with absolute independence of opinion, and often with a touch of originality that amounted to genius.

Now as her maid opened the huge, flat leather case and tossed aside the layers of tissue paper which lay beneath, Mrs. Hosmer found her gaze wandering to the young woman who had brought it, and who now stood respectfully at one side. She looked the conventional shop assistant, and yet there was a curious tensity in her quiet figure, an odd glimmer in her discreetly lowered eyes. She would be handsome in a bold, florid sort of way, Mrs. Hosmer decided, if her face were not so drawn and haggard. She must be hideously overworked, poor thing.

"The gown, madam!" There was a note of reverential awe in the maid's tone, and Mrs. Hosmer turned to view the cascade of filmy lace and shower of starry spangles which foamed over the box's edge. "Ah! but it is *magnifique*, a veritable creation!"

It was. The governor's wife, standing before her mirror, regarded her reflection with the impersonal, satisfied

eye of an artist. The gown, concealing yet daringly revealing the superb lines of her figure, shimmered and glowed with the opalescent luster of pearls, bringing out her dark, vivid beauty in almost startling intensity.

"Just a touch here at the corsage, madam. One moment——" The modiste's emissary knelt before her and fumbled at a fold of lace.

Mrs. Hosmer glanced downward. How the woman's hands were trembling! Surely the gown was perfect as it was. Could the creature be deliberately botching it?

Just then the woman looked up full into the eyes of the governor's wife, and her own held an appeal so wild and poignant that the latter caught her breath.

"Nichette, I wish you would go, please, and see if the favors have come. You need not return; I shall ring if I need you."

The maid looked her reproachful astonishment at being banished from the fascinating rite, but went promptly, and when the door had safely closed behind her Mrs. Hosmer spoke:

"You wished to see me alone? There is something I can do for you?"

"Oh, madam!" The woman sat back upon her heels at the feet of the governor's wife and clasped her hands convulsively. "It's heavenly kind you are! If you'll only listen, if you'll only hear me——"

"Who are you?" Mrs. Hosmer stepped back and loosened the gown from about her. "You do not come from Drouillard's establishment. How did you obtain possession of this?"

"By a trick." The woman's full, red lips drooped, but her brilliant, haggard eyes still pleaded. "I bribed the girl who started with it, but don't blame her; I put too big a temptation up to her. I had to; it was the only way I could get to see you. I'm Kitty—Katherine Mulqueen."

The gown slipped from Mrs. Hosmer's fingers and fell, a mass of glittering froth, about her feet.

"You are——"

"The wife of the man who must go to the chair to-morrow unless your husband says the word that'll save him. I tried to reach him but he won't hear me; he won't even see me." The woman rose and retreated a step, her head proudly erect. "I've not come to grovel for mercy or lie about his guilt. Of course Danny killed Matt Holihan, and proud I am of him for doing it. But the real story never was told at the trial. The truth that might have freed him never came out; he wouldn't let it. He made us promise—me and the lawyers that defended him. It's that story that I want to tell you now, ma'am, if you'll only listen."

"But I can do nothing," protested Mrs. Hosmer faintly. "I have no power, no authority——"

"You're the wife of him who has; you can make him hear you and heed. Would you have him send a man unjustly to his death? 'Tis not a light thing to have murder on your soul."

Mrs. Hosmer gasped and her face went white.

"Sit down," she said quietly. "I can promise nothing, but I will listen."

"Thank God!" The woman sank into a chair and for an instant buried her face in her hands, her buxom form drooped and trembling.

From where she herself was seated the governor's wife caught a reflection of their two figures in the tall mirror, and a grotesque fancy came to her mind. How much alike they were! Albeit cast in a finer mold, she was of the same general type as her visitor; the latter was only a trifle taller, a trifle more ripely developed, lacking her poise, but with a certain wild grace. It was as though she beheld a flamboyant, fantastically accentuated replica of herself.

But the woman had dropped her hands, and when she spoke her voice was steady, though a trifle hard.

"If you read of the trial in the papers, ma'am, you'll know that Danny Mulqueen—my man!—and Matt Holihan, his best friend, went duck shooting together to a shack down on Long Island, where all the boys of the Ward Association used to hold their clambakes and jamborees—and Danny came home alone. He said that Matt had gone out in the marsh or the reeds, or whatever they call it, with the decoys and hadn't come back, and he couldn't find him; that he'd left a note for him at the shack saying he was tired of hanging around in the rain with no luck, and had gone on back to New York.

"They found the bit of a note, but after—they found Matt, too, away out in the salt marsh with his head bashed in. The district attorney proved that for all they went off together like that there was bad blood between the two of them; that my Danny held it against Matt for his own failure in the trucking business, Matt having been one of the big fellers in the combination that forced Danny to the wall.

"He's a smart man, that district attorney, but he didn't know that there was no truth in it. Danny failed through no fault of his own nor Matt's, but just the bad judgment that made him try to buck the combination, and he held it against no man. He didn't know, either, that Danny had been passing the word for weeks beforehand of his fake grudge against Matt, fixing up a motive in case he should get caught in what he had planned to do."

"It was no sudden quarrel then? He meant to kill his—his friend when they started on that shooting trip?" Mrs. Hosmer's tones were colorless, but she wet her lips nervously. "Why?"

"Because of—me." A dull flush crept over Kitty Mulqueen's face, but she still held the governor's wife with her eyes. "Such things don't come into the lives of people like you, ma'am, but before ever I met Danny, when I was a wild slip of a thing my first year over from the old country, I struck the black fancy of Matt Holihan, the most popular feller in the ward. He was a fine figure of a young man, dashing and gay and with a way with him, and I thought he meant marriage. Nobody knew, and when he got tired and laughed at the broken heart of me, I could still hold my head high before my aunt that I lived with, and the people on the block and in the parish.

"It's not my story I'm telling, except how it worked on Danny later; so I'll not be trying your patience with how I got over it and went on through the days and the months till Danny himself came along. For three years I wouldn't listen to him, and then I found all at once that he was everything in the world to me! I ought to have told him then and he'd never be facing the chair to-morrow, but I didn't dare, for he was that strict about right and wrong that I might have lost him. Nobody knew, you see, ma'am, and I thought it was all dead and buried so—so I married Danny. Did you speak, ma'am?"

"No." Mrs. Hosmer shook her head. "Go on."

"Everything went well, and we were the happiest couple in the parish when Matt, who'd been working out in Chicago, came back and saw me once more." The sullen face was averted now. "The vanity of him couldn't stand it, I guess, that I was happy and had forgot him, and he spoke to me with a sneer at Danny for marrying me, knowing what I was. I flared up and told him the truth, that Danny didn't know, and that was the second mistake I made, for it gave him just the hold he wanted over me.

"He began making up to Danny, and

of course Danny liked him, just like everybody did at first. He got to coming to the flat all the time, and before I knew it him and my man were thick as thieves and Danny couldn't understand why I tried to break it up. At last he showed his purpose to me; he wanted me back again!"

She buried her face in her hands again and the governor's wife said no word. There was neither pity nor condemnation in the eyes she bent upon the bowed figure before her; only a calm, judicial patience as though waiting for the dénouement.

"I wish to Heaven I'd killed him myself!" The woman gulped back a convulsive sob and lifted her face once more. "I hated him enough to, but I only tried to make him go away. When he saw that—that it wasn't any use, he swore that he would fix it for Danny to learn the truth; that he'd spread it around the parish so nobody would know the story came from him, but he'd see that it reached Danny's ears. He would have done it, too; I knew him well enough for that. I knew, too, that he'd be able, with the devil's cleverness of him, to make it seem like I was worse than the dirt under his feet before ever he met me. I couldn't stand it to have Danny hear it blacker than it was, and from any one else. I was near mad with the man's persecutions and—and I told my man the whole truth myself."

She paused and drew in a quivering breath.

"Danny's the quiet kind, ma'am, that takes things in deep. He was wonderful to me." Her hardened tones sank to a tender, adoring whisper. "I never would have believed that a man lived who could be like him, but after that he brooded, and sometimes there was a look in his eyes that made me afraid of I didn't know what. One thing I couldn't understand, though; he kept up his friendship with Matt. He didn't bring him to the flat any more, and he took care that Matt didn't come by himself, but he was always with him. The failure in the trucking business had come some months before, and never a whisper of the things he was saying behind Matt's back reached me about Matt being responsible for it.

