

EVERY WEEK

AUG. 15, 1925

DETECTIVE

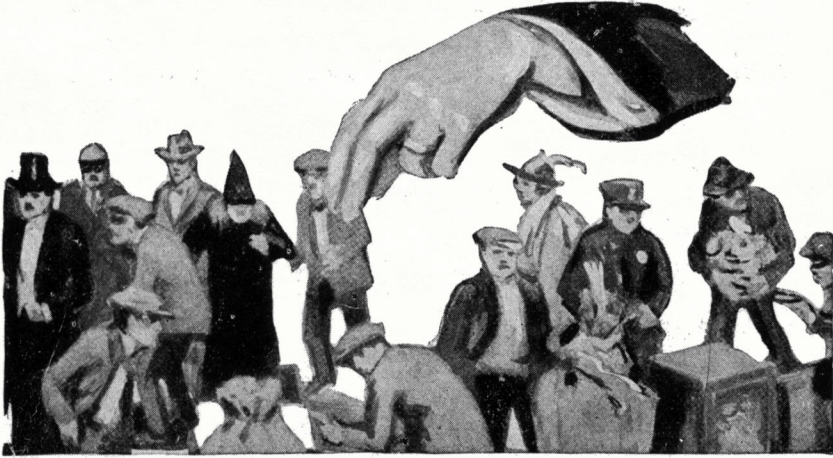
REGISTERED
U.S. PAT. OFF.

STORY MAGAZINE

15
CENTS



*The
Padded Pay Roll
by Hugh Dawson*



The Moves of a Master Crook

Follow the moves of that master crook Black Star, see how he is finally checkmated by the intelligence of a greater mind who frustrates his attempts to plunder a great city. Read

“Black Star’s Campaign”

By JOHNSTON McCULLY

It’s one of the famous cloth-bound books that bears the “CH” brand on their cover and that are on sale to-day for only 75 cents a copy. None of these books are rehashed reprints. They are as fresh as a Western wind and they move with the speed of a racing mustang.

Look for the “CH” brand on the next book you buy.

OTHER POPULAR “CH” TITLES

THE BRAND OF SILENCE.....Harrington Strong
 THE SPECTACULAR KID.....Robert J. Horton
 THE TRACKING OF K. K.....Douglas Grey
 UNWELCOME SETTLERS.....James Roberts

QUALITY BILL’S GIRL.....Charles W. Tyler
 THE SCARLET SCOURGE.....Johnston McCulley
 GOLDEN ISLE.....Roland Ashford Phillips
 WHOSE MILLIONS?.....Joseph Montague

75c each



75c each

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

E V E R Y W E E K

Vol. LXXVII Contents for August 15, 1925

No. 3

ONE NOVELETTE

The Padded Pay Roll *Hugh Dawson* 3

TWO SERIALS

The Man They Couldn't Arrest . . . *Austin J. Small* 76
An Eight-part Story—Part Seven

The Snake in the Grass *Lee Thayer* 114
A Six-part Story—Part Three

FIVE SHORT STORIES

Big-nose Charley and Madey-line . . *Charles W. Tyler* 55

Hung on Wire *Ernest M. Poate* 64

Some "Lulu!" *Roland Krebs* 99

Into Thin Air *Roy W. Hinds* 105

Sauce for the Fixer *Alan Macdonald* 131

MISCELLANEOUS

Scotland Yard Keeps Tabs on Night Clubs 54 Dummy Safe Masks Robbery 75

His Twelfth Mistake 54 Bob-hair Bandit Is Model Prisoner 98

Escape Jail with Makeshift Torch . . 63 Crippled Policeman Subdues Suspect 104

Door Keys Furnish Clue to Robberies . . 63 Credit Criminals Increasing 104

DEPARTMENTS

Headquarters Chat *The Editor* 140

Missing 142

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gouid, Secretary. Copyright, 1925, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1925, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. All Rights Reserved. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$7.50. Foreign, \$8.50.

WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are daily made by persons thus victimized. IMPORTANT—Authors, agents, and publishers are requested to note that this corporation does not hold itself responsible for loss of unsolicited manuscripts while at this office or in transit; and that it cannot undertake to hold uncalled-for manuscripts for a longer period than six months. If the return of manuscript is expected, postage should be inclosed.

Address all communications to the Street & Smith Corporation

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, \$6.00

SINGLE COPIES, 15 CENTS

**For a Real paint job
nothing is equal to
a good Brush /**

REGARDLESS of the claims made for paint spraying devices, Brushes are still the tools of *Better Painting*.

Wherever long life, fine appearance and lasting protection are more desirable than a possible small saving in first cost, *Brushes must be used*.

And remember this—

Whiting's Celebrated Brushes.
Adams Superior Brushes

have been preferred by Master Painters for more than one hundred years.

Send for
Illustrated
Literature

**WHITING-ADAMS
BOSTON**

Brush Manufacturers for over 117 years and the largest in the World

Picture-Play Magazine

*The Best
Magazine of
the Screen*

On sale at all
news stands

Price, 25c per copy



Tom Converse Gambled with a Stranger---and Lost

His money was all gone. He was broke, but he would not wager his gun on a turn of the cards. Then the stranger proposed another bet—that Tom should ride to the top of a near-by mountain and light a bonfire, in the event that the cards should go against him on the next deal. Tom accepted the wager—and lost again.

He took the ride and, by so doing, he assumed to himself the personality of the notorious outlaw known as "The Shadow," for the lighting of the beacon was the signal of The Shadow's return. Poses of riders swarmed to the mountain, and Tom was in dire peril. The Shadow's crimes were dastardly and called for swift and certain justice.

Every one who enjoys a tale of splendid courage and exciting adventure, of manhood tested in the crucible of danger, should read

The Shadow of Silver Tip

By GEORGE OWEN BAXTER

Of the many writers who have woven the romance of the West into their stories, none enjoys a wider popularity than George Owen Baxter. There is a magic and a wizardry to his story-telling which is the essence of true art. His narratives are simple yet absorbingly dramatic, absorbingly real. They make the reader live over again the vivid life of the primitive West.

PRICE, \$2.00 NET

At all booksellers or order from

CHELSEA HOUSE
79-89 Seventh Ave. New York City



DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXVII

August 15, 1925

No. 3

WARNING! Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but we feel sorry for the reader who buys an imitation. Do not be deceived; insist upon having the original DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

The Padded Pay Roll by *Hugh Dawson*

Author of "The Midnight Terror," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HIS FIRST CRIME.

THE old pawnbroker eyed his customer shrewdly. "What do you want this revolver for?" he asked.

The young man on the other side of the low counter turned pale. His cheeks twitched. He bit his lower lip anxiously.

Apparently the question came unexpectedly, for he had no glib answer

ready at the tip of his tongue. For a moment he was silent, his fingers drumming nervously on a counter worn smooth and glassy by years of surreptitious traffic. The tattoo stopped. He lit a cheap cigarette, his hands shaking perceptibly.

Throughout the bartering, his black eyes had evaded the aged pawnbroker's. Now he glanced up warily.

"Oh," he responded, his soft voice a bit strained, "I just want a revolver for a hunting trip. But I didn't know

it was necessary to give such information. This is the first gun I ever bought."

"I can see that," said the old man grimly. "Enough gats have passed in and out of this shop to equip more than one regiment. A fellow in my business gets so he can size up his customers. I can see that you're all right. Otherwise, I might have to refuse to sell. The police are getting stricter. You'll understand—crime wave and all that."

The young man smiled in relief. Color again flooded his cheeks. "I'll take this revolver," he said. "It is just what I need. In particular, I'm glad it is not an automatic. Those things look treacherous to me. I'm rather leery of them."

The pawnbroker nodded agreeably. "Very well, sir. And now, are you sure you know how to operate this infant cannon? Sure you soaked up the instructions I gave you?"

"Yes, I'll remember all that." The young man reached in a pocket and brought forth a small wad of banknotes. In peeling off the purchase price, ten dollars, from the outside, he disclosed that the remaining bills were ones. Perceiving which, the pawnbroker surmised that he was none too prosperous. The ten dollars changed hands.

"And now," the old fellow announced, "you understand, of course, that there are certain laws and ordinances designed to regulate the sale of firearms. I must have your name and address."

"What for?" the customer queried apprehensively.

"Just a matter of routine. I have to file them at police headquarters, along with the serial number of the pistol, which I already have on my books. Of course, you might give me a phony name and address instead of your real one—and how am I to know?"

A faint smile flickered invitingly in the old man's crafty gray eyes.

"I see," said the customer quite pleased. "No police permit needed, eh? That's a nice rule for an out-of-town buyer like myself. Just record me as—er—Jeremiah David, at 4000 Washington Street, Lima, Ohio."

"That sounds all right." The pawnbroker examined the bank note carefully, to make sure that it was not counterfeit. "And now, is there anything else I might show you? How about a set of brass knuckles or a billy or a nice blade?"

The young man had quite recovered his composure. He was exuberant with good spirits and confidence, like one emerged from a trying ordeal. "Don't you remember?" he asked jestingly. "I told you that I want this weapon for a hunting trip. What use would a hunter possibly have for those other things?"

The pawnbroker smiled blandly. "One never can tell," he answered quietly. "They would prove invaluable if you dropped your revolver and came to close grips with a bear."

They exchanged winks.

The young fellow strode through the door, out into the cool night. A dense fog, drifting in from Lake Erie, was pouring through Cleveland's downtown streets. Amid it, lights glowed softly. The mist made the familiar streets seem strange and unearthly. Under cover of it, criminals would reap a rich harvest before morning, vanishing like phantoms.

A clock struck the hour of ten shortly before he boarded a Clifton Boulevard street car in Public Square. It carried him westward, out over the viaduct. A damp, chill breeze came through the car window as it passed high above the river. It was pleasing on his hot, flushed face. A consuming fire that was not a fever burned throughout his body.

Nearing West Forty-fifth Street, he pushed a button, left the car, and walked briskly southward. In a few minutes

he was in his rooming house—the upstairs rear chamber that he called home.

He drew down the shade of the one window, locked the door, and hung his coat over the knob as a precaution against any spying eye at the keyhole. Then he pulled the revolver from a side pocket of his trousers. He placed it gently on the gray blanket of the bed, brought a rocking chair forward, sat motionless and feasted his eyes on the instrument of death. For many minutes he was entranced, moody, plotting.

There came a sharp rapping on the bedroom door. He jerked guiltily. Again his face went pale. His first thought was that a policeman had followed him home and stood in the hall, ready to arrest him. But his panic quickly subsided. After all, he had not used the pistol—not yet. He had nothing to fear. The law cannot punish a man for merely thinking in terms of crime.

He grasped the revolver and thrust it back into his pocket. But, no! that would not do. A bulge showed suspiciously. He glanced swiftly about the room, seeking a hiding place. The knock at the door was repeated, this time insistently. Fumbling in his hurry, he shoved the weapon under a pillow, and crossed to the door.

Unlocking and opening it, he recognized the visitor as a friend who roomed at the other end of the corridor. His heart skipped a beat, and with difficulty he repressed a sigh of relief.

"Hello, Ben!" he said cordially. "Come on in."

"How's the honorable Arthur Diamond to-night?" asked the guest. "Had your door locked. Must have been counting your jack."

Diamond laughed sourly. "A lot of money I'm apt to have—timekeeper employed by a tightwad corporation."

Ben's face fell dismally. "Hope you're not strapped."

"Why? Want to make a touch?"

"Not now, but I may be around in a few days. The firm gave me the gate this afternoon, Art."

"What! Why, you've worked six or seven years for that outfit. I thought you were sitting pretty, working into a lifelong job."

"Eight years!" Ben corrected. "Head of the shipping department, I was, with an eye to an office job. And they tied a can to me as if I'd only been with 'em a week. Why? That's easy. I'm kicked out to make room for a son of one of the Big Chief's friends. They're going to break him into the business and boost him up. Meantime, I was excess baggage. So they tied the can to me. Oh, well, what can you expect from a corporation? You know what the Philadelphia lawyer said—a corporation has neither a body to be kicked nor a soul to be damned."

Arthur Diamond gritted his teeth. "My sentiments exactly. Tough luck, old man, and I'm sorry."

"Oh, I'm not a cry-baby," Ben grumbled. "I can take care of myself. Wouldn't mind it so much if it hadn't happened when times are dull and jobs scarce as hen's teeth. Well, if worst comes to worst, I can always get a piece of lead pipe and go into business for myself."

Diamond was a generous young chap. "If you get broke," he said, "you know where to find me. I'm none too rich myself. But always glad to help a pal along, if I have anything to split with him. Say, I didn't think they'd pull a dirty trick like that on you, considering your years of service and how loyal you've been. Gosh! for all I know, it may happen to me to-morrow."

They talked on, cursing employers in general. Both were radicals. Friendship had sprung up between them readily, for they entertained similar economic views. Neither had been drafted for active war service. Dia-

mond had been barred by defective eyesight, Ben by organic heart trouble. During the boom they had made big money—and spent it promptly, to the last cent. Where some wise ones had saved beautiful nest eggs from which to hatch future fortunes, these two had passed up the opportunity that comes not often in a lifetime.

Accordingly, they now had nearly empty pockets—and a grudge against the industrial system. They were out-laws at heart.

“Anything new at your plant, Art?” asked Ben.

Diamond expressed, by a manufactured yawn, his surfeit of monotony. “Naw,” he grumbled. “Same old dish, day in, day out. Still acting as time-keeper, and handling the pay roll.”

Ben’s eyes half closed. He whistled tunelessly between his teeth. “Pay roll, eh?” he commented. “Must be a great temptation at times.”

Diamond swallowed uneasily. “Oh, I wouldn’t think of stealing,” he protested quickly. “But I sure could make a big haul if I went after it. Big in my eyes, at any rate, though I suppose a professional crook wouldn’t think much of it. We have over three hundred men working in our machine shop and foundry, and it’s a rare week when the pay roll doesn’t total over fifteen thousand bucks.”

“You handle all that jack?” Ben asked, awed.

“It goes through my hands. Comes to me in sealed envelopes from the office, and I pass them out. Maybe I could slope with the lot. But they’d catch me, sooner or later.”

“Fifteen thousand dollars a week!” Ben mused. His eyes were closed as he spoke, and he spoke the words with pleasure. “And I recall your telling me the other night, that they only pay you eighty dollars a month, a bit under twenty a week, for all this responsibility. Say, Art, your boss

couldn’t invite trouble any better if he advertised for it.”

Diamond slowly rolled a cigarette. He ran his tongue along it, tucked it in a corner of his mouth, struck a match and inhaled deeply. “Clerical help doesn’t get much jack,” he reminded the other. “Once in a while, I’ll admit, I do see a fairly good chance to steal and get away with it. Of course, I wouldn’t think of doing it. There’s a case recently. On our pay roll we had a big Swede, a toolmaker named Janssen. I made up his time last week, sent it through, and his pay envelope came out to me with the rest. But Janssen didn’t show up on Saturday. I just learned to-day that he dropped dead in his boarding house. Heart failure or some such thing. He’d only been over from the old country a short time. Didn’t have any relatives in America, so far as I’ve learned yet. They paid the funeral expenses with what money they found on his person—quite a roll he carried, too, I guess. He was a mighty thrifty cuss.”

Diamond’s voice faded away into silence.

“I get you!” said Ben in a tense whisper. “You still have the week’s pay that was due him. No one has come for it. No one is apt to show up.”

The timekeeper nodded. “Quite a puzzler, isn’t it?” he asked. “Now, suppose nobody steps up to claim it. Who does it belong to—this sixty dollars of Janssen’s? If I turn it back to the office, the company will keep it. Yet it doesn’t belong to the company any more than it does to—well, me, for instance.”