"Then—then came that duck-shooting time, and—and that's all. It's the truth, and do you think any jury of red-blooded men with women of their own would have heard it and not let him off? But he wouldn't—wouldn't have it told because he'd closed the one mouth that would have done it, and my good name meant more to him than the chance of going to the chair. Oh, ma'am, forgive the impudence of it, you that's always been a good woman, but if—if you'd been in my place and the governor had been in my Danny's, wouldn't he have done the same? Won't you tell your husband the truth and ask him to save mine?"

There was a tense silence; then Mrs. Hosmer rose slowly, and, approaching the other woman, laid her hand upon her shoulder.

"You will wait here, Mrs. Mulqueen, until—until the last train. Nichette will take care of you."

"But you'll tell him? You'll——"

Mrs. Hosmer nodded solemnly.

"I will tell him," she said.

The banquet that evening was the most brilliant affair of the administration. The foreign visitors were entranced anew with the vivacious beauty and charm of their hostess, and the members of the gubernatorial set themselves opened their eyes.

"A wonderful woman! Wonderful!" State Senator Blabbington remarked to a Washington guest, a diplomat of the country from which the foreign mission had come. "She would be an ornament to the White House itself, by Jove!"

"Perhaps, sometime——" Being, as aforesaid, a diplomat, the other finished his sentence with a shrug and a smile as they took their departure.

At last it was all over, and the governor and his wife found themselves alone in the study for a moment before retiring. Even the indefatigable Stacy had metaphorically thrown up the sponge and sought a respite until the early morning should call him again to his tasks, and after the blare of the orchestra and hum of many voices the room was very still.

"Well, my dear!" Richard Hosmer laid his hands upon his wife's softly gleaming shoulders and turned her tenderly toward him. "Quite worn out? Ah, but I was proud of you to-night. More proud than I have always been, if that were possible."

"Really, Dick?" She smiled faintly up into the fine face bent above her, and noted the tired lines about the firmly chiseled lips and keen, steady gray eyes. "It is you who are worn out, and yet—and yet I want you to humor me for just a little while, will you? You are the governor, but after all you are my husband, and surely a wife——"

For a moment he studied her face intently and then his hands dropped.

"What is it, Georgette?" he asked quietly.

"I want to tell you a little story," she began nervously. "It is very brief, and although it may—may disturb you, I want you to hear me through till the end. Will you?"

"A story?" he repeated. "I don't understand in the least, my dear, but of course—— Let us sit down."

"Dick, there was a girl once, a very young girl; let us say in her first season out in the society of her own kind. She was unsophisticated, warm-hearted, bubbling over with life and spirits, and she met an unscrupulous man who fascinated her——"

"Georgette!" The governor rose precipitately. "What does this mean? Why are you speaking——"

She interrupted him with a gesture. "Please let me go on. The young girl of whom I am telling you thought that the man meant marriage, but he didn't, and she only woke up to a realization of his true character when he tired of her. He laughed at her and almost broke her heart, but the affair had been a secret one and no one knew, so somehow she plucked up courage enough to go on."

Richard Hosmer went quickly to her and once more laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Dear, you are tired out. It is late and you must rest. Why do you choose this time to——"

"I asked you to humor me, Dick; to let me finish. You *must* let me tell you this story to the end." Her voice rose almost hysterically.

"But I cannot see——"

"You will if you will only listen. You will see, you will understand, I promise you." She laughed, and as suddenly pressed her hand against her lips as though to still the sound. After a moment she composed herself and went on: "Another man came into this girl's life, a good man, and in a little while she found that she loved him, really loved him. The other affair seemed like some horrible dream, and when this other man asked her to marry him she dared not tell him of it. He was so uncompromisingly upright, so stern in his condemnation of those who—who made mistakes, that she was afraid of losing him, so she married him and said nothing."

Georgette Hosmer paused, but her husband did not speak. He stood regarding her as she had regarded that other woman upstairs a few hours before.

"The girl supposed that the old skeleton would never arise, but she was

wrong. The first man came back, and in his egotism he could not endure the thought that she was happy and had forgotten him. He tried to win her back, to resume his affair with her in secret as before, and when he saw that she hated him he threatened that her husband should learn the truth. She knew that he meant it, and rather than have the hideous story reach the ears of the man who loved and trusted her from any one else, she told him everything herself. In his God-given generosity and love he forgave her, forgave, too, the fact that she had married him, living a lie. But he did not forget what the other man had done, although he ostensibly remained his friend——"

"Georgette!" The governor's voice had grown suddenly hoarse. "I will not listen to another word. You are overwrought, you are working yourself up——"

"You shall listen! You shall!" She had risen and now she faced him with every nerve in her body tense. "The woman was afraid. She didn't know why, or what it was that she feared, but she couldn't understand. She knew there must be some motive behind her husband's continued cordiality to the man who was her worst enemy and should have been his, and she dared not face even her own thoughts. Then —then her husband and the other man went on a shooting trip together, and —her husband came back alone."

"Stop!" The sharp cry rang through the room and the governor's face went white. "Do you know what you are saying? Do you realize——"

"Yes!" A running sob came into her voice. "I'm telling you the story of Kitty Mulqueen, whose husband dies in the chair in the morning for killing the man who had broken her heart once and then tried to steal her from him."

"Great—Heaven!" The words came slowly from the governor's lips and he backed away from his wife, his eyes fixed upon her tear-filled ones as though he were just awakening.

"It's true," she sobbed hysterically. "Oh, Dick! Dick! When I told you about Paul Vanduyne and what had happened in my débutante year—how he tried to get me back after I married you and threatened to tell you, and then you and he went hunting together in the Adirondacks——"

"Georgette!" There was a cold, almost menacing quality in the governor's tones, yet upon his face was the look of a man who finds himself all at once at the edge of an abyss. "Do you realize that one word more may open up a rift between us that can never be bridged?"

"Why?" Her hysteria was checked as suddenly as it had risen, and she opened wide eyes upon him. "Paul's death up there was an accident, of course. I knew you went with him only to get an opportunity to tell him that you knew, and to thrash him within an inch of his life where there would be no chance of notoriety and scandal; but you never had the opportunity, did you? He was killed the very night you reached camp, while he was cleaning his gun. But think, dear! Suppose you *had* shot him for what he had done to my life, and was trying to do to ruin our happiness, as this man Mulqueen killed the beast who had done just what Paul did! Wouldn't you have deserved clemency? You'd have gone to the chair, too, rather than have my name dragged in the dust, and this poor fellow will, and for the same reason, if you don't save him. His wife came to me—she's here now, waiting; she told me the whole story. It's just like ours, Dick, just like ours would have been if you had killed Paul. You can't refuse to save Mulqueen now. Put yourself in his place. You can't refuse to save him!"

"Paul Vanduyne's death was—accidental, of course. You are right, Georgette. I—I meant to thrash him, but the end came too soon."

"And Dan Mulqueen," she cried eagerly, too engrossed in her plea to note the change in his manner. "Suppose you had done what he did; wouldn't it be right and just and fair for you to go free? Oh, Dick, every added minute is torture to him waiting there in that prison for the dawn, and to that poor woman upstairs who loves him. Dick, may I not go to her and tell her that you'll phone and wire and stop the execution, that you'll sign the pardon now, now? She can tell her story to the district attorney and the other officials later, but it needn't come out. You *will* pardon him, Dick? Think, you might have stood in his place!"

The governor turned and walked to his desk where he stood with his back to her, one hand over his eyes. She waited, her breath coming in little gasps, her tightly clasped hands pressed against her breast.

After what seemed an interminable time he turned again and faced her with a grave smile.

"The woman is waiting, you say? Go to her, Georgette, and tell her that her man shall go free."

"Ah, I knew it! I knew that you would understand and save him! Oh, Dick!"

She stumbled toward him, but with a wearied gesture he motioned to the door.

"Go, dear. It is almost dawn, and I must get the warden on the wire."

When his wife had vanished and the door had closed behind her Richard Hosmer sank into the chair before his desk. He saw again that picture which for ten years had risen before him: the camp fire, the hated figure bending over it, which rose and faced him just as the gun he was cleaning slipped from his grasp, the echoing shot that rang out as he tried to catch it before it fell, the body which tumbled over into the dried leaves——

Richard Hosmer started as four musical notes pulsed out upon the air from the tall clock in the corner. He shook off the convulsive shudder that came with the thought of what might have been—then straightened in his chair and reached for the telephone.