Ben snorted. “You big chump,” he said, “don’t turn it in. That Swede’s money belongs to you as much as it does to your boss. Keep it, you boob. Believe me, in your shoes, I would.”

Diamond meditated. “No,” he decided presently, “somehow I’d feel crooked. I’ll hand the money back to the treasurer to-morrow. Would have

done it sooner, only I've been expecting some one to drop in and claim it."

Ben rose to his feet. He yawned. "You're an easy mark," he jeered. "Well, I'm going to turn in. Want to get a good sleep. I've got a lot of walking ahead of me to-morrow, looking for a job."

He ambled wearily out of the room.

Alone, Diamond locked the door. He seemed to have forgotten the pistol hastily secreted under the pillow. Another object monopolized his attention. He sat down and drew it from an inner pocket.

It was a plain manila envelope, about five inches long and half as wide. The flap had been sealed. A wad of bank-notes bulged inside. His fingers tingled as he felt the bulge. A queer sort of elation went up and down his spine, ending in a shiver.

Diamond never in his life was wider awake. Midnight approached. And still he sat in his chair, caressing the enticing manila envelope. A great struggle was taking place in his brain. It was the grim argument with the Other Self that at some time or other comes to nearly everyone, and the decision is momentous. He smoked an endless chain of cigarettes.

Repeatedly an inner voice tempted him: "It belongs to you as much as to your employers."

At three in the morning he tore open the manila envelope, bearing the name of the late Eric Janssen.

He extracted the wad of bank notes and thrust them into his pocket. Then he burned the envelope and tossed the rustling black ashes out into the night.

CHAPTER II.

WOMAN ENTERS.

A FORTNIGHT of constant apprehension, at times mounting to terror, followed for young Arthur Diamond. By day he was haunted by the

dread that his taking the sixty dollars would be discovered. By night the same terror pursued him in dreams.

Previously he had always been honest, never had knowingly taken a penny of any one else's money. And now that he had slipped from the straight and narrow path, the agonies of remorse visited themselves upon him. Ah, if he could only turn the clock back and undo his dark deed.

But as the days slipped past, he felt increasingly confident. No one seemed to suspect him. The big Swede soon was forgotten by his fellow workmen. No one came forward to claim the pay envelope. At the end of two weeks, Diamond felt sure that he had gotten away with his first crime, in safety. He abandoned all thought of making restitution.

After all, he wondered, was it really a crime? The sixty dollars no longer belonged to the corporation that employed him. The company certainly had no more ethical right to the money than Arthur Diamond. The money, without any apparent legitimate owner, occupied an extraordinary position. It had, as he saw it, the same status as discovered pirate treasure or a bank-note found in the street.

Bitter against his employers for what he considered to be underpayment for his services, Diamond decided that if a show-down ever came and he were compelled to refund, he would insist that the sixty dollars go to charity. In the meantime, he regarded himself as a trustee of the money. To be sure, he had spent it. But he appeased his conscience by saying to himself that it was in the nature of a loan—that, if a legitimate owner appeared on the scene, he would pay it back in installments.

Then one evening he read in a newspaper: "National banks alone hold more than twenty-seven million dollars of unclaimed deposits, for which no owners can be found."

Thereafter he refused to listen to the pleadings of his conscience. "I'm not a thief!" he reflected triumphantly. "I'm just like a bank, holding an unclaimed deposit. If an owner shows up, well and good. I'll pay. In the meantime, same as the bank, I am entitled to use of the money."

The law, he realized uneasily, might not agree with his questionable line of reasoning. However, it was beginning to look as if he would never have to reckon with the law. It gave him cold chills, though, when he contemplated the action that his employers would surely take if they discovered his theft. There had been a recent illustration of their kindheartedness; they had pressed a case against a machinist who stole a few tools—had sent him to prison "as an example." Oh, well, no use crossing the next bridge until he came to it.

Another matter was keeping him awake nights—a woman.

A young woman she was, fair to look upon, alluring, charming. Her personality was magnetic. She fascinated him.

Her name was Marjorie.

Her mentality was on a par with her brunette beauty. She was a private secretary in an uptown office, and sufficiently capable to command a top salary.

It galled young Diamond, that she made more money than he did—though, loving her with all his heart and soul, he was simultaneously proud of her ability.

One night he took her to a movie. Afterwards they lingered on one of the orange-colored benches in Edgewater Park. Diamond was more ardent than ever before. And the girl, enchanted by a gorgeous moon, was inclined to listen to his pleas.

"Why don't you marry me, dear?" he implored wretchedly. "My room gets gloomier all the time. I want you more than anything else in the world—more than everything else heaped together."

She pondered him languorously. "I think I could be very happy with you, Arthur," she admitted. "Like yourself, I am alone in the world and get tired of solitude. It would be wonderful to have a real home. But I am making half again as much money as you are. Now, there's Ned——"

"What!" Diamond protested a bit angrily. "You're not really interested in him, are you?"

Marjorie laughed musically. "Yes," she said, for she was of frank nature. "I said that I think I could be happy with you. Well, why couldn't I be equally happy with Ned?"

"Surely you must know your own mind."

"No, I don't. Right now I am very much undecided. Ned, of course, makes several times as much salary as you do."

Diamond had heard this before. So often, in fact, that it sounded like a taunt. He was not unaware that Marjorie, however, dangled Ned in front of his eyes to spur him on to success, so he was not enraged. Instead, he became rather sullen.

"I'm not altogether to blame," he muttered. "I'm not a dumb-bell. I have a lot of ability, and you know it. It's just a case that the right opportunity hasn't come my way yet. Every chap who makes his own way goes through the same period of fighting hard without seeming to get anywhere. Times are dull right now, and it's difficult to get advancement. When things hum again I'll——"

She smiled in the moonlight and patted his shoulder. "I know it," she said comfortingly. "You'll make good. It's just a question of time. Until then, we had better just be good friends. I could, of course, marry you and go on working, and with our combined incomes we would get along very well. Thousands of young couples are doing it, helping each other. But it is hard on the wife, coming home after a hard

day's work and finding household tasks awaiting her. Not for me, Arthur."

Diamond groaned. "Forget that stuff," he said. "I wouldn't let you do it even if you wanted to. Well, so much for that. My ship will come in one of these days and we'll sail away into the sunset like they do in the movies. That makes me think; there's a swell picture scheduled at the Hollywood next week, and we want to go sure."

"What night?" Marjorie asked guardedly.

"How about Monday?"

"I can't go."

"Why not? Got a date?"

"Yes-s-s."

"Who with? Ned, I suppose."

"Yes," the girl answered impatiently.

"And why not? He is taking me to the big musical revue."

"No, he isn't going to take you. I am."

"Orchestra seats," she reminded him, "are five dollars, not counting war tax."

"Nevertheless, you go with me."

"Now, he sensible, Art!" she urged.

"Ned has promised all the trimmings."

"For instance?"

"A big hotel dinner to start with."

"I'll give you that. You can order roast bird of paradise if you want to."

"Supper after the show, and all travel by taxi," she went on. "And Ned promised that I should wear orchids."

"You'll have all these, and I'll provide them," Diamond pledged recklessly.

"That Ned fellow has gotten under my hide to-night—and I won't let him take my sweetheart." He chuckled, though already he was wondering where he would get the money. "We'll have a big time, same as if we were rich."

"Can you afford it, though?" Marjorie asked. In their courtship they had reached a degree of intimacy where she was not fearful of becoming too personal. He nodded with a confidence that was as thin as a film of oil on

water. She clapped her dainty hands delightedly. "Oh, Arthur! you must have got a raise. Why didn't you tell me?"

He was glad that he did not betray himself by a guilty flush. Though he could not bear to lie to her bluntly, he nevertheless assumed the rôle of deception. "Ask me no stories, I'll tell you no fibs," he responded airily. "Things are looking better for me at the office. Maybe I'll rise fast. But I insist on keeping all the details from you until I have the big surprise to spring."

"Oh, I'm just dying with curiosity," the girl said. She was breathing excitedly. "But I'll wait."

"You'd rather go to the revue with me than with Ned?" he inquired eagerly. "Tell me."

Her impulsiveness subsided. She hesitated. "I think so," she admitted after a tantalizing pause. His face glowed, and his blood tingled deliciously. "Ned is very attractive, though," she reminded him. "He loves me, and he has a lot to offer along with himself. This time, though, I'll decide in your favor. Yes, I go to the revue with you—to celebrate your increase in salary."

Diamond felt like a cur for deceiving her. He hung his head. Fortunately for himself, she misinterpreted the gesture as one of thanks.

An hour later, he had escorted her home and was alone in his bedroom, staring anxiously at the carpet and consuming a chain of cigarettes.

"A fine boat I'm in!" he thought. "But I'm in it now, and have to play the game. Why the devil didn't I save my jack before I met this wonderful girl? Theater tickets, taxis, dinner, orchids will cost me a week's pay or more. I can't afford it."

True, he had several hundred dollars saved up. But this did not lessen the fact that he had engaged himself to

spend beyond his means. Nor could he put away the dread thought that nowhere on the horizon could he see any possible good fortune that would enable him to marry Marjorie.

For this fact, he did not accept full responsibility. Primarily he blamed the industrial system, in which advancement without exceptional ability or "pull" usually is slow. Especially was he bitter against his point of contact with that system—namely, his present employers. He cursed them copiously for not having given him a larger share in the profits which he had helped create.

A sudden temptation came to him. It brought a thrill.

"No, no!" he whispered aloud. "I might get caught."

But the enticement persisted. He could not fight it down. He began to consider it coldly and, as calmly as he could, with the attitude that it was some one else's problem, not his.

Now, Diamond was not a drinking man. But he occasionally took a few fingers of whisky to be sociable. He liked the stuff, but had never developed an appetite for it. To date, he could have a bottle in his room for days without ever touching it. Such a bottle was locked in his suit case. It was a half pint of rye, which he had procured on a doctor's prescription a week or so before, when he feared, from the ache in his bones, that flu had marked him for a victim.

He got out the bottle and took a stiff drink. Others followed. A sort of electric purring, along with a gratifying numbness, presently asserted itself in his limbs and head.

His mind turned to the revolver which he had bought from the old pawnbroker. The purchase had been made in a wild moment, when he was more than customarily nursing his grievance against the capitalistic system. At that time he was wavering on the threshold of crime. One thing which he had vaguely in

mind, though he refused to admit it to himself, was the possibility of staging a few holdups, possibly thereby getting a large enough nest egg to go into business for himself.

Then had come the incident of taking the sixty dollars from the pay envelope of the deceased Eric Janssen. Not much in the way of loot, but it had temporarily appeased his craving for easy money.

Making sure that the window shade was down and the door locked, with a coat over the knob to cover the keyhole, he brought forth the pistol and contemplated it intently.

Gradually he yielded to temptation—decided to take the easiest way. Alcohol, ancient ally of crime, hastened the decision though it did not generate it.

Two courses were open to him. The first was banditry; he dismissed it as too dangerous. The get-away might be difficult, and there was a possibility that a victim might be carrying a pistol and might prove prompt in using it.

The other course was pay-roll padding. Here, obviously, was less risk, for he would be operating on familiar ground.

Diamond drank the rest of the whisky. He tossed the bottle into the wastebasket. Unsteadily he removed his clothes, donned pajamas, turned out the lights and went to bed. He slept soundly.

The next day was Monday. He started the week by putting an imaginary employee on the pay roll. This mythical individual, he christened Jerry Jones, and sent him on his way. He assigned the invisible henchman to the warehouse staff.

Morning and night, Diamond rang the time clock for this creature of his imagination. Along came Friday night. According to the records, Jones had twenty-four dollars due him. So the timekeeper reported to the office. Next morning the trays of manila envelopes

sent out from the office included one for Jones.

Arthur Diamond pocketed the money. No one was any the wiser.

CHAPTER III.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

EASY money it was, to be sure—like finding it in the gutter. The mythical Jerry Jones continued to be on the pay roll, playing his rôle realistically, completely deceiving the office treasurer and bookkeepers who imagined him to be flesh and blood. Each Saturday the twenty-four dollars, weekly stipend of said Jerry Jones, found its way to the pockets of the crooked timekeeper.

To young Diamond, this imaginary Jerry Jones seemed very actual. In fact, within a fortnight, Diamond was carrying in his brain a vivid picture of Jones—sinister, secretive, refusing to answer the questions of any save his master. Often when with eyes closed in reverie he conjured up the likeness of the fictitious worker, Diamond would have sworn that Jones gave him a knowing wink.

Curiously enough, though reticent and unsociable, Jones was dogged by a horde of other phantoms. They plodded close at his heels, peering over his shoulders, gesturing as though to make the timekeeper understand their desires.

Abruptly the message got across to him.

The phantoms were saying, "Put us on the pay roll with Jones. Why stop at one? We can fetch as much money to you as he can. You might as well make a real killing while you're at it, as long as you play the game cautiously."

So Diamond added other imaginary names to the pay roll. At the end of the first month, Jones had six companions. And the lot of them were netting Diamond about two hundred dollars a week. To him it was a fabulous sum.

The legitimate pay roll included several hundred names. Among these it was no difficult feat for a sharp young timekeeper to plant seven phony names without arousing suspicion.

Though Diamond did not know it, he was playing an old game. So old, in fact, that almost any modern scientifically operated business would have detected the crooked work almost immediately. But the corporation employing him was lax in the office end. While there was a certain amount of checking up, affairs were run so loosely that the timekeeper was undetected.

Then, too, he was a young fox. For one thing, he kept changing the names. Jerry Jones, for instance, served him faithfully for five weeks. Then Diamond bade him adieu. He removed the name from the pay roll and started another in its stead.

Jones faded from Diamond's brain. The young man often wondered what had become of the phantom. It had seemed to be so real that Arthur meditated whether evil spirits, inciting to crime, move on from brain to brain. At any rate, Jones was gone now and there was no way the office could trace him.

It would, of course, be as uncomfortable as being in boiling oil if the treasurer should begin to ask the warehouse foreman about Jones. That thought turned Diamond's blood to ice water. But his game was netting him plunder that would soon roll up into the thousands, and he could not bear the thought of deserting such a lucrative scheme.

He juggled his pay roll frequently, eliminating his silent actors after rather brief performances, and replacing them by new ones. This did not arouse attention in the office, for the business was accustomed to constant labor turnover. Many of the machinists and molders were transients, drifters, never staying long on any one job.

Diamond had read both in newspapers and in fiction, about similar defalcations. Exposure, he knew, usually came because the thieves spent too much and were caught at it. When a man lives beyond his income to any noticeable extent, his associates naturally begin to wonder where the funds are coming from.

So Diamond resolved to profit by the experience of such fools. He spent little money in high living. Instead, he cached his plunder in many banks, dividing his deposits among them so that he would not attract attention and suspicion.

Marjorie was delighted at his ability to shower her with gifts and good times. They enjoyed a taste of luxury at the start, but the sensible young woman quickly called a halt and they adopted a modest mode of living.

"Save your money, Arthur," she admonished him. "Bank it and we'll enjoy it later. Salt it while you have it to salt."

Though his situation seemed secure, and nothing tangible had developed to alarm him, Diamond had the feeling that disaster hung over his head, ready to crush him, and that when it fell, it would come unexpectedly. With his secret, he had the sensation of being alone in the universe. At times the desire to confide to some one almost drove him frantic. And increasingly he turned to the girl for support. Somehow, despite her feminine weakness—her frail and flowerlike being—she appealed to him as a raft to a man adrift in mid-ocean.

His youthful affection for her became passionate love. The fear that, if he were exposed she would shun him, filled him with panic. His emotional outbursts were at times puzzling; she interpreted them as natural expressions of fathomless love. And yet, by intuition she sensed that all was not right; that he had not fully bared his soul;

that he was concealing something from her. This made her cautious.

Desperate from fear of losing her, he asked her to marry him at once. It was a cowardly act, for thereby he invited her to share the disgrace that might overtake him.

She refused. Just why, she did not know. He implored. She was adamant in her decision, though tender.

"Why not?" he protested. "Why delay?"

"Be patient," she said. "Let us wait and see how long your good fortune lasts. Maybe you'll lose your job. Times are hard. Nearly every concern is laying off employees. I don't want to be married to a man out of work during a period of depression."

Lose his job? What she suggested was more than a possibility. It was a probability. Any moment, the ax might fall—and losing his position would not be the only disaster to ensue. For he was an efficient worker, and dismissal was not apt to come except as a Siamese twin of exposure of his crime. Secretly he admired her sound sense, and thanked Heaven that she had not yielded to his marriage pleas. Suppose he were caught. Then Marjorie would share his disgrace, would suffer with him.

All this time, he was getting deeper into the mire.

Fearful, morbid, he occasionally drank too much whisky. Not enough to make him stagger, but enough to make his face turn haggard, his black eyes become bloodshot in their whites, and his manner grow irritable even to his sweetheart. Then they would quarrel—and quickly make up.

The girl was worried. "I wish you would never touch liquor," she lamented. "This bootleg stuff is especially dangerous. Suppose you got some wood alcohol and it blinded you? Arthur, God has given you a superb physique, and you are foolish to undermine it by dissipation. Do you know, I often think

that the real reason you are so bitter toward the capitalistic industrial system is because, with a body plainly meant for outdoor work, you are cooped up in an office. Your health resents it."

He swore off—and kept his pledge. But, for this, there was a deeper reason than her pleas. It was a gnawing fear that, in a moment of bad judgment resulting from a mild spree, he might make the fatal slip that would betray his stealing.

Diamond no longer kept his revolver hidden in the locked suit case of his bedroom in the rooming house.

He carried it on his person, in his right hip pocket. This was not inconvenient, for the barrel was short and the pocket deep. The bulge showed through his coat. Fellow workers noticed it, also men from the office. He made no attempt at concealment.

"Sure," ran his glib explanation. "It's a gat, and it's loaded, too. On pay day a good many thousands of dollars pass through my hands in those little manila envelopes. I don't guard them for many minutes, but suppose bandits swooped down when I had the pay roll? These gangs that are sticking up the town right and left are in the habit of shooting first and going after the jack afterwards. They might bump me off. Any wonder I carry a gat? I need it to protect myself as well as the money."

This was plausible. The office approved. Here, evidently, was a valued employee, one to be trusted, one who realized his burden of responsibility and could handle it. They raised his salary by five dollars a week. That struck him as highly ludicrous, in view of the amount he was stealing. But he acted to perfection the rôle of a grateful drudge.

Of course, the real reason he carried the pistol was linked with his chronic thefts.

"If I'm caught," he vowed secretly, "they'll never send me down to the pen

at Columbus. Not much! I'll just out with the pistol and end it all. One shot through the head, and I'd exit from trouble. Maybe if it was the big boss that called a show-down, I might bump him off, too, curse him!"

In common with similar fools, he did not realize that it was just a question of time until his employers would learn of his embezzlements.

Henry Luke was the president and general manager of the combination machine shop and brass foundry that employed Arthur Diamond.

This man Luke was a natural product of heredity. His father had underpaid his employees and kept them satisfied by promising to remember them in his will.

Henry Luke regarded men as machines to be speeded up and, when their efficiency waned, cast aside.

"If they aren't satisfied, let them quit and get other jobs," was Henry Luke's attitude. He paid the lowest possible wages. At present he was particularly inclined to cut expenses and "watch the corners." During the war boom he thought he made a second fortune. He did—on paper. When prices collapsed, most of his supposed profits had to be "written off" in the inventory values of his materials and plant.

On a certain fateful morning—Friday the thirteenth—Luke was in his private office talking to his auditor.

"Get this, now!" the employer said. "While we have our books nicely doctored to fool the government income-tax inspector, maybe he is onto some of these dodges and will ferret out the truth. So I want you to approach the inspector, when he comes, diplomatically. Sound him out. Admire his work in an innocent sort of way, and offer him a job as your assistant. These auditors who work out of Washington don't get much salary. Find out this bird's, and double it. He'll jump at

the chance, like as not. My lawyers tell me that this racket has been worked before. If the inspector is human, maybe he'll accept our proposition. Let him O. K. the books. Then he can come to our pay roll after a sufficient wait so Uncle Sam won't be suspicious—ninety days, say."

The auditor rubbed the tip of his long nose with a pencil. He winked knowingly. Then cat-footedly this man who doctored business ledgers to deceive the tax collector ambled out of the room.

Henry Luke sat alone.

For some reason—possibly a guilty conscience due to crooked business deals—this man was very nervous. He had, in fact, a pronouncedly nervous temperament. His tall body was thin, his cheeks gaunt and somewhat pale, his eyes burning with restlessness. Although he frequently made public addresses, urging the populace to uphold the Constitution, he had a bottle of bootleg whisky in his desk.

He opened the drawer, took out the bottle, poured a stiff drink and, rising, added water from a cooler in the corner.

Luke was sipping this with the air of a connoisseur, one accustomed to the fine things of life, when the door opened. A frail little woman, who had given her age as twenty-five for fully fifteen years, entered.

"Doctor Curwin Baynes to see you, sir," she announced timidly.

Henry Luke's agate-hard blue eyes brightened at his crony's name. "Shoot him right in," he instructed her.

The physician sauntered through the doorway with an air of familiarity. One would have thought that he owned the place. This was not surprising, for his body was large and masterful, and his personality was commanding. He was Luke's physician as well as his friend, and easily lorded it over the neurasthenic employer who looked up

to him as the sole escape from dreaded maladies.

"How you feeling?" the doctor asked, feigning an anxious tone.

"All right, though a bit shaky," Luke answered. Sudden alarm showed in his eyes. "What makes you ask?"

"Nothing much," said Baynes, biting his lip as though afraid to alarm the other. "Your skin looks as if your circulation were bad to-day, though. I'll have to go over you very carefully again. Maybe your blood pressure is up high." He paused and eyed Luke accusingly. "Have a lot to drink last night?"

"Well, not so much, five or six shots."

The physician sighed. "Let's forget disease. What's new?"

Luke shrugged. "Nothing much. Oh, yes, I was running over the pay roll a while ago, and I see we have a molder in the foundry with your name—Baynes. Spells it the same way, too."

The doctor was interested. "That's odd," he commented. "I've yet to meet one since I came out from the old country. Lots who spell it with 'i,' few with the 'y.' Like to meet him."

"Come on, we'll go out," Luke offered.

If Arthur Diamond had known of the impending visitors, he might have shot himself through the head. For Baynes was one of the fictitious names with which he had been padding the pay roll.

The show-down was at hand.

CHAPTER IV.

A PENITENTIARY OFFENSE.

DIAMOND, the amateur thief, meantime was alone in his timekeeper's office. This was in a large degree a private room. Morning and noon, the workers filed through and rang up their cards on the time clock. Then Diamond closed the door leading out to the machine shop and thence to the foundry.

At quitting times, the procession again passed his desk, tired yet jubilant at the prospect of rest, and punched the lever that indicated the quitting hour.

In between these streams of visitors, the timekeeper was secluded, busy with his records and various minor book-keeping duties that had been put on him in the general campaign to cut down overhead expenses.

The hour was eleven, on that fateful morning of Friday the thirteenth. He had paused in his toil to gaze moodily out of a window, where the freedom of outdoors and the crisp tang of autumn tantalized him invitingly.

Diamond had no premonition of the disaster that threatened him. Months of safety at his crookedness had generated in him a false feeling of semi-confidence, though not of security. Cognizant of the ever-lurking peril, he nevertheless saw no reason for immediate worry. His bank account had reached dimensions that pleased him mightily, cached here and there in numerous financial institutions.

"When it reaches ten thousand dollars," he mused, "I shall call a halt on this stealing. Thereafter I shall be honest. I should have the ten thousand some weeks ahead of the annual audit. If that overhauling of the records does not betray me, I can rest assured that my secret will never come to light. The books, once closed for the year, are not apt to be opened again for any extensive check-up. Ah! how pleasant to contemplate. I shall wait a few months. Then Marjorie and I will be married. I shall take her to a far part of the country and start anew."

He closed his eyes and contemplated that future state of bliss. He pictured their future home—a cottage in the suburbs, his stolen money invested in a home, or possibly in a business where he would be his own boss. Vivid and alluring was the vision. He saw the cottage, Marjorie—then to be his wife,

God bless her!—humming happily as she plucked the blossoms of her flowerbeds. Meantime, he would be washing the roadster or building a new radio or, perchance, lounging comfortably on the porch, smoking his pipe and placidly watching the world go by.

A frown flitted across his face. A familiar figure had intruded into his dream world. It was a man, one he knew only too well. Jerry Jones! The imaginary worker whom Diamond had used for his first pay roll padding. Jerry's face was as expressionless as ever, secretive, with a covert and knowing wink to the thief who had conjured him into phantom existence.

Strange, how a creature of a man's fancy performed like an actor on a stage. Diamond saw Jerry turn in at the gate. He stood there, leaning against the fence, and eyed his creator intently. Bluish gray eyes, had Jerry. Why did he not wink, as of old? His eyes were grave, worried. They seemed to be trying to convey a warning. This was unusual, as much so as for Jerry to emerge from memory for more than an instant.

A chill crept into Diamond's blood. And then he heard the door open.

He gave an involuntary start at the intrusion, opened his eyes and blinked. Henry Luke, his boss, strode in. Close behind was the physician.

Luke scowled. "Loafing, eh?" he said sourly.

"Er—just resting my eyes a moment," Diamond responded hastily. "Afraid I'll have to see an oculist and begin wearing spectacles."

"Don't delay too long," the employer grumbled. "I won't have any one around me who knowingly allows anything to handicap his efficiency. Hard enough making a profit out of you fellows, as it is."

"Yes, sir, I'll attend to it at once," the timekeeper assured his employer hastily. He stood up, in respect, and

waited for the two visitors to pass on through and out into the factory. Such, he figured, must really be their destination.

But Henry Luke had no such intention. He walked directly to the time-clock and ran his eye down the alphabetically arranged tiers of cards.

"Here we are," he announced to the doctor. "This is the man we want—Baynes."

Diamond suddenly went weak in the knees. His heart fluttered and for a moment he thought it was going to fail. Weakly he sagged back into his chair and waited developments. A panic of terror vibrated through him, and he was conscious that his fingers were trembling. Had his thieving been discovered? Was the boss hot on his trail? If not, what on earth interested him in the card of the mythological Baynes?

Luke informed him promptly. "My friend here," he explained, "is Doctor Curwin Baynes. In all his many years in this country, he has never met any one with the same name as himself, same spelling. Naturally, he was interested when I told him that in looking over the pay roll I'd run into a namesake. Well, doc, this particular Baynes apparently isn't a highbrow like yourself. I see by his card that he's a roustabout in the brass foundry. Come on, we'll look him up."

Diamond was in a tight corner. If his boss went to the foundry, he would learn that, not only was no Baynes employed there, but never had been. Pronto, the timekeeper would stand exposed as a pay-roll padder.

"Hold on, sir!" Diamond called out. It required his utmost will power to keep his voice steady. "No use going to the foundry. Baynes has quit."

Luke seemed to swallow this lie gullibly enough. He turned to the physician and said, "Labor turn-over is a big problem in a plant like this. They come and go, some of them like wild

geese. Oh, well, guess you haven't missed much."

Absent-mindedly he had carried the mythical Baynes' card along with him when leaving the time clock. He glanced at it. "When did the fellow quit?" he asked.

Diamond gulped. "Yesterday," he answered, too hurriedly to give the question any thought. The word rolled from his dry lips before he realized.

Again Henry Luke glanced at the card. Now, he was no fool. Furthermore, in his younger days when he was learning the business from the ground floor up, under his father, he had served an apprenticeship in the accounting department. Since then, he had become accustomed to "reading" the meaning of figures almost the instant they were placed before him.

"Is that so?" he inquired quickly. "Yesterday, eh? Sure of that?"

"Yes, sir." Diamond's voice was jerky.

"You're another!" the employer retorted. "Else how comes it that Baynes' card was rung up this morning as if he himself had come back to work?"

Diamond's head was reeling. A thin mist had come before his eyes, and it seemed to him that the ticks of the clock had suddenly become louder and changed their cadence so that they were longer apart.

"Must be a mistake of some sort," he faltered. "Maybe one of the other workers rang the Baynes card by mistake."

"That's plausible," said Luke quietly. His voice was calm, cold, as penetrating as a knife. "It's plausible, all right—but your face isn't. I smell a rat. I'm going to ring for the foundry foreman and learn the truth."

He stepped to a switchboard by the door. His extended hand did not touch the button, for Diamond abruptly swayed.

"Don't ring!" he muttered brokenly. "I'm caught."

The two visitors stared at him, the doctor with mild interest, the employer dumfounded by surprise.

"So that's it!" Luke snapped. "A pay-roll padder, eh?"

Young Diamond, on the verge of collapse, experienced one of those rallies of energy that come to desperate men when they are cornered. Doctor Baynes recognized it as prompt stimulation of the adrenal glands.

Diamond's right hand flashed to his hip.

His choice was prison or suicide, for now the whole wretched business would be exposed.

He chose suicide.

CHAPTER V.

FATE ROLLS HER LOADED DICE.

DETERMINED, on sudden impulse, to take his own life, Diamond also decided to send his boss into eternity with him. There was no time for dramatic accusations and outbursts of hatred.

His hand rose from his hip pocket and elevated the pistol which he had surreptitiously purchased from the old pawnbroker.

There came an unexpected interruption.

The placid Doctor Curwin Baynes, master of himself in any and all occasions, was standing near by. As promptly and as effectively as though the entire affair had been many times rehearsed, the physician raised his right leg and kicked swiftly. His shoe cracked against Diamond's wrist bone.

The pistol catapulted out of the would-be killer's fingers. It fell at Henry Luke's feet. That individual had gone white as flour. There had been no mistaking the vicious gleam in Diamond's eyes. For an instant the employer had sensed that the graveyard

yawned for him. His escape was narrow. He nearly lost his balance and fell headlong, so swiftly did he pounce down upon the revolver. It vanished into a side coat pocket. He gasped to regain breath.

"Thank you, Baynes!" said Luke shakily. "You saved my life. This young man will face a charge of attempted murder, along with embezzlement."

Diamond sobbed. He staggered to his desk, slumped into his chair and gazed in terror at the man whom he had come so close to murdering.

Henry Luke locked the two doors so that no one could interrupt the forthcoming inquisition.

"Got a flask on your hip, doc?" he asked. Baynes nodded. "Give him a shot—a big one. He sure needs it."

Diamond gulped the stimulant so greedily that he almost strangled. His visitors waited silently until the alcohol took effect and the young fellow began to regain control of his nerves. Finally Luke broke forth sharply:

"How long has this thing been going on?"

"About five months, sir," Diamond informed him dully. He was dazed by the shock of discovery.

"How did it start?" Luke demanded.