PRISONER ESCAPES TO AID MOTHER

GIVEN the privileges of a trustie because of his good record as a prisoner in the jail at Carthage, Missouri, Homer Parrish surprised and shocked the warden by violating the confidence placed in him. He left the institution secretly before he had completed his term. A few days after his escape he sent a letter to the warden which explained why he had broken out of custody.

Parrish wrote that a mortgage would soon be due on his mother's home and that she would not be able to meet the obligation unaided. Being devoted to his parent Parrish decided to leave the jail and earn the money to pay off the mortgage. He voluntarily offered to return to Carthage and finish his term as soon as he had given his mother the aid she needed.

Impressed favorably by the letter, the prison officials decided to let Parrish have an opportunity to carry through to success the obligation he had assumed. If he fails to earn the money honestly the guardians of law and order will make every effort to run him down and return him to the jail.

Without Pity

by John Campbell Haywood

"WHO done it? That was the question agertatin' all o' Dooners from th' head o' th' crik to Point o' Rocks!"

The old man suddenly ceased whittling and turned toward me. For two hours he had been perched upon the fence, gazing seaward, his hair in whisps of yellowish white stirring in the light breeze. It was the first time he had spoken.

The dull, querulous voice repeated: "Who done it? I say! Who done it?"

I was in no mood to answer. My sketch, with the bent figure in the foreground, was nearing completion. The high lights were darkening. I brushed hastily to finish before the evening shadows fell.

"Did ye hear me?"

He left his seat and came and leaned against a large bowlder, part of which I was using as a back rest. As he passed around the easel I saw a seamed and withered face. Lusterless eyes peered half blindly through the waning light.

"I heard you. What of it?"

"Murder it was, an' who done it, says I. Will ye listen, man! Will ye listen?"

I could not paint with the old man looking on, although I felt he could not see that I was putting his figure on the canvas, and with that hoarse voice without life or cadence to it in my ear.

"Yes, I'll listen," I said somewhat impatiently, and began to wash my brushes.

"Will Moons was a shif'less man, almighty shif'less. He come in with the herrin' fleet one day, thirty year ago it was. Lord! It seems like yesterday." The old man drew his hand across his eyes as though he saw the landing of the shiftless man.

"A big, handsome chap he was, an' soon the girls were took with him. I was coortin' Lisbeth Pines in them days, an' a comely lass she was; aye, a comely lass with red cheeks an'—an' beautiful to me. When Will Moons come she cooled to me an' had no eyes for any one else but him. It were crool hard, becos I loved her well. Drunk he got—drunk an' fightin', but it made no dif'runce to her. He must 'a' loved her too' 'cos when th' fleet went out he stayed behind an' married her.

"There was a kid born, an' for six year there weren't no change in him. But th' life told on her—'tis God's truth I tell ye—as it will when th' tide o' a woman's love goes out an' there's nothin' in sight but mud an' rock. Another's wife she was, an' a good woman, too, but I loved her an' done my best for her an' tried with him, but 'twern't no use. He was just shif'less an' bad!

"One night he was killed in th' shed back o' th' cottage—found dead, he was, with a ax beside him an' him lying on his back with a hole in his head! She found him. Then they told me an' I went an' done what I could to comfort her, but murder it was. An' who done it? That was th' question agertatin' all Dooners from th' head o' th' crik to Point o' Rocks!"

I saw his hand claw into the dull light as though he grasped at an escap-

ing thought. I knew that he had more to tell so I sat silent and puffed at my pipe.

"Lisbeth's sister, Emmerline, comes up from the city an' says send for a deteckatif. That was how Peter Pike come to Dooners. Peter was a small man, likely enough, an' 'bout thirty. Emmerline said he was a great deteckatif; anyway he soon had everybody talked to about th' murder—mostly wimmen, becos th' fleet was away—but nothing come of it. He got a-many clews, but when he follered 'em up there wasn't any arrest becos it was mostly a cat or a dog as had left th' mark they led to. That was plain to me, an' I showed others how it was. One day 'bout a week after th' murder he come to me—I was laid off from th' boat with a sore foot—an' showed me a little shoe button what he says was took from the dead man's hand. He says it was a great clew. Whomever, he says, that button belonged to was th' murderer. He follers that clew from house to house tellin' me to keep my mouth shet. He purtends he wants to buy boots, an' he ain't offered any but high-lows an' sich. He goes to meetin', but there weren't any button boots there even on the Sabbath. Fisher people don't wear them things Sabbath or any days, but he sticks to that clew an' tells me he'll foller it to his dyin' day.

"Peter Pike boarded at Widow Moons'. Every time I went there—which were pretty often—I finds him settin' in th' parlor like he owned it, an' he didn't give me th' chance to speak to her alone like I wanted to. I loved Lisbeth same as ever an' would 'a' married her, but Peter didn't let be; at last he told me Lisbeth was goin' to marry him instead o' me. Peter was still huntin' th' murderer of Will Moons, an' follerin' clews, an' livin' on th' widow's money, as far as I cud see. She was still payin' him to find th' murderer. He never told Lisbeth nor Emmerline o' his great clew, the button. It was almost wore out by being carried by him constant. Then I went out with th' fleet—there was a good run o' herrin' outside—an' when I come back they was married.

" 'Bout a month after that Peter Pike comes to me with a white face an' a scared look. Little Tim—that is Will Moons' son—was about eight year old then, a fine boy, nigh ready to work in the net house. His mother meant to make a preacher o' him an' was trainin' him that way by having him speak a piece when comp'ny was present. Peter says to me most impressive, 'I've found th' murderer—my clew is follered to its end.' 'Who?' says I. 'Baby Tim,' he says.

"Then he goes on to tell me how he was lookin' in a bouror droor for his shirt when he comes across a package—a small package wrapped in thin paper an' tied with pink ribbons. He knows his shirt isn't in it but he opens it an' finds a pair o' little shoes in it, an' from one o' them the top button was gone. He had that there button in his pocket that minit! Peter says th' shock giv' him a chill, but he comes to me an' tells me. I says it ain't possible for a little chap like Baby Tim—he was between six an' seven year old then—to 'a' done it, but Peter explains as children is cute but th' trained mind o' a deteckatif sees thro' 'em easy. He says Baby Tim knows what a shif'less raskill his father was an' loves his mother, so he says to himself he'll punish him. Then he goes to th' shed an' sits on a beam 'till his father comes an' then he drops th' ax on his head.

"I know'd it wasn't so when Peter explained it. I loves th' kid an' tells Peter I think dif'runt an' asks how he knows. Peter says, 'By the button.' He explains that Baby Tim gets down to run out o' th' shed an' Will Moons in his dying convulsion grabs his boot an' th' button comes off in his hand. I

says 'No,' but Peter says if Baby Tim didn't do it then there ain't no clew as leads to any one but him. Peter says he dassn't tell his mother—Baby Tim's mother that is—becos it 'ud break her heart, but from that day he goes about th' house sort o' mopy becos he's hidin' a secret as he had ought to tell. Folks giv' him things to find out, like who stole Ben Hand's bar'l o' herrin', an' he done it easy; but he pines all th' time, an' 'bout a year after that he ketches a cold an' dies. He dies, mind yer, with th' little button in his hand, an' I kep' his secret. Then when Lisbeth takes up with Cap'n Swift I leaves th' place!"

As the old man's voice drooned down I made a movement as though I thought the tale ended.

"Wait, man! I ain't told all yet. A man was murdered. Who done it, I says."

I smoked my pipe silently. The shadows of the great rocks overhanging the dark waters grew deeper, the movement of distant swells more indistinct as the night clouds gathered overhead. From the breast of the creek a mist was slowly rising, creeping out to sea. Yet I sat waiting, held by the fascination of the dull, colorless voice.

"Who done it? Five years ago over there"—he stretched a long thin arm in the direction of the lights twinkling in the village near Point o' Rocks, "there were many widders weepin' an' children cryin'. Why? Becos a hurricane had swep' th' coast an' out o' thirty boats in th' herrin' fleet twenty-seven had gone under an' drownded th' men."

I remembered the great storm and the disaster it wrought upon the coast.