"A big Swede worked here, fellow named Eric Janssen. He croaked. No one came to claim his pay. I took it—figured I had as much right to it as the company did."

Luke sniffed. "Unique line of reasoning," he commented. "You missed your calling. Those lawyers of mine would be glad to add you to their staff. They're crooked enough to hide behind corkscrews. Give him another drink, doc. He looks like he might collapse."

The timekeeper again tackled the flask. He was recovering his composure so quickly that the physician wondered whether emotions were a matter of alcohol or its lack.

"How deeply are you involved?" Luke asked.

"About seven thousand dollars," Diamond answered.

Luke whistled. "I'll sure give the bookkeepers Hail Columbia. They must have a swell system of checks and balances. Seven thousand, eh? Spent it all in high living, I suppose? Leading a double life?"

Sudden hope gleamed in Diamond's dark eyes. "No, sir," he said. "I've only spent a few hundred. The rest is scattered around in banks, where I can lay my fingers on it at an instant's notice. Oh, sir! Please, sir! If you'll just let me pay the money back to you and—and—I'll work my fingers to the bone to make up the amount that's missing."

Luke laughed jeeringly. "Not by a jugful!" he said. "Even if you could make restitution to the last penny, I can still send you over the road for the stealing. Return of embezzled funds doesn't clear the embezzler unless his employer waives prosecution. And I won't do that, take it from me. I'll make such an example of you that it'll be remembered for a generation by all who work for this business. Plenty of proof, I have, to convict you—and not only the falsified time cards. Doctor Baynes is a witness to the confession you have just made."

"Prison!" Diamond cried. "Oh, I can't endure it, I can't!"

"You're going to, just the same," he was reminded. "A clear-cut case of grand larceny."

Luke was primed for a long tirade. But he broke off abruptly and fell to studying the culprit. A novel idea had come to him, apparently, something that fascinated him. He turned and walked to the window and stood there motionless, staring out, for fully two minutes. The others waited in silence. Presently Luke began pacing the floor. It was evident that an increasing excitement

was thrilling him. Repeatedly he paused to scrutinize the thief, and Diamond felt that he was being looked through and through. After an intent stare, the employer would nod his head, mutter to himself and resume his restless walking. Finally he swung on a heel and came close to the young man.

"How the devil you were crazy enough to put yourself into such a hole, is more than I can figure," he said. "I gave you credit for having more intelligence. But the eggs can't be unscrambled. Now, the thing you could normally expect would be for me to phone for the police and have you bundled off in a patrol wagon."

Diamond pursed his lips tightly.

"Look here, now, and pay close attention," Luke proposed. "How would you like to get out of this mess and go scot-free?"

Unbelieving joy showed in Diamond's face. "Oh, you're just torturing me," he groaned. "Go ahead, call the cops and get it over with."

"I'm not kidding," Luke assured him sharply. "I repeat my question."

"Why," the thief faltered, "if you let me go, there isn't anything under the sun I wouldn't do to repay you."

"Got any relatives in town?" Luke asked.

"No, sir.

"How about your father and mother?"

"Both dead. Nearest relations I know of are out in Kansas."

"You could drop out of sight from this city, and not be overly sorry not to leave a trace?"

"Just give me a start of two minutes and I'll prove it."

"Fine!" the employer exclaimed. His excitement again manifested itself in his eager manner. Perspiration stood out in beads on his pale forehead. "Is there any one in town that would go to the bother of trying to trace you if you disappeared?"

"You bet! The girl I'm engaged to."

"Sweetheart, eh? Well, I might have expected as much, you being rather an attractive young fellow in the way that appeals to women. How about your sweetie—would you give her up to avoid prison and disgrace?"

Diamond wondered what his boss was driving at. He had something sinister in mind, no doubt about that. Doctor Baynes, too, was puzzled. He watched intently.

"I would, indeed, sir," the thief agreed. "Yes, I'll give her up, go out of her life for good. Otherwise, it means prison for me, and she would suffer a sorrow she would carry with her to the grave."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the physician. "Still, I was just as much of a lunatic when I was your age."

Diamond scowled. "You don't know Marjorie," he countered confidently. "She's the kind that—well, you know, still waters run deep." He turned to Luke. "You have some kind of a proposition to make, that's evident. Is it within the law?"

Luke shrugged. "Don't be so blasted inquisitive," he chided. "You're a fine toad to be splitting hairs as to the legality of your conduct. There are laws and laws. The best citizen violates many laws in the course of a year, though he may not know it, being ignorant of the statutes. Suffice it, that I'm not going to ask you to do any really dirty work—no foul play, at any rate."

"I wouldn't kill," Diamond declared, his voice apprehensive.

Luke laughed derisively. "That's rich!" he said dryly. "You demonstrated as much, a few minutes ago when you were so all-fired intent on bumping me off. However, you won't be called on for any stabbing or gun play—if you are careful. I'll tell you here and now, though, that it's a mighty dangerous game I have in mind for you."

The young man swallowed. "I'll take the chance," he promised. "What else can I do? If I refuse, I suppose you'll ring for the police at once."

"Surest thing you know."

"All right, what is this dangerous rôle you offer me?"

Luke frowned. "Keep your voice low," he cautioned. "Didn't you notice that I've been speaking barely above a whisper? The game is sufficiently dangerous that we don't dare discuss it here. We'll do that at my house. You'll enjoy it—for it's booked to be a real adventure."

He turned to Doctor Baynes. "Doc," he said, "I can't leave the office at once. Got a directors' meeting on this afternoon, very important. Besides, I want to do some tall thinking before I lay my cards in front of this youngster. Suppose we three meet at my home for six o'clock dinner to-night. Now, I don't dare turn him loose for fear he'll hit the trail or try to kill himself. Can you spare the time to ride herd on him to-day?"

The physician nodded. "Rely on me," he promised. "I can manage him. I've handled some tough customers, all the way from alcoholics with 'snakes' to madmen in the asylum."

CHAPTER VI.

WANTED: A CORPSE.

MORPHINE, administered by hypodermic, was a favorite remedy with Doctor Curwin Baynes. He was a black character, and, utterly unscrupulous, did not hesitate to employ drugs to bring people under his power. Henry Luke was one of these victims. The masterful physician had started Luke into the opium maze by talking him into permitting an injection of the narcotic to soothe and quiet his torturing nerves.

Of the various children of the poppy family, Doctor Baynes preferred morphine. Already he had Luke well on

the way to becoming a chronic addict. After reaching an advanced stage of the vice the business man would be in the physician's clutches, at his mercy, unless he made outside connections for a source of supply. As long as Baynes furnished the drug, Luke was not apt to share his secret with others.

So it happened that the doctor gave young Arthur Diamond a "hypo" to lessen his agitation. The narcotic pulled the timekeeper's nerves together. He left with Baynes, in the latter's car. Luke carried back to the office a plausible story that Diamond, being suddenly ill, had been granted the rest of the day off. A subordinate bookkeeper was sent to take his place in the time room.

Luke was a great hand for detail. Nothing escaped him. For the present, at least, he wanted none of his employees to suspect that Diamond was a payroll padder. Accordingly he had the thief remove from the racks, before leaving the factory, the time cards that were phony. Otherwise, the bookkeeper, anxious to make a showing, might check up and discover the crooked work. If, for instance, he ran through the cards and found the ones indicating that the owners had started the day's work but not registered their quitting at night, he would smell a rat.

The physician drove to his office, keeping Diamond close at his elbow. The young man spent a dull time reading out-of-date magazines. It was mid-afternoon when the effects of the morphine began to wear off. Baynes urged another hypodermic. His prisoner refused. The doctor coaxed; he threatened. Diamond was stubborn in his opposition.

"All right," Baynes growled. "I'll turn a bottle of whisky over to you."

Secretly he resolved to keep after the embezzler until he inveigled him into the drug habit.

"Before I start any more drinking,"

Diamond said, "I want to make a telephone call."

"Help yourself," the physician said. "You want to call friends in cells at the police station, no doubt."

Diamond flushed. But he bit his lip and kept silent, though it was an effort to hold back a hot retort. His game, he sensed, was to linger in the background and not rile either of his new masters. He phoned Marjorie.

"Awfully sorry," he told her, "but I'll have to call off our engagement for to-night. Never mind, though, I'll take you to the same show later."

"When?" she asked, disappointed.

He hesitated, groping for an answer. "I don't know exactly. Can't tell right now. To-morrow, maybe."

"What are you doing to-night?"

"Great news!" He tried to make his voice sound jubilant. "I'm invited out to Henry Luke's for dinner and a conference afterward."

"Your boss! Oh, Arthur, dear, isn't that fine! Do you suppose he is going to promote you again—more pay or, still better, a job higher up?"

Diamond licked dry lips. "Wish I knew what the night will bring forth," he responded fervently. "Well, I'm not alone, so I can't talk much. By-by, dear."

He hung up the receiver. Doctor Baynes had been taking it all in with great glee. "So you're going to a conference with your boss, eh? Ha, ha! I'll say you are."

Diamond gritted his teeth. "Listen, you old sawbones!" he said. "I don't know what I'm heading into, and I doubt if you do. But, since you've been invited, apparently you're going to be dealt a hand along with me. Maybe it won't be long until you'll want me on your side—eh, what? May I suggest that I'll be more inclined to listen to reason if you don't stick too many hot pins into me in the meantime?"

This was logical. Immediately Doc-

tor Baynes beamed with apologies and protestations of friendship. Diamond listened placidly. His thoughts were elsewhere. The more he pondered his predicament, the more horrible seemed the prospect of prison. It all depended on whether or not he would accept the as yet unknown alternative that Luke would offer. What could be this "adventure" which Luke had in mind? Ah, well, he would soon know.

Impatient, eager to learn his fate, he thought the afternoon never would pass. Outside, the sky was leaden. It started to rain—a slow, dismal downpour that intensified his wretchedness. The doctor was a fresh-air fiend. He insisted on having the window open. The room became clammy damp. It occurred to Diamond that this was a fitting environment for Baynes. He could not but associate the physician with death.

Finally they set forth in Baynes' motor car. Apparently the doctor had been over the route many times in the past, for the trip was nicely timed. They arrived at their destination—Henry Luke's residence—within a few minutes of six o'clock.

At sight of the home, Diamond's chronic envy of the wealthy class burst into flame again. Why should one man have a mansion and another a hovel? He could see no justice in the system. Here was his employer in an estate that must require several landscape gardeners. The house itself looked as if it had a score of rooms. The young man bitterly compared it with his own quarters—a dingy bedroom in a boarding house.

Luke was present to greet them. He had been watching from his library window. He shoved the butler aside and opened the door himself. A great man for comfort was Luke. He was wearing a smoking jacket and Chinese "sneaker sandals."

His greeting was so cordial and effusive that it amazed Diamond. He had

rather expected to be received in a spirit of disdain. But Luke shook his hand first, and then the physician's.

"Welcome to my home!" said the employer warmly. "You, too, Baynes. Just hand your things to the butler and come into my lounging room for an appetizer before dinner."

The doctor eyed his host knowingly. At a glance he knew the reason for this transformation from a harsh, cynical, driving business man. The combination of drugs and whisky is unmistakable.

A cat-footed Japanese boy mixed ginger-ale highballs. The three clicked glasses and drank. Presently Diamond responded to alcoholic exuberation. He felt more at ease. But he still was astounded at his employer's good-fellowship. It was as though Diamond were a distinguished guest. The show of hospitality continued throughout the dinner. And such a meal! It was a revelation to Diamond, unaccustomed to the good things of life. Drinks were frequent, beginning with dry Martinis and winding up with cordials.

Then he lit his first fifty-cent cigar.

Luke led the way back to the library. He locked the doors. It was a large room, about as long as a bowling alley. They sat in easy-chairs around the fireplace, basking languidly in the heat from crackling logs. Here they were far from the hall, with no danger of their voices being heard by an eavesdropping servant unless they spoke loudly. Luke served another round of highballs in tall glasses.

"Now to business!" he announced. "Let us talk in whispers, for what I am about to confide to you must be kept in strict secrecy. Are you quite comfortable, Mr. Diamond? I see that your cigar is getting down to a stub. At that point they lose the flavor and aroma. Toss it away and help yourself to one from the box on the stand at your elbow."

"Mr. Diamond," eh? The young thief thrilled at his sudden importance.

"And now to brass tacks," Luke announced after holding a lighted match to the timekeeper's fresh cigar. "There is no use beating around the bush. I have you in such a tight and unescapable clutch that I do not think there is any danger to myself in laying all my cards on the table." He paused and meditated. "Aye, even though I, too, stand in the shadow of prison."

Diamond's eyes widened. His cigar nearly dropped from his gaping mouth. He glanced at Doctor Baynes to observe how he was reacting to this startling disclosure.

Luke noticed the questioning look. "Baynes already knows," he announced, "though as yet I have not confided to him the solution I have in mind for my predicament. Diamond, I am in the same boat as you—but more deeply involved. In short, I am an embezzler."

"Embezzler!" the young man gasped. "Ah, so!" In a twinkling he understood his employer's cordiality.

"Embezzler, yes," Luke echoed. "It is a harsh word. It sends a shiver through the culprit. But there is no use mincing terms, nothing to be gained thereby. When I discovered your stealing this morning, I had a glimmer of how you must have felt. Times over, I have anticipated such a show-down for myself, while tossing sleepless at night."

"Whose money did you take?" Diamond asked. Strange, how his attitude toward Luke had changed. As by telepathy, there had sprung up between them the bond of fellowship, crook to crook.

Luke laughed softly. "Naturally, like yourself, I took the money nearest at hand. The firm's funds, in other words. I am no more the owner of the business than you. It is an incorporated company. True, I am head of it, and own a lot of stock, a big stock. But there are other owners. On the side

I play the stock market extensively. It is a dangerous game. I guessed wrong—was a bull in a bear raid. Thinking the drop in quotations was only temporary, I dipped into the company's funds. For a while it propped my margining. I had a big line out, though, and could not outlast the crash in prices. I had to let go. Right now I am broke—and short two hundred thousand dollars of money that doesn't belong to me—or, rather, never did."

"And no one is any the wiser?" Diamond asked incredulously. It seemed impossible to him that any one could make off with so much plunder and not be detected quickly. Why, compared with it, his own stealing was a piker's haul.

"No, I have not been discovered," Luke answered, his face contorted. "Not yet, that is." He ran the back of a hand over a forehead that was moist, and not from the fireplace's heat. "But exposure is just a matter of time. They all get caught in the long run, boy. I might have known. Your turn came this morning. And my turn impends. In a few months we have the new year—inventory, balancing the books and, alas! auditing of accounts. In regard to the auditing, my board of directors do not intrust that to a member of my organization. Not much! They bring in an outside man. You can't blame them. Why, the very man who might audit for us, from our own pay roll, might be a thief. In such event, he would turn in an O. K. report concealing his thefts."

Doctor Curwin Baynes grinned mockingly. "How ironical is fate!" he murmured. "I recall that you were the bird that suggested having an outsider check up the books."

"Yes, I was," Luke admitted. "At that time, it never occurred to me that I might be doing the stealing. Ironical, indeed, my devising the trap that later might catch the originator. It is not

the first time a man dug a pit for his neighbor and fell into it himself."

Diamond's blood pressure had dropped. No longer did he fear the penitentiary. He had a mightier club over his employer's head than Luke had over his. It was exceptionally pleasant to be able to lord it over the man who so long had ruled him with an iron hand at low wages. The situation was delicious. He thrilled with an exaltation that was new to him—the sense of mastery. Reacting to it, he tossed his half-smoked cigar to the fireplace and lit a fresh one. Luke nodded approvingly. His manner was almost appealing. The tables were reversed now. He was turning to his timekeeper as the proverbial drowning man to a straw.