"There was a man wanderin' round th' country them days. He had that little button an' he kep' it by him, although it kep' in his mind th' murder o' Will Moons. Th' dead man's face sort o' haunted him. He throwed th' button away one day an' then spent two days searchin' for it 'til he finds it agen. Then he comes to Dooners an' tells people, mostly old people as remembered things, that he's th' murderer. He even goes to th' meetin' house an' tells them there an' shows 'em th' button, but they don't do nothin' to him—only act kind o' pitiful; an' he goes to th' net house an' th' docks—mostly strangers there is there now—an' he tells them. They listen, but they don't do nothin'. They don't do nothin'. The wimmen, when he tells them, gives him food an' speaks kind to him—an' he a murderer!"

A hacking cough that seemed the breaking of a sob, stopped the old man's voice for a few moments—a voice that now came to me from the shaded figure in the mist with a great softness.

"Are ye list'ning, man? Are ye list'ning?"

I said "Yes" mechanically and he went on:

"Lisbeth was dead—an' Cap'n Swift at sea, but Baby Tim—a growed man—was tending the light on th' Point o' Rocks."

He stretched out his arm and pointed to the far gleam of the lighthouse. It seemed a signal for the fog siren to throw its screaming wail through the low-lying mist.

"It was a long walk for the man. An' then when he told Tim—Tim as he'd knowed when a baby—as how he'd killed his father—not sayin', mind ye, as he wanted his mother himself—an' his sorrer an'—an' that he was a murderer an' ought to be took up an' hung, Tim just looked at him like all th' rest—kind o' pitiful! Then he showed th' little button and told how Peter thought he'd done it. Tim just said 'let the dead—let the dead——'"

The voice ceased as the old man searched his memory for the words.

"Let the dead past bury its dead," I said quietly.

"Yes! Let the dead past bury its

dead," he repeated. "Them was the words! How d'ye know? Them—was —th' very words!"

There was a long silence. I looked round, thinking the old man gone. He was still there.

"Here's th' button! D'ye want to look at it?"

A grimy, clawlike hand stretched toward me out of the veil. In the dusk I saw it and in the palm a little spot of greater blackness than the rest. It rolled as the hand shook.

"See it, did yer?"

"Yes," I answered.

"There was a murder done! Who done it? says I, an' you answers——"

I stood up and reached my hand toward him, touching his damp shoulder. With a feeble stroke he pushed it from him, and shrunk further into the mist.

"Not that, man! Not that! Not pity, but——" His voice died away as he faded into the murk of the night.

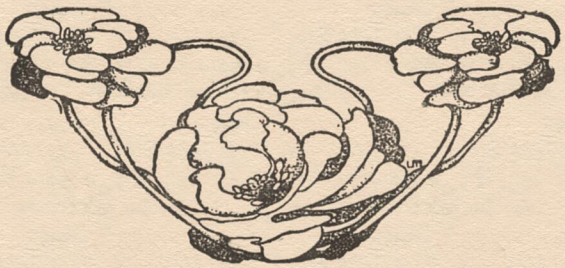
But—what! Surely if it were punishment the little button with its memories brought its own.

BOND MESSENGER MURDERED

EIGHT days after he had disappeared with one hundred and seventy-eight thousand dollars worth of bonds belonging to a Wall Street firm, the mutilated body of Benjamin Binkowitz, a messenger, was discovered in a field near Milford, Connecticut. There were nine stab wounds in the chest, one hand was severely cut, and the face was slashed so badly that at first the police failed to identify the body as that of the missing New York youth. Seven dollars, a knife, and a key ring were all that were found in his pockets, and, identification not having been made, Binkowitz was buried.

A detective working on the case did not give up hope, but came to New York with a photograph he had taken of the murdered youth, a piece of cloth cut from his trousers, and the information that on the lining of the lad's coat had been written in indelible ink the name "Jensen." Binkowitz had fought in local prize rings under that name, so when his mother showed the police a vest of the same material as the trousers, and marked in indelible ink with the word "Jensen" also, the detectives felt certain they had learned the fate of the missing Wall Street messenger. Mrs. Binkowitz confirmed their belief by identifying a photograph of the body as that of her son.

Whether the boy was killed in an automobile and carried to the place where his body was found, or whether the fatal struggle took place in the Milford field, has not yet been determined. The whereabouts of the stolen bonds also is still unknown.



Headquarters Chat

WHEN we placed our little "black piano" in front of us at this time last year, preparatory to strumming out a little spiel, full of nice, harmonious chords, and cheerful, rippling trills, telling you how thankful we should be with our lot, and all that sort of thing, really, on the level, we were having a hard time keeping our own spirits up, let alone trying to raise yours.

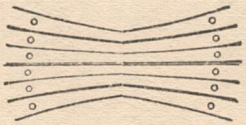
Things did seem to be, to say the least, at sixes and sevens, the world over, and to ask you all to be merry and thankful, with conditions as they were, was a large order. But now we can go right to it and enthusiastically, too. Yes, we can. Of course, it is true, the present situation is not all that one would want, but on the whole, is it not a thousand times better than last year?

So let us all give thanks, and with a will! And while we are on the subject of thanks, please accept our most grateful appreciation for the right royal way you have supported our publication.

You all deserve plenty of turkey with all the fixin's on Thursday, and we hope you get it, and lots of it. But remember, a Thanksgiving dinner is a thing you can take so much of that you may become uncomfortable. *Not so with the* DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE. NEVER!!

Then eat wisely of the dinner, perhaps with moderation, but go at your old pal, DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, like a glutton, and, as usual, it will drive dull care away, make you forget any troubles that may beset you, and will give you the mental stimulus or relaxation that must be yours.

To you, kind readers and generous friends, again we extend hearty thanks from the bottom of our hearts, and express the hope that Thanksgiving Day will bring you many, many reasons for giving thanks and rejoicing.



UNDER THE LAMP

CONDUCTED BY HENRY A. KELLER

HAPPY indeed was the family of Jerry Dent. It was the day before Thanksgiving, and he had just been released from prison after a term of years. Burglary had been the charge, and they had caught him red-handed; but Jerry returned to his wife and family fully determined to tread the straight-and-narrow.

Naturally the family finances were in a sad condition, but Jerry's good wife

Maggie was determined that, though it took the last penny she had earned over the tub all week, she would have a Thanksgiving dinner worthy of the occasion of Jerry's return. So she gave Jerry a ten-dollar bill, and, unable to do the marketing herself, she made out a list and sent him off to lay in a stock of provisions for to-morrow's feast. Her list consisted of: One ten-pound turkey, two quarts of cranberries, three pounds of potatoes, two pounds of white onions, a stalk of celery, one can of soup, a loaf of bread, one-half pound of butter, one-half pound of coffee, nuts and raisins, and a pumpkin pie.

Jerry was full of the joy of the moment when he set out to market, but he hadn't gone far when he met two or three old acquaintances. They told him how glad they were to see him again, and asked if he would like to join them in a poker game they were about to commence.

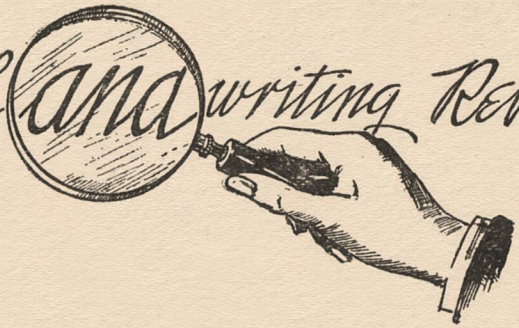
At first Jerry refused, but when he reconsidered, he remembered that Maggie had told him the ten-spot he had with him was every cent she possessed in the world. Why not take a chance, Jerry reasoned, play for a couple of hours, and then bring home the stuff for to-morrow, plus a few extra dollars he was *sure* he could win? The temptation was too great for Jerry, so he went along with his former pals.

At the outset of the game Jerry had one of those peculiar experiences familiar to every poker player—a most consistent run of hard luck. The first hand Jerry lost the price of the cranberries. His losses in the second hand were five cents less than in the first, and he had to strike the potatoes off his list. In the third hand he lost twice what he had in the second, and off came the pumpkin pie. The fourth hand lost for him as much as the third had done, and with a sigh he told himself that now he couldn't buy the butter. Fortune was less harsh with him in the next hand, for he lost but a third of the price of the butter, and as a result he had to strike off the bread. But with the hand that followed came the worst blow of the evening, so far, for he dropped the price of the nuts and raisins, which would have bought five loaves of bread. Next he lost half what he parted with on the hand before, and he had to take the celery off his list. On the hand which followed he lost the price of the can of soup, which was equal to the price of the butter. Losing two-thirds of this on the next hand lost him the coffee, and an equal loss on the next hand forced him to take off the onions.

All told, Jerry's losses now amounted to the equivalent to one-half the price of the turkey. Soon the bird too was off his list, and, in desperation, Jerry bought his last stack of chips with what remained of the ten-dollar bill. And then his luck changed, as it has many a time for the man who buys his last stack of chips. When Jerry quit playing, which he did in good time to do his marketing before the stores closed, he had won back all he had lost, and three times that amount in addition. If butter sold at sixty cents per pound, how much money had Jerry in his pocket when he left the game?

The answer to last week's route cipher problem is: "I bribed a newsboy to dispatch this. Johnson & Hughes are bogus outfit. Get wise to my game. Holding me prisoner till all claims are leased. Their property will never produce. Send some one down for evidence I collected before they quit." The words were transposed in columns containing three words each; three is one of the common multiples of forty-two, the total number of words in the message. How did you come out?

What Handwriting Reveals



If you are an employer and desire to place your employees in the positions in your office or factory for which they are best fitted; or if you are just about to step out into the world to earn your own living; or if crimes involving handwriting have been committed in your community; or if you want to know the characters of your friends as revealed in their chirography—send Louise Rice, in care of this magazine, specimens of the handwriting of the persons concerned, and inclose a stamped addressed envelope. She will analyze the samples submitted to her and will give you her expert opinion of them, free of charge.

Every communication will be held in strict confidence. When permission is granted, cases will be discussed in the department, with or without the illustrations. Of course, under no circumstances will the identity of the persons concerned be revealed.

Miss Rice has on hand a thousand or more specimens of handwriting from readers who wished their handwriting analyzed in the magazine. On account of restricted space, it will be a long time before these letters appear. We therefore suggest that these readers send Miss Rice a stamped addressed envelope, and she will give them an analysis of their handwriting in a personal letter.

G. PIERCE.—How any man with your indifference to machinery could be successful as an automobile mechanic would be a puzzle. No wonder you aren't, when your real talents lie in the direction of farming. You may not think so, but just try it for a year, and I venture to say that you will heartily agree with me. You have naturally good judgment for such work.

G. S. G.—But I haven't the slightest idea what your present work is. Your writing shows that you will be most successful in work which demands of you intuitiveness and self-reliance in action rather than close attention to a routine. I suspect you of trying the latter. Get out of doors. Get out among people. Use your tongue. That's your line.

B. O. P.—I'll tell you what I think about your engaging in Accident Prevention and Labor Relationships as a business; I think it is the very worst thing that you can do. Much as you dislike it just now, what you need is a good, eight-hour day of definite work at a definite thing in which skill is required. I know you don't think so. I know that you hate it. But I do assure you that such discipline is the only thing which will ever bring your character to full maturity.

A. B. RICHMOND.—My dear friend, you have my sympathy, for you really are very insincere and your attitude toward yourself is surprisingly free from conceit. The trouble is not exactly with your character, though. It is rather a

matter of worldly knowledge and judgment, for you are too much inclined to take people as they represent themselves to be, and to be too confiding. You need to strike the golden mean, remaining friends with people, but not getting too intimate; not believing all that is told you, but not appearing suspicious. Let your manner be pleasant and self-possessed, and be sure to learn to laugh at a good joke. It is really these things, simple as they seem, which are in the way of your happiness and success. Here's good luck to you!

SIGMUND S.—The specimen which you inclose quite justifies your feeling toward the writer. People like this, so good-humored, kind, and patient, are the salt of the earth. The only trouble is that, like salt, we are inclined to take them as a matter of course, and never realize their worth until we miss them. Your own handwriting, for instance, while it shows the capacity for intense affection, indicates a nature of considerable selfishness. You are the sort of a person, if this other were very closely related to you, and you were sure of her, to take her for granted. So look out!

PEGGY.—Oh, I don't know. Not only because you are only eighteen, but because marriage is such a difficult subject, anyway. I have known girls to marry happily at your age, but it was the exceptional thing. The happiest marriages, in my rather wide experience, have occurred when both parties to it were at least thirty—because, you know, no one is really mature until then. Send me the man's writing, and let's see how your two natures hit it off graphologically.

L. R. C.—This is not "next week," is it? It would have to be nearly six weeks afterward, at least, and this is a bit more, because a lot of other people wanted theirs next week, too. Yes, I think that you have the ambition, the energy, and the self-reliance to go into business for yourself, even if you are only nineteen; but I do hope that there is a mother or a father or a good friend of more years at hand, on whom you can rely for sound advice. Being "on your own" in this competitive world is rather a job.

S. C. WILLIAMS.—All right—but I always do tell the exact truth, anyway. My profession would not be worth a cent to anybody if I didn't. I'll tell you, for instance, that your character lacks accentuation. You are too easy-going, too apt to be contented, too much inclined to accept people and events without question; and this does not prevent you, either, from being continually discontented. You need, in a word, to translate your energy into action. You need to *do* instead of think, brood, and reflect so much.

C. K.—As a bookkeeper you have no more prospect of success than I would have in your place, and anybody who knows me can tell you how little that would be. Get out of that office as quickly as you can. Chemistry? Why, of course. Anything which will use your analytical and very logical mind. No, I don't call your writing illegible, but I do say that it is not a bookkeeper's "hand" at all. You are not fitted for that kind of routine.

ITHANKU.—The writer of the submitted specimen is a person of strong passions and appetites, with a materialistic mind, a virile personality, much ambition, and not much credulity. People of this type are exceedingly useful, especially so if associated with others who are more idealistic, who will insensibly elevate and idealize their somewhat uninspired minds and hearts.

HOW TO READ CHARACTER IN HANDWRITING

LESSON VI.

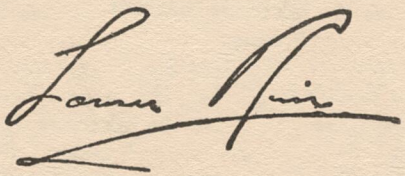
Pen Pressure Continued

WRITING which is composed of light but firm strokes shows a nature which is splendidly adjusted to the needs of life. These are the people who gratify the senses with delicate gusto, and yet with good taste; who are idealistic without losing their grip on the firm realities of earth, and who are warm-hearted and even ardent—if other indications confirm this—without being at all sensual.

Light strokes, with a hesitating, uncertain look about them, show a nature which is the reverse of this, being so idealistic as to have lost the practical ability with which me must all fight our material problems. People who use this style of pressure are timid, uncertain of their own wishes, afraid to fight opposition, and yet are extremely critical. It is not strange that men and women who have never married, and those who have persistently remained in the backwaters of existence, should be found to use this characteristic pressure. With it there is usually associated a mild, faltering glance, hesitating and inefficient movements of the body, and all kinds of nervous ailments. Nor is it surprising that religious fanatics and the advocates of all kinds of Quixotic "isms" should belong, almost exclusively, to the users of the light, uncertain pressure.

Light, delicate pressure, with writing which has a graceful, flowing appearance, shows a gay, light-hearted nature, nicely balanced between the idealistic and the materialistic. These are the people who withstand most trouble without turning sour, and who come through all kinds of difficulties without much impairment to the health. It is not always easy to point out, in this particular type, the really broken stroke as distinguished from the firm, but a magnifying glass will at once show up the difference. The firmer the stroke the more power and sweet courage the writer possesses.

Very light pressure, with very individual letter formations, in which the letters of words are not joined by the customary strokes, shows intuition. Women, of course, use this type oftener than men, but it will be found among scholars, clergymen, and poets. When small, neat capitals are found associated with this type the indication is of a trained mind. When the capitals are large and ungainly the writer is intuitional and probably has a rare personlity, but has little mental acumen.