With almost insolent familiarity, young Diamond rose, strode confidently to the table and helped himself to another drink of Scotch. He returned to the chair by the fireplace.

"Roll your dice," he said. "Where do I come in?"

Luke had been leading up to this climax. He rubbed his hands in anticipation. "Now you're talking turkey," he said. "I have a fine rôle cut out for you. I am going to make you cashier of the company. In about sixty days, my shortage will be discovered. But the books will be doctored so that it will look as if you, not I, stole the two hundred thousand dollars."

Luke paused. "And shortly before that time," he continued slowly, "the newspapers will announce your death, Mr. Diamond."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEATH PLOT.

TERRIBLE, indeed, is an announcement that friends soon will be sending flowers to one's funeral. Diamond's hair did not stand on end but he felt a tingling in his scalp. Simultaneously came the creepy sensation of prickles

of gooseflesh appearing on his skin. His face turned pale and he stared in horror at the physician's mocking face.

"You're not going to kill me?" he demanded fearfully. "Surely, you don't mean that. No, no, I won't pay such a price to escape prison. This morning, when you discovered my stealing, Mr. Luke, I aimed on suicide after killing you. But not now, knowing that you, too, are a thief. You—you—surely you don't mean that you're going to murder me?"

"Sh!" Luke admonished. "Keep your voice lower. Servants have sharp ears. Of course, we're not going to murder you, you silly ass. You won't die at all."

"Ah!" Diamond gasped in relief. He hurried to the table for another drink of Scotch.

While he poured and drank it, the other two men exchanged a few whispered words.

"Sure, I will," Doctor Baynes agreed.

"Fine!" Luke exclaimed delightedly. "I knew you wouldn't leave me in the lurch in such a tight corner." He paused, and after Diamond had again taken his chair before the fire, continued: "Now, you won't die, rest assured of that. There'll be a coffin and mourners and flowers and a burial and all that. But the whole proceedings will be staged—just make-believe."

"Leave it to me," Doctor Baynes cut in. "I'll make out a death certificate. It may, of course, be necessary for you to lie in a coffin for a while to convince friends that you have really croaked. Then you'll get out of the coffin. It will be interred in a cemetery with bricks or some such thing in it, instead of a body."

"Exactly," Luke agreed. "And then you'll go to some far State—or, better still, another country entirely—and start life all over again under a new name. I'll give you ten thousand dollars cash to set yourself up in your new home."

Diamond whistled. "Whew!" he sighed. "That sounds more like it. So this is what you had in mind. I understand now, your asking me this morning if I had relatives or intimates that I'd be averse to leaving in case something happened."

He had hoped for an easier way out of his dilemma. If he accepted Luke's offer, it meant surrendering Marjorie—going out of her life forever. While it would save him from a long prison term for pay-roll padding, it was a terrible price to pay. Marjorie! He choked, and a film of water came across his dark eyes at the thought of losing her. Dear, sweet, beautiful, helpful Marjorie. Possibly, after a period of mourning, she might marry his hated rival, Ned.

"Huh!" he ejaculated cunningly. "And suppose I refuse to go through with this fake death."

Luke snapped his fingers decisively. "In that case," he announced, resuming the rôle of harsh and relentless employer who has been wronged, "in that case, you'll go to the pen and have years to think it over and regret your foolish, stupid refusal."

Diamond sneered, for he felt that he still had the whip hand. "Is that so?" he retorted. "And in the meantime, what? Do you think for an instant that I'd keep my mouth shut about your own embezzlement? If I went to prison, you'd go along."

Luke scowled savagely. "Don't kid yourself!" he snapped. "I have the books at the office cunningly doctored. It'd take days to ferret out proofs of my stealing. In the meantime, I'd raise the two hundred thousand elsewhere, and return it to cover my shortage. I'd do it in some way or other—burglary, if necessary. You're not my only salvation. I know several sources where I could gather a big chunk by blackmail. Don't get too cocky, young fellow. You're dealing with a man older and

shrewder than yourself, and desperate into the bargain."

Doctor Baynes nodded. "That's the stuff!" he said approvingly. "Keep the young whippersnapper in his place, Henry."

"I think he'll realize what's best for him," said Luke significantly.

The physician grinned. "Well, don't let him get under your hide," he urged. "If necessary, we can do away with him to seal his mouth."

Luke paled. For a moment he appeared to have forgotten Diamond, for he spoke as though the young man were not present. "You—you don't mean, murder him?"

The doctor shrugged. "You are indelicate in your choice of words. I have been around death so long that I am calloused. He has to die some time, anyway. So why have scruples about merely hastening the date? Don't forget, he's an outlaw, not a desirable citizen."

Diamond, his eyes closed and his breath held in agitation and mounting terror, did not see the winks they exchanged.

"For instance," the physician proposed, "you have the pistol with which he attempted to kill you this morning."

Luke produced the weapon from his hip pocket. Diamond opened his eyes and stared at the gun. It fascinated him.

"Then," Baynes proposed, "what more plausible story could we tell the police than this? You, we'll say, suspected that he had been padding the pay roll. You had him come out here for a show-down. Trapped, he admitted guilt—and shot himself dead. Of course, you could do the shooting. Then, before the servants came rushing up and pounding on the door and we admitted them, we'd wipe off your finger prints from the butt of the revolver and close his own limp fingers on it."

Luke gulped. "Baynes," he said in

admiration, "you're a genius. The doors are locked. What say? Shall I shoot?"

No dramatic period of hesitation ensued. Diamond believed that they had been discussing his fate in earnest. He huddled back in his chair and held up a protesting hand as if to ward off a bullet.

"No, no!" he remonstrated in an agitated whisper. "You've got me in a corner, no matter which way I turn. Don't shoot, sir, please, Mr. Luke! I'll agree. I'll go through with the game you proposed. I—I'm licked, sir. Oh, mother, mother, why did I ever start padding that pay roll?"

Luke pocketed the revolver. Once more he was a smiling, solicitous host, suave, catering to the wants and needs of a guest. "Calm yourself, my dear Mr. Diamond," he said. "I am glad that you see your predicament in a sensible light. It makes the affair so much easier for all of us. After all, consider what you gain by submission. Why, with your youth and the grubstake of ten thousand dollars that I offer, you can track off over the horizon and establish yourself magnificently. In later years you will thank me for your start in life, for such it will be. Think how long it would take you to save such a sum as I am pledged to give you after the phony funeral."

"The ungrateful hound!" Doctor Baynes said. "Luke, you are the most kind-hearted and generous man I ever knew."

Diamond groaned. He could not help it. "As kind-hearted as the electric chair or the hangman's noose," he muttered. "You fellows don't know what you are compelling me to surrender. I don't imagine that either of you ever really loved a woman. I doubt if you are capable of it. But I do. And the path you force me into compels me to forfeit her."

"Blah!" said the doctor. "Take her with you."

The young man shook his head sorrowfully. "She wouldn't go along," he said. "You don't know Marjorie. She's the soul of honor. Why, if she thought for a second that I was a thief, she'd throw me over and never see me again, no matter what pangs the parting and eternal separation might cause her."

Doctor Baynes smiled tolerantly. "You don't know women," he retorted. "They stick to the devil if they love him." He sighed. "I know," he said philosophically. "In my younger days, I met the right woman—and won her. I got into a mess. It killed her. But she stuck till she died. She didn't desert."

Diamond did not agree. "Marjorie," he said, "loves honesty above all else. Why, one of her chief delights in me is her belief that I can be trusted with a pay roll running into thousands of dollars a week."

Luke snorted. "I'm a bachelor and have views of my own," he said. "But this is no time for discussing feminine frailties or feminine qualities or, for that matter, any other extraneous matters. We have a man-sized job on our hands, and the quicker we get down to handling the details, the better."

There he was again, in his natural rôle—details. Young Diamond secretly cursed him.

Doctor Baynes took charge of the situation. He spoke calmly, dispassionately, in his professional manner, as though he were diagnosing an ailment and prescribing a curative course.

"Now, gentlemen," he suggested, "let us consider the matter. We have reached an agreement, to wit, that Mr. Diamond is going to pretend to die. Now, unless a physician is present at his death, the law requires that an autopsy be held. If anything seems suspicious about the death—as may well develop, in view of the two-hundred-thousand-dollar embezzlement that will be pinned on him after his demise—there might be an autopsy. That would

be fatal to you, Luke. However, I think I can fake up a cause of death that will ward off any post mortem. My, but wouldn't the coroner get the shock of his life if he started to thrust a dissecting knife into our prospective corpse's remains!"

The physician chuckled. "No," he continued, "Diamond must seem to die a natural death. Now, what kind? Have you, sir, any pet ailment that you'd like to expire from?"

Diamond's blood turned to ice water at the brutal suggestion. He shuddered. Then he answered tremulously, "Why, as far as I know, I'm sound as a nut except that my eyesight is a bit defective. That's why I was rejected in the army draft—or selective service, they called it, to sugar-coat the bitter pill. I eat like a horse—eat anything. I can walk ten miles and never know I have a heart or anything else inside me."

Doctor Baynes nodded. "I surmised as much, looking at you. However, we needn't bother. I'll record you as having died of heart failure. It is a convenient phrase—especially so, I find it, when I am experimenting with a patient. Often it happens that in curing one organ we destroy another. I have had, for instance, a patient with an ailing liver. In trying out a remedy, I might cure the liver and wreck the heart or nerves. It is all very interesting, though." He laughed unemotionally. "You have heard the old line—the undertaker covers up a great many of the doctor's mistakes. Yes, we'll set you down as heart failure—unsuspected organic, valvular disturbance suddenly asserting itself fatally."

Henry Luke grinned. "Swell!" he agreed. "I've noticed that when a doc can't fathom a cause of death he just writes it down as heart failure. And, surely, no one can dispute but what he is right. Well, we'll dope the thing out so you, Baynes, will be with Diamond at the supposed time of death.

How does this strike you? I might have him out to dinner some night. That will look all jakaloo, for by then he'll be elevated to the position of cashier, and in that capacity it will seem natural for me to be entertaining him as a business associate. On the menu we'll have, so the servants can bear us out, some atrocious and deadly combination such as bananas and beer or oranges and buttermilk."

"The latter is good," Doctor Baynes agreed. "It turns into a pool ball in the stomach, does orange and buttermilk. I get your line of logical sequence. Diamond will come here and eat a mess that in any ordinary man would produce acute intestinal indigestion. That, plausibly, will eventuate in heart failure."

Luke smiled approvingly. "How about an undertaker?" he asked. "Won't we have to get one in order to obtain a coffin?"

Doctor Baynes meditated. "Leave that to me," he suggested. "I know an undertaker who will keep his mouth shut. Best of all, Diamond, he'll be willing to put you in the casket without any embalming fluid."

Again Diamond shuddered. He foresaw that this was to be no pleasant rôle that he was to be called on to play.

"Have a heart!" he protested. "Do I have to go through all that horrible procedure of lying in a satin-lined coffin?"

"Tut, tut, it is nothing!" the physician assured him. "I'll give you an opiate so that you'll never know a thing that's happening. Given a little grease paint and some fine shading of your face by surrounding floral decorations, and you'll look like a sure-enough corpse."

Diamond groaned.

"Regarding my end of the deal," Luke spoke up, "I will change the ledgers and so on at the office—doctor them so that the stealings will seem to be after your appointment as cashier instead of

in the past. When you are supposedly dead and gone, the question will naturally arise as to what you did with the money. I'll have to work that out. Maybe I can fix my brokers so they'll falsify their own books to make it seem as if you had been playing the stock market or the grain pit on the wrong side with the company's funds. There's a fellow in the brokerage office that could be relied on to keep his mouth shut if I paid him. In addition, I've got something on him; no use going into that, it's private between the two of us."

Diamond felt like a tennis ball being batted between two players. "My immediate future," he commented acidly, "seems to loom up just about as invitingly as if I were going to live in a graveyard."

Luke, nevertheless, eyed him a bit enviously. "Not altogether," he announced. "You see, we have to make it seem as plausible as possible, this cock-and-bull stuff about your embezzling two hundred thousand dollars. How do we go about that? Well, for one thing, it's a mighty rare man who—stealing big sums—can resist spending it as he goes along."

Diamond leaned forward in his chair. "Do you mean," he asked, "that I'm to do a lot of spending?"

"Surest thing in the world," his employer assured him. "You have to do it quietly—that is, so it will come out after your supposed death that you were living a sort of double life. You've read of such things. Nearly all big embezzlers do it. By day you'll be a faithful, plodding employee. By night—and this will not crop out until after your supposed death—you will enjoy luxuries such as the kings of old never dreamed of. That isn't saying much, of course, for the plain workingman of to-day has things that the ancient kings would have given half their kingdom for. I bet Napoleon would have traded ten years

of his life for a Ford car to help him escape from Waterloo. We don't realize it, but the mighty monarchs of the past, despite all their theatrical magnificence, had no such things as even bath tubs with running water. I recall that the government once showed an old Indian chief all over New York. They gave him the works. When he had seen all and done all, they asked him what was the greatest thing he had observed. He pointed to the water and said, 'spigot, running water, no carrying from river or lake.'

Luke paused. He reached into a pocket and held forth a revolver. "This is the gat with which you tried to kill me," he said. "I'm giving it back to you as an indication of good faith. I have taken the cartridges out, but you can reload it later."

"Tut!" Doctor Baynes remonstrated. "You are arming a possible future enemy."

"I think not," Luke answered confidently. "Anyway, he could buy another gun, so he might as well have this one."

Diamond had accepted the revolver absent-mindedly. His thoughts were elsewhere, his nerves tingling. "Listen," he cut in. "Let me get this straight. Do you mean to tell me that I'm to be a high-flyer by night? That I can take my sweetheart with me and treat her to the fat of the land? That I can buy all the things and enjoy all the denied pleasures that I have always wanted?"

Henry Luke nodded as nonchalantly as though it were a straight business proposition, such as telling a salesman to spare no expense at entertaining a prospective big customer.

"You sure can!" said Luke. "I am going to give you a thousand dollars a week to fling to the four winds. Yes, sir, Mr. Diamond, you certainly are going to live a millionaire's life—while it lasts."

CHAPTER VIII.

LIVING A MILLIONAIRE'S LIFE.

FASCINATING was the prospect of spending a thousand dollars a week for sheer pleasure. It appealed to young Diamond as glamorously as a trip into fairyland. All men at times dream of such things, as do all women. He had. And now his dreams were coming true. He was dazed at times by his good fortune.

Much can be done with a spending account of a thousand dollars a week. Diamond did it.

"A thousand dollars!" he repeatedly mused. "Why, it is more than the average man can save in seven years, even by the most strict denial. Let's see. Why, a thousand dollars is one hundred thousand cents." It was not remarkable, his making this comparison, for up to date he had always been compelled to "watch the corners." He had, by bitter necessity of the past, acquired an awesome respect for the humble penny. He appreciated the eagerness with which a housewife would walk many blocks to save a few cents a pound on butter or on a dozen of eggs.

His sweetheart, Marjorie, was elated at his promotion to the position of cashier of the company. And now it was she that approved of immediate marriage. For, surely, with this new job and its income, he could be relied on to support her. The tables were turned. Formerly he had urged her to wed, and she had countered that they had better wait until they were sure that the good fortune would last. Now it worked the other way. Apparently he was securely situated in a financial sense.

But her own words rebounded from him: "Let us wait, my love, until we are sure of our ground."