EXPERT DETECTIVE ADVICE

CONDUCTED BY WILLIAM J. BURNS

Mr. William J. Burns is a well-known criminologist, who for years has been engaged in the study and investigation of crime and criminals. Any of our readers may consult Mr. Burns through this magazine in regard to any matter relating to crime and its detection, to psychological problems, and the protection of life and property against criminals and other evil-doers. Letters seeking expert information along these lines should be addressed to the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. These letters will be answered personally by Mr. Burns, without charge, if stamp for reply is inclosed; they will be discussed in this department, the names and addresses in all cases to be omitted.

Industrial Detectives

NO better work could be done for the community than that of the detective who is hired by industrial plants to see that the employees are safeguarded. A man in this position has an opportunity to *prevent* wrongdoing as well as to help in securing the persons of wrongdoers.

Men of high personal character, with open and clean records, who fancy detective work, and are not ready to take up other branches of it, will always find opportunities for success in this line.

Such an operative is in a position really to influence the men among whom he circulates. He can inculcate a regard for law and order, and an understanding of what the real laws of our country are. A great deal of mischief has been gotten into, at times, by foreigners, which could have been avoided if they had been properly instructed to regard this land to which they have been admitted as a place where liberty does not mean license.

The personality of a detective in such a position should be such as to command the respect of both his employers and their employees.

ANSWERS TO READERS' QUERIES

STELTEON.—I shall have to look up your matter. Letters to England, where I shall be obliged to write, take some time, so please be patient. I will give the information through this department as soon as I am in possession of it.

J. SHOTWELL.—Under the circumstances you must be very careful. The best way would be to get a governor's warrant. Thank you. I am always glad to hear that a man is being successful in our profession, especially after years of faithful service.

DEMPSEY.—Oh, yes, crooks and criminals arrange themselves into social ranks just as honest men do. The holdup man despises the pickpocket, and the forger thinks any other kind of a thief is beneath his notice; a bank robber does not wish to be seen in the company of an ordinary burglar. Yet, it is amusing, but, in a way, no more so than a great many other social pretensions. "A man's a man for a' that," as the poet says, no matter whether he is poor or rich, successful or otherwise. The two rightful classifications of men are honest and dishonest. On that point there can never be any real argument.

MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to readers of the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE. Its purpose is to aid readers in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address, often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

When you hear from the person you are seeking, tell us, so that we may take your notice out.

Now, readers, help those whose friends are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

NELLIGAN, DAVID, son of Patrick Nelligan, who died in Detroit two years ago. He is six feet one inch tall, and of powerful build. He has five brothers and three sisters in the United States. His son is very anxious to get news of him, and any information will be gratefully received. Please write to FORREST RAIN, 165½ Drummond Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

HAFFLER, MARIE.—She was last seen in November, 1918, when she was staying at 1312 Canal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana. She is asked to send her address to M. DAUGEISEN, 1108 Jefferson Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

DOUGLASS, HARRY, now twenty years old, about five feet eight inches tall, and weighs one hundred and forty-two pounds. He left West Haven in June, 1913, for parts unknown. A friend would like very much to hear from him. WILLIAM DAVEY, 34 Thomas Street, West Haven, Connecticut.

CUTHBERT, CLARENCE, alias FEDERICO MONDRAGON, native of San Francisco, California, where he has relatives and friends. It is thought that he was with General Francisco Villa up to December, 1918. He holds the rank of colonel in the Mexican army. Anybody knowing this person, or the whereabouts of his relatives, kindly communicate with MENDEZ, care of this magazine.

ADAMS, ROY D., formerly of Colorado Springs. Your brother Robert is dead, and your mother and sisters are very anxious to hear from you. MRS. L. LACEY, 948 Mariposa Street, Denver, Colorado.

RODNEY, DAVID.—He went out one Monday morning four years ago, leaving the impression that he would be back on Friday night, and that is the last that has been seen of him. He is a small man, with brown hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. The top of his head is bald, and most of his teeth are filled with gold. He is now about thirty-six years old. Any one who has seen him, or who knows where he is at the present time, will do a great kindness by writing to N. M. R., care of this magazine.

FEHNEL, CHARLES G., MAMIE C., or ISABELLA, who lived at 1035 or 1135 Spruce Street, Easton, Pennsylvania, three years ago. Please send any information to G., DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

DAWNE, AMBY, who was last heard of in Pittsburg, Kansas, in 1912. I have some papers that were given to me by a man four years ago on Peace River, Canada, and which I promised to deliver if possible. Any one who can help me to trace any of the family will confer a great favor. TEX WILSON, Deeth, Nevada.

ON August 3d, 1919, MR. JOSEPH COHEN was killed at CONEY ISLAND. Eye witnesses, or those who know of eye witnesses, kindly communicate with the missing department of this magazine.

SHEA, WILLIE, known as PETE.—He left Albany, Oregon, about six or eight years ago for Utah, or somewhere in that part of the West. He is thirty-eight years old, has black hair and eyes, and is about five feet four inches tall. His sister is very anxious to hear from him. MRS. LILLIE PARRY, Box 111, Prineville, Oregon.

ROUNDS, DANIEL.—He was last heard of in Kalamazoo, Michigan, twenty years ago. He is over sixty years of age, and of fair complexion. He weighed nearly two hundred pounds when he was a young man. His children, Asa, Della, and Lucy, would like to have news of him, as they do not know whether he is alive or dead. Please write to DELLA, care of this magazine.

YOUNG, PAUL CLEVELAND.—When last I heard of him he was employed by the Pecos Valley Drug Company, Roswell, New Mexico. I would like to communicate with him. JOHN T. REDWINE, Sandy Hook, Kentucky.

SETZER, MARVIN, thirty-eight years old. He has brown hair, blue eyes, and weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. He is a carpenter. Any one knowing his present address, please notify M. M. G., care of the missing department of this magazine.

ABOUT thirty years ago a young girl was placed in an orphanage near Springfield, Massachusetts. Her name was MARY. She does not remember her surname, but knows that her father's first name was WILLIAM. She also remembers something of being with her grandparents at their home near Willamansett, before being placed in the orphanage. She thinks that her parents' home was in or near Chicopee, Massachusetts. Any one who can give information that will help her to find her relatives will do a great favor by writing to MARY, care of this magazine.

HOWARD.—Everything will be all right. I am in the same place. The baby cries for you. Please write to me. Your wife, BUBBLES.

DANIELS, C. J., who was last heard of in Newark, New Jersey, some six months ago. He is about fifty years of age, and has blue eyes, gray hair, and fair complexion. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will greatly oblige by writing to the Missing Department of this magazine.

FROTZ.—A baby named Lula Ann Frotz was left at an institution in Milwaukee, or South Milwaukee, in the year 1900. It is thought that her parents lived in some part of Oneida County, Wisconsin. Any one knowing the whereabouts of these people will do a great kindness by sending their information to C. D. S., care of this magazine.

FEUSTON, JAMES F. or WILLIAM C.—Any one knowing the whereabouts of either of these men will confer a favor by writing to their friend, BEN W. TUCKER, 72 Foster Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

EMERY, W. W.—He is about sixty or sixty-five years old, and when last heard of was in Ardmore, Oklahoma, in 1910, and is supposed to have gone to Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1911 or 1912. His son will greatly appreciate information concerning him, and will be glad to hear from any one who may know his present whereabouts. Please write to YOULEY F. EMERY, General Delivery, Canton, Ohio.

MARTZ, JULIUS, who was taken from the poorhouse at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, about twenty-seven years ago. His sister is very anxious to find him, and will be most grateful to any one who will be kind enough to help her to communicate with him. MRS. KATE COUTTS, 153 Church Street, Sunbury, Pennsylvania.

ATTENTION.—Information wanted of these overseas soldiers: CORPORAL DON HART from Oregon, with Sixth Infantry, Fifth Division, last heard of at St. Germain-sur-Meuse, in September, 1918. CORPORAL JOHN CROSSDILL, once of Company K, One Hundred and Sixty-first Infantry, last seen going into action near Romagne, with the Sixth Infantry, in October, 1918. DAVE M. SHEPHARD, of Golden Valley, Hennepin County, Minnesota, and GEORGE C. STICKLER, of Fountain Run, Kentucky, last seen in St. Aignan-sur-Cher. Persons having any information please communicate with D. W. BAILEY, 1000 Washington Avenue, Monaca, Pennsylvania.

ROBERTS, MARY.—In 1879 I was taken from my mother by my father. I had a baby sister named Anna, who was two years old at that time. I was taken to Howell County, Missouri. I am anxious to find my mother and sister, or to get some information about them, and shall be most grateful for any assistance in the matter. MRS. OSIE ROBERTS, 3715 Race Street, Dallas, Texas.

BURNS, L. C., who worked as a telephone lineman in Topeka, Kansas, about 1885 or 1886. Also LOREN W. WILLIAMS, who worked for Trumbul's art store on Kansas Avenue, and attended the First Baptist Church in Topeka, in 1892. Please send your addresses to DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for further particulars.

HOLMES, WILLIAM HILARY.—He is twenty-two years old, and has black hair, gray eyes, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. He was last heard of in Norfolk, Virginia, where he went to take place in S. B. ship, March 8, 1919. MRS. NELLIE LESTER, Tourist Hotel, Savannah, Georgia.

DUNSMORE, JOSEPH PINKNEY.—His mother has not seen him for twenty years, and as she is now advancing in years, she would be very happy to get news of him, as she does not know whether he is dead or alive. It is thought that he was employed by the Standard Oil Company in New York City. He is now about thirty-four years old, and has blue eyes and a fair complexion. Any information of her son will bring comfort to his mother. MRS. MARY DUNSMORE, 400 East Madison Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

MANN, JOE J.—He enlisted in the United States navy about twelve years ago, and was discharged in Seattle Washington, after four years of service, when he wrote, saying that he was returning to his home town, Chicago, but he did not come. In November, 1918, an insurance card from the government was sent to his mother, who was then dead. This card stated that he was in the army, but no further news was obtainable from the government. It was heard from other sources that he was in the Thirty-seventh Field Artillery, and was about to sail for France when the armistice was signed. He was discharged February 5, 1919. We have been unable to get any information about him, although we have written to the war department several times. He is twenty-nine years old, and has auburn hair and brown eyes. Any one who will help me to find my brother will be gratefully remembered. CHARLES W. MANN, care of this magazine.

SIMENSEN, SYVER.—When last heard from he was in Dawson City, Alaska. That is twenty-two years ago. At the present time he is supposed to be somewhere on the Pacific coast. If any one who reads this knows anything about him, please write to his nephew, VICTOR SIMENSEN, Box 136, Sutton, North Dakota.

KEHR, WALTER, who left Harriman, Pennsylvania, some time ago. He is about five feet four inches tall, of dark complexion, and has three scars on the left side of his face. His initials, W. K., are tattooed on his right arm, and a Kewpie doll is tattooed on his left forearm. Any news of him will be gratefully received by WILLIAM J. WILSON, Hotel Victory, Harriman, Pennsylvania.

GREGG, MRS. HOMER.—When you sent your inquiry for your brother, you failed to give us an address. We have news of him which we would like to forward to you. Please send us your address.

HORTON, ENOCH GEORGE, whose parents lived at 169 East One Hundred and Nineteenth Street, New York City, some years ago. He is said to have been in the navy in 1906. Any one knowing his whereabouts will do a great favor by writing to the missing department. The advertiser would also like to have news of the brother of the above, DANIEL HORTON.

RAMSEY, MYRTLE and ELROY, who were last heard of in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1912. Your father is anxious to hear from you. Please write to him at once in care of this magazine, and as soon as he hears from you he will send you a letter, and let you know where he is.

WILLIAMS, MORRIS.—I would like to know his present whereabouts. His home was in Lewiston, Idaho. Any one knowing where he is, or having any information about him, please write to FRED PREBLE, care of Universal Film Company, Universal City, California.

MOOK, EMIL, JR.—He left home to go to a hospital in New York City September 16, 1914, and has not been heard of since. He left a wife and three children. His mother is very ill, and offers a reward for information of him, dead or alive. He has gray eyes, dark hair, and had a heart with dagger tattoed on one arm. Any one having seen him, or having knowledge of him, please write to MRS. GICK, 2319 Ludlow Avenue, Unionport, Westchester.

DAVIS, BESSIE TAYLOR, daughter of Mrs. Emma Davis who, some years ago, lived at 210 Chauncey Street, Brooklyn. Her father has been trying for years to find her, and has tried every possible means, but in vain. He will be deeply grateful for any assistance that may be given him by readers of this magazine, and is hopeful that he may meet with success through this medium. Please write to GEORGE DAVIS, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

COHEN, or TUCK, LOUIS.—Information regarding his whereabouts desired by his relatives. Age thirty-eight, height about six feet, light hair, and has a white spot over one eye. He is believed to be an auctioneer or a horse dealer in Illinois, or Ohio. Address N. T. C., care of this magazine.

CLARK, RALPH WALTER, my brother, who was last heard of in Michigan. He left home in November or December, 1913. I should be very glad to hear from him. My sister was placed in a Catholic home in Allegheny or Pittsburgh, and was adopted by people who did not wish her to remember any of her relatives. She was registered either as MAY or as MARY ELIZABETH YASINSKI, or CLARK. She is now about nineteen years old. Any one who can give me news of her will earn my deepest gratitude, as I have tried for many years to find her. Please write to MRS. VIOLET CLARK, Seward Hotel, Seattle, Washington.

WOOD, or WOODCOX, EDWIN A., who came from Main some years ago. His children would like to hear from relatives. MRS. F. J. WEGHER, 2937 Champa Street, Denver, Colorado.

HARDING, Z.—We have news for you in regard to Carl Lockwood, and as letters sent to Hominy, Oklahoma, have been returned to us, we would ask you to send another address.

CONDON, MRS. GEORGE H., or MARY LOWE, who was last heard of at Menominee, Michigan. Any information concerning her will be gratefully received by GEORGE H. CONDON, South Haven, Michigan.

HAROLD.—Come home. Your mother and father have forgiven you, and both are heartbroken.

LONG, ELMER.—Skinny, I would like very much to hear from you. LEO VAUGHN, General Delivery, Salt Lake City, Utah.

BURGESS, ALBERT, who left England for Halifax, Canada, with the 101st Regiment, about forty years ago, and is believed to have settled in New York. He has probably married and had children. Information that will lead to communicating with him, or with any member of his family, will be gratefully appreciated by his brother. Please write to SAMUEL, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

JOHNSTONE, HOWARD DEWITT, sometimes goes by the name of John Stone. He is thirty years old, tall and slender, weighs about one hundred and forty pounds, and is very fair of complexion, with large, light-blue eyes. Has two front upper teeth missing. He left home one Sunday afternoon in June, to be absent only two hours, and no trace of him has been seen since. His wife is very ill, and his three small children are in need of his care. Any one who can give information about him will confer a great favor by writing to his wife, care of this magazine.

WESTON, ELEANOR.—Your sister has important news for you, and would like to hear from you at once. RUTH RUTHERFORD WHITE, 727½ K Street, Sacramento, California

INFORMATION WANTED as to the present whereabouts of MRS. GEORGE GREER, and MARY JANE, NELLIE, and HARRIET BOWDEN. Any one who knows where they are at this time will greatly oblige by writing to their sister, MRS. SELINA CONLEY, General Delivery, Lodi, California.

HENRY WILKINS, FRED GOSS, and ARTHUR HILL, formerly members of the Acorn Literary Society of the N. Y. J. F. Please write to your old pal, BRUTUS, care of this magazine.

BARNES, CLARENCE M., sometimes known as Jack Rivers. He is about six feet tall, has brown eyes, and is bald except for a rim of dark-brown hair on the back of his head. He is quite slender, and has one gold upper tooth. He is said to be in Pocatello. Any one who knows where he can be found, please communicate with TOMEY, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE. If Clarence should see this, he is asked to write to Tomey, at the old Utah address.

LARRY, with the flag tattooed on your right forearm, send your address to your home. Your mother is worrying about you. ANNABELLE.

KOENIG, GEORGE VALENTINE.—He is of medium height, twenty-six years old, and has brown hair and blue eyes. He was last heard of in Erie, Pennsylvania, about ten years ago. Any one who knows his present address will greatly oblige by sending it to his sister, ANNA KOENIG, 2605 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas.

JOHNSON, ADDISON JACKWORTH.—He is about five feet eight inches tall, weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds, has black curly hair and a dark complexion. His son, who left him seven or eight years ago, is very anxious to get in touch with him. He has been trying for years to find him, but so far all his efforts have failed, and he hopes that some of the readers of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE may be able to assist him in his quest. He will be most grateful for any news. RAY KINGSLAND JOHNSON, 83 Twenty-fifth Street, Guttenberg, New Jersey.