"When will you be sure?" she asked. Marjorie was quite ready to cast her lot with him.

"Be patient," he promised, "and the day will come. Suppose we wait until after the first of the year. That is when they have the big annual directors' meeting. Maybe there might come a change in management—and I'd be out. You know, a new boss brings his own favorites and clears out old timber."

To this she was silent, in womanly resignation. Diamond felt like a scoundrel. At times he could scarcely face her, knowing that she loved him, knowing that it was a matter of only a few months until he was doomed to fade from her life forever.

It occurred to him that he might insure himself heavily, naming her as beneficiary. Then, when he supposedly died, she would be paid a large sum, enough to make her independent for life. Yet he knew that Marjorie would not touch a penny of the phony legacy if she knew that it had been arranged by fraud. And, knowing this, he respected her sufficiently to decide against the insurance policies.

This was a stage in his moral regeneration. He had bitterly repented his thefts. At heart he again was honest, and if he could have lived his past over again he would have stuck to the straight and narrow path. But it was too late to recall water that had gone over the dam. However, he determined never again to steal. It was with loathing that he played the deceptive game that would apparently blot out his past and enable him to start life anew in some far part of the earth.

Meantime, he endeavored to make her as happy as possible. It is delightful to shower luxuries upon a loved one. But young Diamond did it with an undercurrent of dread. He realized only too well that her normal life when she returned to it would be drab by contrast. However, he could not resist. Then, too, orders were orders; and he must spend a thousand dollars a week. Marjorie might as well share in it.

He had to do it cautiously, for too big a display of wealth would arouse her suspicions. They saw all the best shows. They dined at the fashionable hotels. There, while she puzzled over the French menus, he ordered for her the delicacies of civilization. Having had no experience with them, she did not know their cost.

Her lover had left his humble rooming house. He occupied a palatial apartment house suite. Right and left he showered the big tips such as are given only by a fool or by a rich man who does not know the value of money. The recipients accepted with a servility that amused him bitterly. He knew how he himself would have welcomed such windfalls when he was struggling along as a timekeeper at eighty dollars a month.

Several times a week he dined with Henry Luke at the latter's home. His employer was amiable, almost like a comrade; and with good reason. Diamond was his solution—the one way out of his predicament, the only thing that stood between Luke and the penitentiary.

"Don't be a piker," he instructed Diamond. "Time is slipping by fast. It won't be long until we'll be staging your funeral. Toss your money right and left. Make a big splurge for the finish. Are you mixed up with any fast women?"

Diamond glared. "Of course not!" he answered angrily. "I think I've told you several times before that I'm in love with the purest woman that ever lived."

Luke grunted. "You ought to be seen in public with a fast frail," he said. "It's the first thing the police and the reading public look for when they find a treasurer short in his accounts. Why don't you? Now, I can give you some names——"

Diamond was adamant in his refusal. "You might as well save your breath,"

he said. "That's where I draw the line."

He was true blue to Marjorie. What a pity, that he had ever taken that first misstep.

The fatal time was approaching swiftly, the end of the year, with inspection of the company's books by an outside auditor who would disclose the fact that two hundred thousand dollars was missing.

Snow lay on the ground. Gales, blowing from the northwest, brought blizzards. Ice formed from the Lake Erie shore out to the "crib"—intake for Cleveland's water supply.

Diamond had entered into this "last fling" with considerable jubilation, despite the dreadful finale that would ensue. To live a millionaire's life for a few months was glorious, the attainment of a yearned-for goal that comes to but few men of the earth's many millions. But as the days slipped by, and he watched the calendar, his "lucky lot" lost its glamour. He would have bartered his soul to turn back the clock and revert to the simple days when he and Marjorie considered an evening at the movies and an ice-cream soda afterward a riotous time. Pleasure, he found, was by no means merely a matter of tossing money right and left. He could have been told as much by any young child who, deserting a plethora of Christmas toys, crawls out into the kitchen and plays with a basket of potatoes.

Spending his thousand dollars a week required considerable caution. He must get rid of it in such a way that suspicion would not be attracted to him at the time. Premature discovery would upset the smooth functioning of the plot. He must squander his money partly "under cover," so that all would come to light after his supposed death, in the nature of a sensational exposé. Newspaper headlines must read: "Dead

Embezzler Lived Double Life Unsuspected."

Accordingly, he frequented a gambling house and, quite naturally, lost heavily. He did a lot of betting in pool rooms. He bought occasional diamonds and turned them over to Luke. For these he paid cash, without giving his name. But sales clerks would remember his face when they saw it later in the newspapers, and would come forward as informers, eager to get into the lime-light. Coached by Luke, he played the stock market and grain pit under an assumed name. His deals were all made with intent to lose. He was a bull when the market was bearish, and vice versa.

One night Diamond went by appointment to Doctor Curwin Baynes' office. The rooms were brightly lighted. This often was the case, for the sinister physician met most of his "patients" in the evening. They came close on each other's heels—dope fiends. The doctor gave them a "shot," charging from a dollar apiece upward.

This night, though, no customers were wanted. More profitable business was afoot. The blinds had been drawn so that the windows would appear dark to any "snow bird" or "hop head" glancing up from the street below to see whether Baynes were on the job to relieve craving.

Diamond found a stranger in the office. This individual was garbed in black, even to the neat bow tie above his starched, white shirt bosom. He had the graceful and gliding manner of one who flits in the background of life's stage. His white face was so solemn that Diamond decided that he must be a clergyman. If so, what on earth was he doing in the company of the medical rogue?

Baynes did not introduce the stranger by name. He merely said to him, "This is Mr. Diamond, the young man I told you about."

The man in black closed his eyes and nodded, as though to say, "All right, leave it to me, I'll handle him." Then he speculatively eyed Diamond from foot to head. "About six feet tall," he estimated. His voice was respectful, sad.

"Pretty close guess," Diamond spoke up. "I stand five feet ten in my socks."

The stranger gloomily stepped aside and surveyed the young man from another angle. A peculiar soft sound came from him. Lips closed tightly in a straight line, he was whistling through his nostrils, by breathing melodiously and with varying intensity. He reached up and stroked his bald spot.

"Now, Mr. Diamond," he said, whipping out a tapeline, "just lie down straight on yonder operating table."

Puzzled, Diamond obeyed. The man in black began measuring him across the shoulders and hips.

"What's the big idea?" asked the subject. "Are you a tailor, getting my dimensions for a new suit?"

Doctor Baynes laughed as if this were a great joke. "You," he informed, "are getting measured for a garment. all right—a wooden kimono, your coffin."

Diamond for a moment was paralyzed. Understanding dawned on him. He shuddered and drew back as from a snake.

"You don't mean that this gent is my undertaker?" he gasped.

"Surest thing in the world," said Baynes. The stranger nodded. He returned the tapeline to his pocket. The young man leaped from the table.

The undertaker ignored him. Apparently his negotiating was to be entirely with Baynes. "I suppose you want the casket lined with imitation white satin?" he queried.

The doctor meditated. "Yes," he agreed. "And use a cheap coffin. No use wasting any more jack than necessary. Not too low-grade, of course. Luke wants to convey the impression

that he is giving Diamond a decent burial, out of the generosity of his heart, despite the embezzlement. It will make the public talk well of him, quite as good as contributing to charity. Sly old fox, you may be sure he never overlooks any bets."

Said the undertaker, "I have just the casket desired in my shop at this very moment. Does Luke want it sent out to his place now?"

"Of course not, you old fool!" Baynes answered with a show of irritation. "Why, it'd be a dead give-away if Luke had a casket on hand all ready for the embezzler."

"Where are you going to stage the funeral?"

"Well," said Baynes, "here's the line of instructions Luke gave me. He'll invite Diamond out to dinner and have him stay overnight. I'll be there, too. And I'll also sleep at Luke's. That'll make it plausible that I could get to him before he died of an unexpected heart attack following acute gastritis. You see, if a doctor is not with him when he croaks, the coroner will perform an autopsy. We'll ring for you. Then you come in your ambulance or whatever you call the thing, and take the body to your shop. He'll lie in state—ha, ha—a day or two in your chapel. After that, off to the cemetery."

The undertaker nodded. "I see, I see," he agreed. "This fellow will make as fine a looking corpse as ever I handled."

Diamond's eyes bulged. "Listen, you!" he said tremulously. "Before we go any farther, I want your sworn pledge that you'll take me out of the coffin before you screw the lid down. I'm to be drugged, you know, and I'd go crazy if I woke up and found myself buried alive."

"Bah!" Doctor Baynes interjected. "You needn't be afraid of that. Luke is in a tight corner, all right, all righty,

but he's not chancing a murder. The coffin will be buried with padded bricks in it."

"Better still," the undertaker suggested, "I can get a stiff from the medical school—thirty-five dollars is the market price at present, I believe—and substitute it for Diamond's body. It's best to have a real corpse in the grave, just in case relatives ever dig up the coffin. I can do a bad job of embalming so that in a few weeks identification will be impossible."

"Fine!" Doctor Baynes agreed. "Diamond, will you join us in a drink?"

"You bet! I'm having a chill." This was really true. His teeth were chattering.

The physician unlocked his desk and brought forth a half pint of prescription whisky. He served liberally. Diamond coughed and sputtered as the fiery beverage went down his throat. The other two, chronic and hardened drinkers, were as undemonstrative as if they had partaken of water.

"The night is young," Baynes suggested, glancing at his thin gold watch. "Better stick around and try your hand at poker with us, Diamond. You'll find the undertaker is a good sport after you know him, though he never smiles. Besides, you two ought to get better acquainted, in view of your impending intimate relationship—ha, ha!"

The young thief wagged his head negatively. "Not much!" he said. "This session has lasted plenty long enough to suit me. I want to get out—out—out where I can gulp fresh air into my lungs."

His departure was as precipitate as flight. They heard him running down the hall to the elevator.

A new fear had taken possession of him. Despite the doctor's assurances, Diamond was fearful that his confederates would double cross him—get him drugged, then bury him alive.

CHAPTER IX.

NEARING THE END OF HIS ROPE.

CERTAINLY fate was putting poor, unfortunate Arthur Diamond through a frightful ordeal. Already his soul had undergone agonies that were sufficient punishment for his original crime—pay-roll padding. By the law of compensation, he had spiritually paid in full for his transgression against the man-made laws of right and wrong. The stern law, however, demands physical penalties, such as isolation and hard labor in the penitentiary.

But he had undoubtedly suffered more than he had gained by his stealing. He loved Marjorie dearly. Night and day he was agonized by the thought that the time was swiftly approaching when he must bid her adieu forever. And yet was it to be for eternity? He hoped not; he believed not. Instinct told him that possibly in some future existence he would find his loved one again, though separation on earth seemed inevitable.

It was a dreadful prospect that was drawing near—saying good-by. Worst of all, he must leave her in the belief that she would see him again. At the time he would be aware of the impending tragedy; she would not learn until later.

And their farewell was not far off.

Luke informed him: "We want to stage your funeral the twentieth of December. That will be about a fortnight before the outside auditor gets well into the books and discovers the big loss—the missing thousands."

Diamond groaned. "Have a heart!" he implored. "Please let me spend Christmas with my sweetheart."

Luke shook his head emphatically. "Nothing doing! It would be running too close to the deadline. On Christmas Day, your sweetie and friends will believe you to be in your grave."

Diamond's pleadings were frantic.

Luke steadfastly refused. "Take your choice," he said. "On the night of the twentieth of December, you either stage a supposed death—or I turn you over to the police. It isn't too late for me to call the cops. I have not as yet substituted the set of doctored records that will pin the embezzlement on you. Nor have I been letting any grass grow under my feet. I can raise, overnight, enough money to make good my losses—though repayment will be just as difficult in the new direction. The fact remains that we have you where the hair is short. No escape for you, Diamond."

"All right," the young man mumbled dismally. "Go ahead and arrange the details. I'll go through with the game."

So December twentieth was to be his hour of fate! He had only a few more days with Marjorie. It was awful to contemplate. He tossed sleeplessly at night. Doctor Baynes observed his blood-shot eyes, drawn cheeks, tense nerves.

"Don't be an ass!" the physician urged. "Let me give you a hypodermic. It will ease you through the climax."

Diamond frowned. "You mean—morphine?"

"Sure—or opium, cocaine—anything you want."

What a stubborn chap this was, Baynes reflected. He had fancied that by this time he would have Diamond in the ranks of dope addicts. Yet again, as before, the thief declined. "No drugs for me!" was his decision. "It is hellish enough to be associated at all with a reptile like you, let alone becoming your abject slave." He shuddered. "I have profited by watching the victims who patronize the dope peddlers who approach them stealthily at that corner of Superior Avenue and East Ninth Street."

The doctor shrugged. His manner and voice remained calm and composed,

though inwardly he raged at being frustrated. He had Luke in his power, by drugs, and if he could snare Diamond he would be master of a situation that might later be turned to his own ends with great profit. He had several crimes in mind, did Baynes, crimes that would yield big profit, and they were propositions that he wanted to handle through henchmen, not personally.

"Have it your own way, Mr. Diamond," he said suavely. "The day will come when you will crawl to me on your hands and knees and beg for a shot in the arm."

The young thief laughed jeeringly, confidently. "Not by a jugful!" he retorted.

Doctor Baynes smiled complacently. He felt sure of his ground. This was no new experience for him. He was in no hurry. Time and again he had encountered similar obstinacy. Why rush? All around, he had the patient attitude of a veteran spider that thoroughly understands the psychology of flies.

Sometimes, at the most crucial moment, an utterly unexpected actor walks out upon the stage of life. So it happened with Diamond.

In Luke's office was an old chap, an assistant bookkeeper. He looked the part of a man who has made rather a failure of life. He was gauntly thin, with gray hair and the kindly blue eyes of one who had become spiritually glorified by adversity. A few months before, he had come cringing to Luke for a job. Luke had accepted him for two reasons—first, because he was willing to work for low wages; second, because he was unfamiliar with former bookkeeping records and, therefore, would not "smell a rat" when the doctored ledgers were substituted to shift blame for the embezzlement from Luke's shoulders to Diamond's.

James Purdy was this assistant book-

keeper's name. From the start, every one called him Jim. That was proper. He was a Jim, not a James—just as there is a fine distinction between a William and a Bill.

Late in the afternoon of December nineteenth, the day prior to the scheduled date for Diamond's masquerade as a dead man, Jim Purdy came into the new cashier's private office.

The aged man's face was grave, his eyes sorrowful. "My dear Mr. Diamond," he said gently, "will you take a friendly word of advice from an old man who has knocked around the world and had hard knocks, and who knows much that you will not learn until later?"

The younger man frowned. Nervously he inhaled his cigarette. "Spit it out!" he said. His voice was impatient, yet tremulous. Could it be that Purdy, in his poring over the corporation's books, suspected the embezzlement?

The old man eyed him keenly. "You look nerve-tense lately, sir," he said quietly. "Every one in the office is talking about it. Something seems to be preying on your mind. Now, maybe I have an idea what's wrong, and maybe I haven't. But my counsel might be worth a lot to you."

Diamond cut him short. "Nothing is wrong," he answered dully. "It is just that my promotion has come fast and I'm sort of head-over-heels in responsibility and not yet sure of my ability to handle things."

Jim Purdy frowned anxiously. He bit his lower lip. "Very well, sir," he said. "I just wanted to be of help if I could. No offense, I opine?"

Diamond smiled wanly. "Not at all, you good old sport," he assured the other.

"Thank you, sir," said Purdy. "And now may I ask you to pledge yourself not to breathe a word to Mr. Luke of what I've intimated to you?"