COOK, or KOCH, CHARLIE, who made his home about ten years ago in Elmira, and later in Binghamton, New York. He was about sixty years old, and was a tailor. Any news of him will be gratefully received by WILLIAM JACOBI, 114 Mulberry Street, Buffalo, New York.

STEVENSON, HARRIET, who used to live at 898 Eddy Street, San Francisco, California. Her friends in San Antonio are very anxious to hear from her. R. LA NIER, 435 East Crockett Street, San Antonio, Texas.

WOLFE, JENNIE, GERTIE, and CLARA.—They were in New York City in 1912, and all efforts to find them during the past five years have ended in failure. Their sister-in-law is anxious to get in touch with them, and will be grateful for any assistance that readers of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE may give her. GERTRUDE WOLFE, General Delivery, San Antonio, Texas.

VICE, BENNIE.—He was born May 29, 1883, and was sent to a children's home at Topeka, Kansas. Later the home was burned down, and all records were lost. He was traced to Sylvia, Kansas, and was adopted by George Kauffman, from whom he ran away, and has not been heard of since. He is probably known by his adopted name. He has two sisters and one stepbrother who are anxious to find him. If any one who knows him sees this, they will give great happiness by writing to MRS. C. H. DANIELSON, 3101 Sutton Avenue, Maplewood, Missouri.

CLINE, JOHN, who married Miss Julia French in Indiana, and moved to Sacramento, California. He separated from his wife in 1902, she taking their daughter, and he the son. Another son was born about a month after the separation. The wife was killed in October, 1916. I should be glad to hear from any member of the family. FRANK A. CLINE, 1637 South Talbot Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

WADE, ERNEST, late of Newcastle, England. He was last heard of in New York City ten years ago. He is thirty-three years old, weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds, and has a dark complexion. His brother THOMAS would be happy to get any news of him. 39 North Maple Street, Akron, Ohio.

LANE, HARRY.—I have written to your home, and all letters come back. Please write to your old pal, AL.

MANOUD, MABLE, who used to live at 53 Johnson Street, Leominster, Massachusetts. Any of her friends who know her address will do a favor by sending it to the missing department of this magazine.

MARKOVICS, BERTHA, formerly of Debrecen, Hungary. She is about twenty-nine years of age, small and dark. She was last seen in New York, where she was known by the name of A. J. ANDERLETT. Please communicate with A. KOSSAK, 1144 East 147th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

MEYERS, JOHN.—Two years ago he was living at Heber Springs, Arkansas, and has not been heard from since. He has four children in some Catholic home, either in Brinkley or Heber Springs. I would very much appreciate any word about him. Please address GEORGE MEYERS, 725 O'Brien Street, Monroe, Michigan.

BROWN, EDWARD, HARRY, MAE, who lived in Manhattan about twenty years ago. Their cousin would like to hear from them, or from any one who can give news of them. P. G. L., care of this magazine.

DAY, VERNON WINSTON.—He is seventeen years old, has brown eyes and hair, and weighs about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. He is five feet one inch tall. If any one knows where he is at the present time, and will ask him to write to his mother, who is very anxious to have news of him, she will be most grateful for their kindness. MRS. H. M. MILAM, Garman, Texas.

MARTIN, JERRY.—He was last heard of in 1918, with the 327th Infantry band, at Camp Gordon, Atlanta, Georgia. Any of his friends who read this, and who have news of him, please write to ASTRID, care of this magazine.

DRUETT, CHARLES H.—A "railroad man from Texas." Everything is all right. Have interesting news for you. Write to your old pal, "Doc." P. O. Box 583, Wilmington, North Carolina.

PERRY, MINNIE, who married George Oris Whiteside some thirty-three years ago. Information wanted concerning her or her relatives. Please write to MRS. EDWARD LARDIE, 66 St. Aubin Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

ANDOVER, CHARLES.—Your old pal "Red" would like to hear from you. W. F. E., care of this magazine.

TURNER, JESSE H.—The son of R. M. Turner. He is about sixty years of age. He moved from Tennessee to Oklahoma about 1902, and was last heard of in Etta, Oklahoma, in 1914. Any one knowing his present address will confer a great favor by writing to his sister, MRS. GEORGE LAVENDER, Spring City, Tennessee.

BELLER, FRANK.—He is about six feet tall and weighs one hundred and sixty pounds. He has blue eyes and light-brown hair, and was last heard of in St. Johns, Oregon, in 1917. Frank, mother and father are dead. I promised mother on her deathbed that I would find you. Please write. Estate to settle. Your sister, JULIA BELLER, 2947 North Ninth Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

HOLT, R. G.—When last heard of he was working for the Texas Oil Company in Oil City, Louisiana. Any information that will lead to his present address will be appreciated by his brother, care of this magazine.

HARBACK, ARTHUR, who was last heard from when he was in Los Angeles, California, in 1917. It is thought that he may be in Santa Barbara now. If any one who reads this knows where he is, they will do a great favor by writing to CARL J. HATTON, 1007 East Fourteenth Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

FORAN, JOHN.—He left Yankton, South Dakota, about 1885, at which time he was a railroad man. He was born in Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary, Ireland. His children would be most grateful for any news of him, and would be glad to hear from any reader of this magazine who could give them information about him. Please address LIDA, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

GRAVES, JOHN S.—Four years ago he was working on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, on a passenger train for the Union News Company of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is forty-six years of age, about five feet two inches tall, and weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds. He has black hair and brown eyes, and walks with a slight limp. One of his finger tips has been cut off. Any assistance that will help to find him will be gratefully appreciated by his daughter, F. A. S., care of this magazine.

ANDERSEN, MRS. CHARLES W., whose mother was known as Molly Herman. She was last heard of in Salt Lake City in 1915. She is requested to write to her husband. CHARLES W. ANDERSEN, 1265 Forty-fifth Avenue, San Francisco, California.

KOZAK, JOHN A.—Will any one who was in the army, and was acquainted with my brother John, who served in the war, and who landed at Hoboken, New Jersey, on June 12, 1919, kindly let me know where he is now? He is five feet eight inches tall, weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds, and is of a dark complexion. He has a scar on his left wrist about two inches long. He was also known as Edward Kussack. STEPHEN M. KOZAK, JR., Box 151, Winburne, Pennsylvania.

ANDERSON, WALTER J.—When last heard of he was in Rapid City, South Dakota, to which place he told his mother to address his mail, care of Pat Ryan. He left Chatham, Ontario, twelve years ago, and has not written to his mother in the last ten years, on account of which she is in very poor health. Any one knowing where he is, or having heard of him in any way, will do a great kindness by writing to R. K., care of this magazine.

LANE, BLANCH HELEN.—She was placed in the orphans' home at Augusta, Maine, in 1913, and later was taken by some people named Perry, of Skowhegan, Maine. They did not treat her well, and she returned to the home in 1914. Since that time her brother, who is most anxious to find her, has not had any news of her, and has been unable to trace her. She will be sixteen years old next February. Any assistance that may lead to his communicating with her will be most welcome to her brother, who is longing to find his little sister. DANIEL LANE, R. F. D. 35, Oakland, Maine.

BUY TODAY 10 MONTHS TO PAY

X-68 Massive flat Belcher ring; one fine diamond. $60.

X-69 Twelve beautiful diamonds, platinum set, surround a blue faceted sapphire. $115.

X-70 One sparkling blue-white diamond set Tiffany style. $75.

X-71 Graceful pattern of white gold, set with seven perfectly cut, blue-white diamonds. $85.

X-72 Solid gold Tiffany style ring; one blue-white diamond. $45.

X-73 Massive seven-diamond cluster ring. $85.

X-74 Exquisite diamond, hexagon-set in platinum mounting. $125.

X-75 Gentlemen's solid gold tooth ring, set with one fine diamond. $50.

X-76. Gentlemen's massive seven-diamond platinum-set cluster ring. $75.

X-77 Pretty lavalliere set with one fine diamond and one genuine whole pearl $25.

X-78 Tiffany style solid gold ring; one fine diamond. $100.

X-79 Ladies' Belcher ring set with one fine diamond. $35.

X-80 "Merry Widow" style; five perfectly cut platinum-set diamonds. $100.

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