"You can, that!" Diamond declared grimly. "I know how you feel—a man of your age doesn't like to lose a job and have to start out hunting for a new one."

Purdy's eyes flickered. "That's it, sir," he agreed. "Of course, sir."

He walked slowly to the door. There he turned and contemplated Diamond intently. Then, shaking his head as though in pity, he passed out to the main offices.

The young fellow, alone, felt strangely disturbed. How much did Jim Purdy know? Had he sensed the plot that was afoot? For the first time, Diamond was glad that the end of his masquerade as cashier was close at hand.

CHAPTER X.

FAREWELL TO MARJORIE.

THIS night was to be his last with Marjorie. To-morrow evening he was to have dinner at Luke's home and stay overnight as a guest. The insidious Doctor Curwin Baynes would be present. At some time in the still, faltering hours before dawn, the physician would feel the feeble pulse of the drugged Arthur Diamond—and pronounce him dead.

His last night with his sweetheart! How should they spend it? His first impulse had been to end his career in a blaze of glory, a dazzling farewell that would forever remain in her memory. He had made preparations accordingly. As a starter, dinner at a big hotel. There he had reserved a table and ordered the utmost in delicacies. Afterward, a theater, a musical revue. He had the tickets. Taxis, of course, and orchids, and an elaborate supper after the show.

But, as he dressed this final evening, he changed his plans. He tore the theater tickets to shreds. He phoned to cancel his table reservations.

Lovely Marjorie! In her patheti-

cally small and rather dismal room that she called home, she had beautified herself to the utmost, eager to please the man who had won her heart. He called for her.

The landlady, fingering a banknote which she did not know was her final tip from this rich source of revenue, tapped on Marjorie's door.

"Your fairy prince is waiting," she announced. The young girl thrilled. She stepped back and surveyed herself in the mirror.

Blessings on you, Marjorie. You are perfect. No flower could be sweeter. What are you doing? Ah, yes, to be sure! Just a few more touches with powder; a final patting of your glorious hair. That is right; you are as near perfection now as your lover could fancy in his dreams.

She tripped downstairs. At sight of Diamond, her breath caught in her throat and a delicate pink suffused her cheeks.

Instinctively she displayed herself at various angles without conveying the impression of doing so.

"Magnificent!" young Diamond exclaimed tremulously. "My own love! There never was a woman like you."

They were alone in the reception room of the boarding house. The door was closed. He caught her in his arms and pressed her to him.

She drew back with a gasp and looked him in the eyes. "Oh, Arthur!" she said. "I am so glad."

He was sure that his lips quivered, and he feared that she might notice it.

"Now, what are we doing to-night?" she asked. "You have kept it all such a mystery. But we must hurry. Each second we linger, the taximeter out front is eating up your money."

Diamond smiled. "Not this night," he informed. "Marjorie, I have rather a surprise for you. I thought that, to-night, it would give us a thrill of the old days if we went back to them.

So there is no taxi waiting out front. You and I are going to the corner and catch a street car—just as we did in the old times, my dear, before fortune smiled upon us. Our destination is a movie, not a big musical revue. And, do you know, my dear, I have a notion that we'll enjoy it a lot more than these costly, spectacular things we have been seeing so often of late?"

The girl smiled willingly. She was as putty in his hands. All she wanted was to be with him and to please him.

"Oh, Arthur!" she exclaimed joyously. "It will be just like old times—before you became successful."

He winced, and with difficulty concealed his confusion. To mask any guilty flush that might rise to his face, he held a hand over his cheeks as though to stroke his smooth-shaven beard. "Yes," he agreed mechanically, his voice dull, "it will be just like old times."

They went to the movie, and she held his hand throughout the performance of the silent actors. She held it confidently, with perfect trust.

Meantime, Diamond felt his blood running cold. This farewell meeting, much as he had anticipated and treasured it, was proving to be more than he could bear.

The movie had a happy ending. The lovers in it won out through strife and the final close-up showed them with doves flying near by. It struck him as being ironical, mocking.

After the show, they took the street car to a corner drug store near Marjorie's rooming house, and there had ice cream. It was many months since they had enjoyed this simple pleasure that had at one time seemed so satisfactory to them. It took the girl back to old times. On the way home, she wept, though she knew not why.

Something was vitally wrong, she sensed that. Her feminine intuition told her so. She, too, had a chill that

crept into the very marrow of her bones. And she recognized it for what it was—premonition—though of what she knew not.

They reached the doorway of her rooming house. Diamond wished he could linger forever. For many minutes they stood silently in the shadows of the veranda. She held tightly to his coat lapels. Meantime his arms enclosed her tightly.

"Oh, Arthur!" she burst forth despairingly. "I know that something is wrong. What is it?"

In the darkness she could not see his face. He was glad of that. "Why," he assured her gently, "everything is all right, as far as I know."

It was a lie. But he felt that he must play his deceptive rôle to its bitter end. Foolishly he refrained from telling her the whole wretched truth. The impulse to confide and throw himself on her mercy was almost overpowering.

Marjorie laughed nervously. "Oh, well," she said, her voice reluctant, "maybe it is just my imagination. I hope so. But something tells me that you are in trouble. Oh, my love! If you are, tell me, for there is nothing I would not do to help you."

Again he erred by guarding his secret. Ah, unwise decision, young man! This fair girl, your main desire in life, would stick to you through thick and thin. She would share your sorrows as eagerly as your joys, ever ready to forgive and help.

But Diamond was obsessed with a fear that disclosure of his predicament might make her turn from him in revulsion. Far down in his heart he had confidence in her loyalty. But he also was cognizant of her almost fanatical devotion to the principle of honesty. It had been her fondest boast that Arthur, entrusted with thousands of dollars, "would take his own life before touching a penny of other people's money."

"Life is a very uncertain proposition, my dear," he said. "Now, suppose this premonition you speak of is the real thing—suppose that some unknown danger threatens our happiness. One can never tell. For instance, I might be knocked down and killed by an auto on my way home to-night."

The girl trembled. "Do be careful," she implored him.

He laughed comfortingly. "Never fear, I will. But suppose something happened to separate us?"

"It would kill me," she answered distantly. "I would waste away to a shadow and join you in another world."

"You might," he said, "and, again, you might not. People endure a lot of grief without dying. But you would never forget me, would you, Marjorie?"

"Forget you? Never, never, never!"

She waited for him to speak. He meditated. Then: "Suppose I really were in trouble, and that my death brought disgrace."

"In what way?"

"What if it were discovered that I were a thief?"

She drew back and peered fixedly at him. "You are not, are you?"

"Oh, I'm just stating a hypothetical case," he said evasively. "I love you so, I want to be sure of you—sure that you would love me no matter what happened."

"Of course, I still would love you," she assured him. "But it would be a terrible blow—the end of a glorious dream—if you turned out to be dishonest."

That settled it. He would not confess. She would learn soon enough of his perfidy. Within forty-eight hours the world at large would believe him dead and Luke would have an auditor examining the books. Sensational exposé would follow, probably, before the undertaker staged the fake funeral. While he was innocent of the crime that

would be chalked against him—embezzlement of the money stolen by Luke—nevertheless, Diamond, pay-roll padder, was a thief.

Marjorie shivered. "Thank Heaven, you are honest!" she murmured. "Well, my dear, it is late. I have to be at the office by half past eight in the morning. You must run along now."

He nodded regretfully.

"What hour will you phone me to-morrow?" she asked, her voice vibrant at the prospect.

"Oh, usual time, I suppose—late afternoon."

"And you can't see me to-morrow night, of course. Having dinner at Mr. Luke's, you said?"

"Yes," he answered dully. "Dinner at Luke's—and a conference afterward."

He drew her to him for a farewell kiss. She clung close. Her heart beat wildly, for again the strange premonition of approaching disaster had gripped her.

They kissed. Presently Diamond, as one emerging from a daze, was conscious that he had left her and was plodding weakly along the sidewalk to the corner where he would catch a street car. A film of tears blinded him.

"I'll never kiss her again," he muttered wretchedly. "She is out of my life forever. Oh, what a fool I was, ever to start stealing."

CHAPTER XI.

"TWIN BROTHER OF DEATH."

SUICIDE appealed strongly to young Arthur Diamond after he had bidden his sweetheart farewell. He was utterly wretched, so despondent that he feared he was going mad. His emotions were contradictory. He felt exhausted and drooping. Simultaneously he had a peculiar feeling as though he were about to explode. Sinister Doc-

tor Curwin Baynes would have urged a hypodermic.

Diamond felt that he was on the verge of losing everything that made life worth while. Why, then, live on? Why not end it all? He still had his revolver. One bullet from it, crashing through his skull or heart, would bring, he believed, oblivion. Yet such open suicide would be tantamount to confession. Nothing could be more pleasing to his employer, Luke. It would clinch Luke's case, confirm his contention that Diamond had embezzled some two hundred odd thousand dollars' worth of the firm's funds.

He walked home, out over the Superior Viaduct. After passing the Cuyahoga River he paused and leaned over the bridge railing. Far below was a dimly lighted pavement, from which had been picked up the crushed and mangled bodies of many a despairing man and woman. It was a favorite spot for suicides, having taken the place of famous Suicide Pier along the lake front.

Fascinated and breathless as he stared downward, he climbed upon the concrete railing. The hour was late and no other pedestrians were in sight along the viaduct. Poised, ready to hurl himself to destruction, he hesitated.

The red, green and white lights along the railroad tracks below and to the east looked dismal to him. There is something about such lights that harmonizes with every mood. Melancholy and lingering came the sound of fog horns far out on Lake Erie.

A stiff, chill wind was blowing from the northwest. A sudden gust of it toppled him over. Losing his balance, he fell backward. He struck the concrete walk with considerable force. Resultant pain shocked him to his senses, brought him from his trance. It was like a bucket of cold water deluging a sleepwalker.

He rose to his feet and peered lake-

ward, with the queer notion that he had been forced off the railing by a spirit hand instead of by the wind. His eyes rested on the revolving gleams from the lighthouses. Beacons they were, to comfort and guide sailors in distress. Curious enough, they appealed to him in the same way.

"Maybe a light will shine unexpectedly to show me the way to a safe harbor," he reflected. "Thank God, I didn't murder myself."

Ah, well, he was in a frightful mess, but it was his own fault in many ways. The thing to do was to play the game to its bitter end, like a man. Very well, he would see it through, not be a quitter. With this resolve, he strode briskly toward his home which was miles away.

Sleep was out of the question. He tossed and sighed in the darkness of his apartment. To woo slumber he tried all of the familiar dodges, including counting sheep jumping over a fence. But the woolly creatures, symbolic of innocence, incongruously changed to a procession of Henry Lukes. One after the other, they leaped the fence and advanced on him with a taunting leer.

Finally he became so nervous that he could stand the strain no longer. He switched on his bed lamp and glanced at his watch. It was three o'clock of the morning. He crawled out, lit a cigarette and paced the room, inhaling. Then he unlocked a drawer and brought out a partly filled bottle of whisky. When he returned to bed the bottle was empty.

It was not long until he lost consciousness in alcoholic torpor.

And now came horrible nightmares.

It seemed that he had gone through with his bargain with Luke, and Doctor Baynes had pronounced him dead.

There she was—Marjorie, bless her heart!—at work in her office, tapping

away at her typewriter. Magnificent to look upon, indeed.

She paused in her work and gazed moodily out the window. For a few moments she was lost in abstraction. Then, with a start, she looked back at her desk. Opening a drawer, she reached under some papers and held up a photograph.

It was a picture of her lover, Diamond. She smiled at it fondly, adoringly. Then, glancing to make sure that no one had entered the little room unheard, and finding that she still was alone, she pressed the likeness tightly to her lips.

Back went the picture to its hiding place. Marjorie contemplated the calendar. One guess as to her thoughts was sufficient. She was wondering how many days it would be until she and Arthur could be married.

There came a sound of rushing footsteps. The door flew open. In dashed another girl employee. Her blue eyes gleamed with excitement. She ran agitated fingers over her loose, bobbed yellow hair.

"Have you heard the news?" she asked eagerly.

"What news?"

"Arthur Diamond! It's in the noon edition of the papers. I bought a copy when I was out to lunch."

Marjorie paled. "What about him?" she asked quickly in a thin, tremulous voice.

"Oh, dear, I hate to tell you, for I know you've been running around with him. He's—he's dead of heart failure."

Marjorie fainted.

Diamond moaned in his sleep. He had been watching the scene as a spectator.

Up to now it had not occurred to him to speak to the girl. Strange, that she had not seen him when she turned and surveyed the room to make sure that she was alone. He soon knows

why. He springs forward and cries out a protest.

"No, no, I'm not dead. It's a fake—a put-up job. I'm just pretending to have died."

Marjorie, in her swoon, does not hear. Nor does the other girl, who brought the bad news. Diamond speaks to her. She does not even look up. He shouts; shrieks. Still he makes no impression. He touches the yellow-haired stenographer on the shoulder. She does not feel his touch. He tries to grasp her tightly—and his fingers seem to go right through her flesh.

Then he realizes. "Oh, I'm really dead!" he exclaims with a sob. "Luke and Doctor Baynes killed me instead of just giving me a drug."

His anguish is fearful to behold.

Marjorie and her companion abruptly fade from view. Diamond is startled at the swift change. Aye, and horrified—for he smells funeral flowers. He is in a small chapel, on the premises of the undertaker who measured him for a coffin.

There, yonder, is the casket. He approaches it, bewildered that he moves by floating. It is an odd sensation, leaving the tiled floor and hovering in mid-air without falling. He glances down, and gets an awful shock.

It is his own body that he sees in the coffin. No mistaking that. It is like looking into a mirror, save that the reflected countenance is ghastly, with a transience as of whitish wax.

It dawns on him that he is attending his own funeral.

Some pals come in—not many, for he is branded as an embezzler, and many whom he thought would be loyal through thick and thin now shun him in death. He is surprised to find that the spectators include some whom he has never before seen. This puzzles him, but not for long. The strangers are morbid curiosity-maniacs. They include women, the sort that frequent morgues

and send flowers to condemned murderers.

Who is the woman garbed in unrelieved black? He cannot see her face, for her head is bowed in grief. Can it be— Ah, it is, it is! Marjorie, his sweetheart! And she, alas! is the only one who mourns him. Her love has endured death and disgrace. Or has it? Surely she cannot love him now as she used to. He undergoes agonies of the soul.

The audience is exchanging whispers. They become silent. A frail little man walks softly into the room and approaches the coffin. He, too, is dressed in black from head to foot. Diamond is surprised, thinking him to be another mourner. His hopes are dashed quickly, for he observes that the black-clad man's collar buttons at the back. He is the clergyman, come to perform the funeral rites.

The services begin—no sweet singing, no gorgeous notes from an organ; just a droning, perfunctory half chant.

Throughout, Marjorie does not raise her head. Diamond knows why. She shares his disgrace.

It is mocking, ironical, when the preacher interposes a few kind words about the dead man. And then the brief ceremony is over.

Marjorie is last to leave the chapel. She rises unsteadily and, with head still bowed, walks wearily up the aisle. Diamond floats toward her, his lips about to cry her name. Possibly, now that they are alone, she will be able to hear and see him.

But the girl suddenly vanishes. So does the chapel. Diamond finds himself walking the streets of a distant city. It seems to be Indianapolis, for yonder is the Circle with its war monument.

Ah, this is better! Here he is real enough, live flesh and blood, not a specter. Newly made acquaintances stop to talk to him. They press his

hand in greeting. One of them tenders a cigarette. In raising it to his lips his fingers discover that he has grown a mustache. That must be for partial disguise.

To be sure, he recalls now: After his supposed funeral in Cleveland, the undertaker had taken him from the coffin and substituted a real corpse. In a private room, adjoining the embalming quarters, Diamond had emerged from the drug, jubilant to find himself still alive. Then Luke had brought him to Indianapolis in a motor car. Travel by train would have been dangerous. Some one might have recognized him and started an investigation. He had promised Luke that he would continue his flight, on to a far part of the country or abroad, there to lose his identity and start life all over again under an assumed name.

But he apparently had changed his mind, broken his promise. Why had he done that? Diamond frowns in deep thought, trying to remember, eying the sidewalk as he ponders.

When he raises his eyes, he is amazed to find himself on a familiar street. He is back in Cleveland. It is night. Much time has elapsed since his funeral—months, at least—for the snows of winter are gone and the air is fragrant with the scent of a blooming rosebush in a near-by yard.

This is the street on which Marjorie lives. He is in the shadow of a large tree, with the nearest highway light a considerable distance away. He has been unable to stay away from her. Half-mad with craving, he has risked detection and returned to Cleveland if only to get a glimpse of her.

His heart flutters, for yonder she comes, along the sidewalk. Time must be healing her sorrow, for her slow dragging gait that he had noticed at the funeral has changed to her former easy, youthful stride. This pleases Diamond. He is glad that her grief is not

wasting her away. Nothing he desires more than her happiness.

"Bless my soul!" he whispers. "Why, she's not alone. She has a man with her."

They fancy that no one is within hearing distance, and talk accordingly. So he hears their conversation as they approach.

A chill creeps into his blood as he recognizes the voice of her companion.

It is Ned, his hated rival of the old days.

"Marjorie, my love," Ned is saying, "you must marry me, you just simply must."

The girl laughs—yes, actually laughs. "You certainly are persistence personified, Ned," she says. "But I have told you again and again, that I cannot get poor Arthur out of my mind."

Ned snorts. "Diamond! Bah, he wasn't worthy of you."

It amazes the eavesdropper, that Marjorie does not retort hotly. Still, what Ned had said is true. They are so close to him now that he could reach out and touch them. But the shadows hide him. Then, too, they are intent on each other.

Diamond goes blind with rage. There is a mighty roaring in his ears. He still has the revolver which he purchased from the old pawnbroker. It is in his right hip pocket. His fingers close on it.

"I'll kill this Ned!" he tells himself.

But a better plan flashes to him. "No, no, I can't blame Ned—can't blame any one for wanting Marjorie, adorable girl. I'll do some shooting, all right, but I'll get the cause of the whole wretched trouble—Henry Luke."

The thought thrills him. He grinds his teeth and curses to himself. His eyes and lips are tightly closed in fury. He opens his lids to look at his slowly retreating sweetheart and her new lover. They have vanished. The street, too, has changed. He is standing in the

darkness, under a tree, but it is on a wide boulevard.

Near by is a stone wall, and beyond it a magnificent estate—Henry Luke's. The wall is too high to climb over. He gets up a tree, crawls along a bough, and drops on the other side. Gripping his pistol, he approaches the mansion.

It is a difficult job, but he at length manages to scale a veranda column and reach a roof. From there he cautiously works his way along from ledge to ledge until he arrives at a double French window. It is open to admit fresh air. He steps softly inside.

Lounging in an easy-chair, comfortably sprawled out, smoking a dollar cigar and sipping pre-war champagne, is his ex-employer. It is maddening, the thought that the real embezzler has been enjoying the utmost of luxury while the poor fool, Diamond, had kept under cover in a distant city, lonesome, robbed of his sweetheart.

The Sarouk rug is deep. It muffles the intruder's tiptoeing approach. He is at his enemy's very elbow before Luke gives a start of surprise, drops his cigar and stares at the prowler.

Luke turns white. "What are you doing here?" he asks savagely.

Instead of answering, Diamond fires his revolver. Shot follows close upon shot, six of them striking in the vicinity of the victim's heart.

The killer's smile of joy abruptly changes to one of horror. For the last bullet no sooner leaves the gun than Luke changes to Marjorie. She is dead, at the hands of him who loved her above all else.

Shuddering, Diamond awakens from his nightmare. He is dripping wet with perspiration, and trembling from head to foot. The tragedy has been only a dream. But he wonders if any of the sequence of events is a premonitory foreshadowing of what actually will happen.

CHAPTER XII.

DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES.

TO-MORROW the newspapers would announce his death. The crucial hour had arrived for Arthur Diamond—the hour scheduled for his taking the drugs that would give him the appearance of a corpse. It was ten o'clock at night. He was pacing the floor in Luke's library. With him were Luke and the hard, cynical Doctor Curwin Baynes.

Outside the mansion was the atmosphere of death. A gale blowing from the northwest was pelting the walls with sleet. It droye viciously, eager to destroy, to kill.

The three conspirators had all been drinking heavily. Yet none of them was more than comfortably jingled. Both Baynes and Luke seemed to have hollow legs. And Diamond's nerves were in such wretched condition that an amount of liquor that ordinarily would have put him asleep so far had only mildly stimulated him.

This night Luke had taken no drugs. He tingled with an exhilaration that was not altogether due to Scotch whisky. For in Diamond he saw his means of escape from a prison term that would most certainly be meted out to him if the real embezzler paid the penalty for the big theft of corporation funds.

The physician, too, was excited. He realized that he was about to play a leading part in an extraordinary criminal venture.

Diamond was panting for breath. He halted his pacing to inquire jerkily, "What kind of a narcotic you going to give me, doc? Opium?"

Doctor Baynes grinned. He twirled his spectacles professionally. "You are going to have an experience that you will never forget," he answered. "I shall administer to you a liberal dose of marahuana."

Diamond scowled. "What's that?"

"Cannabis Indica," the doctor informed him. "Vulgarly known as Indian hemp, sometimes called hasheesh. It produces weird hallucinations and a sense of suspension of time. The tradition is that the Arabian Nights were composed under the motor excitement of hasheesh. You, however, will get enough so that you will not be able to write. You will sleep like a dead man."

The prospective victim shuddered. "I wish I didn't have to go through with this thing," he lamented. "Oh, if there were only some other way out."

"Well, there isn't!" Luke cut in sharply. "We've chewed the rag enough about that stuff. Take your choice—the drug or the penitentiary."

Diamond sighed. "All right," he agreed dismally. "Let's start the fireworks and get it over with."

Doctor Baynes rose to his feet. He strode to a small table and busied himself with his medicine case. Presently he turned, advanced to the young man and held forth a wine glass of liquid.

"Chase it with a big shot of whisky—immediately," were his instructions.

Diamond accepted the glass as though it were the tail of a rattlesnake. Fascinated, he stared at the drug that was to transform his career, eliminate him from all present associations and send him off over the horizon to start life anew under an assumed name.

As if he were in a trance he said, "That's a whale of a dose."

The physician struck a match and held it to a cigarette. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "Naturally, what you're holding isn't the pure stuff. It is mainly a dilution with other ingredients. Later I shall start a chain of hypodermics, to continue until we are ready to remove you from the coffin where you will shortly be playing dead."

Diamond raised the glass. With it close to his lips, he hesitated. For a moment he stood motionless, gazing at the floor. Then he resumed his pacing.

His two spectators were patient. They sensed the struggle that was taking place in him. Surely his emotions must be riotous.

The young man reached a window. He paused, drew the drapes aside and, pressing his face to the cold glass, peered into the night and storm. It was suggestive of a graveyard out there. He shivered.

Then, his back to them, he stood erect, his left fist clenched as one mustering his courage. They saw his right elbow go up, his head tilt back a trifle.

He turned, walked to Doctor Baynes and tendered the glass.

It was empty.

"That's the boy!" the physician said approvingly. "The curtain has gone up on the first act. And now we'd better get you to bed fast. You'll be asleep pronto."

Luke was rubbing his palms in pleasure. Bright gleams came from his cold blue eyes. "Shall I escort him to his bedroom or ring for the Jap?"

"Neither," Doctor Baynes answered. He spoke hurriedly. An anxious frown appeared on his forehead. "I know the room you prepared for him. Hustle, Diamond, I fancy your eyes are getting glazed. I was an ass not to get you to bed before you downed the stuff."

The victim followed him languidly. There was an easy freeness in his movements that indicated release from high nervous tension.

After the doctor returned to the room, he and Luke drank each other's health. "The drug got to him fast," said Baynes. "He was so drowsy that I had to help him undress. His pulse is less driving, and his respiration nearer normal. When do we turn in? What hour of the night had we better rouse the servants and announce that Diamond is dead of an acute heart attack?"

Luke chuckled. "No hurry about

that," he said. "It would look strange if you and I hit the hay before two o'clock. Come on, let's mix up another highball."

They staged a drinking bout. When the clock softly and musically chimed two, both were well in their cups. Luke went to a rosewood cellaret in a corner and came back with a fresh bottle of Scotch. He was unsteady on his feet, almost staggering. He lurched into his chair, and dropped the unopened bottle of whisky to a bearskin rug beside him.

Doctor Baynes yawned. "Don't pull the cork," he advised, his tongue thick. "You've had enough. Keep on, and you'll be too drunk to rouse the house with news of Diamond's death."

Luke eyed him admiringly. "I'm all right, only see one of you," he said with a chuckle. You can give me a shot later to pull me together. But that's a good idea about not drinking any more. Might be fatal to slip up in playing the part. How do you feel, doc? Wish I had your capacity."

"Oh, I'm jingled, but not lit," was the answer. "When I get too much, I sleep like a dead man. Dead man! Ha! say, wouldn't it be a grand joke on Diamond if he really died to-night instead of just pretend?"

Luke gave a start. His flushed face went pale. His companion could not observe this, for they were almost in darkness. They had turned off the lights. The great blaze in the fireplace, before which they sat close together, had died down to a bed of red coals.

Doctor Baynes was looking him directly in the eyes, and his lips were curled, baring his teeth. His expression was so devilish that it sent a chill through Luke and partly shocked him to a sober state.

Luke swallowed with difficulty. His words came in a low, tense whisper. "You don't mean—— You're not suggesting——"

"Why not?" Doctor Baynes whispered back calmly.

"No murder for mine! Granted, if we put him out of the way he would be silenced forever. But it's too dangerous."

The physician sniffed. "What of it? We're in a cursedly dangerous corner. Suppose this young fool comes back and tries to extort hush money from us?"

"Blackmail!" Luke groaned. "That possibility never occurred to me."

"Well, it better had. I wouldn't put it beyond Diamond. Ask me, and I say it's more than a possibility, it's a probability that after lying low awhile he'll show up and bleed us dry. We'd have to call a halt or be ruined financially. Suppose we did refuse, and he went to the prosecuting attorney and squealed?"

They gazed into each other's eyes through a long silence. A new understanding, a fresh bond, began to link them.

"By the devil himself!" Luke whispered grimly. "You've hit the nail on the head. But the undertaker would get hep that he was handling a real corpse if we turned a dead body over to him."

"Bah!" said Doctor Baynes. "Leave the undertaker to me. I can silence him. Say, he wouldn't dare open his trap. He'd undergo the gamut of tortures before he'd peach on us. Why, I've got enough on this undertaker to send him to the chair. That's why he consented to stage a fake funeral for us at such a low price."

Luke was trembling. He turned, first to one side, then the other, and peered furtively into the room's shadows as though fearful of seeing an eavesdropper. It was a futile scrutiny, as he well knew, for he himself had locked all the doors and windows after making sure that they were alone.

"Murder!" he whispered. "It's ugly

business. I wouldn't have the nerve to do it. Maybe you would, doc."

Baynes grunted. "It wouldn't be the first person I ever croaked," he confided. His eyes gleamed cruelly, without remorse.

Luke shrank back. "Eh? You never told me about that."

"Naturally. One doesn't stand on the housetop and advertise such matters. However, my conscience does not bother me. So far I have killed my victims in a most kindly spirit."

Luke's blood ran cold. He felt prickles of gooseflesh rising on his arms. His hair tingled. His lower jaw sagged. He gaped at the monster.

"Don't throw a fit," Doctor Baynes said placidly. "My killings to date have been for the victims' own good. I started out by stopping the heart of a cretin, a born idiot whom I considered incurable. On numerous occasions I have given an overdose to put patients out of their suffering. As to murder of a healthy individual, not guilty."

Luke instinctively knew better. Silently he commented to himself, "You're a bloody liar."

As in a daze he heard the physician continue. "I confide this to you for a very definite purpose—to steel your courage. For you, Henry, will have to do the dirty work in this instance. It is your kettle of fish, not mine, and you'll have to cook it. Adopt a humanitarian spirit and think of the suffering and anguish young Diamond will escape if you snuff him out."

Luke meditated. "And if I did, you'd have me completely in your power."

"Not at all. I'm an accessory. And if they didn't electrocute me along with you, they'd at least put me away for life where the dogs couldn't bite me. But we won't be caught. I'll fix the undertaker. No possible chance of a leak in that direction. I'll sign the death certificate as heart failure. No outsider will ever be any the wiser."

Luke pondered. His sinister henchman had planted a seed that sprouted and grew like magic. The more he turned the suggestion in his mind, the more the idea of Diamond's actually dying appealed to him. For complete protection at present, and assurance of not being molested in the future, the murder from his viewpoint was a necessity. His heart was pounding now, his blood pressure high, for emotion had stimulated his adrenal glands.

"How about poison?" Luke asked eagerly. "Maybe you have something that wouldn't leave a trace."

"Not with me," Doctor Baynes answered. There was sincere regret in his voice.

"A revolver is the only weapon I have. And I daren't use it. The servants might hear the shot."

"Don't let yourself get into a stew for lack of an implement. Over in my medicine case I have a little surgical instrument with a strong, slender blade. You could run it into Diamond's heart as easily as spearing a potato with a fork."

"Will you come along with me? I'm afraid to go alone."

"I will not. This is your job. And, while I see no danger, I do not propose to risk being caught with you."

"I know the house from soup to nuts, including his bedroom, and can do the thing in silence—unless he cries out."

Doctor Baynes chuckled. "Fear not, no chance of his crying out. He's drugged so soundly that you could move him from bed to floor and he'd never waken."

Luke gritted his teeth. "I've half a mind to kill him. But something holds me back."

The physician shrugged. "Have it your own way. As for myself, I am going to retire. To play my part of a suddenly roused physician, called from bed to attend a dying fellow-guest, I must be appropriately garbed in

pajamas when the servants see me. So me for bed. I'll snatch a few winks. You sit here and think the proposition over. Take your time. No rush about announcing Diamond's death. As a matter of fact, four o'clock is even better than two, for more people die just before dawn than at any other time, that being when human vitality is at lowest ebb. Whenever you are ready, come to my room and waken me. I'll leave the door unlocked."

Luke was aghast. "You mean to tell me, you will be able to sleep instead of lying awake wondering whether a man is dying under the same roof?"

Doctor Baynes laughed jeeringly. "Death is nothing in my young life," he said. "I've seen hordes of them pass out." He paused and extracted from a vest pocket a leather case. Opening it, he brought forth a glistening object.

Often had Henry Luke seen the thing. He knew it by sight. His breath hissed inward in anticipation. "What are you going to give me in the hypo?" he asked eagerly.

"Morphine," the doctor answered.

A deft job, a pressing of a plunger, and it was done. Luke sighed happily.

Baynes walked to his medicine case. He came back and tossed something on the bearskin rug. Luke bit his upper lip. After Baynes had left, he picked up the pointed bit of steel and fell to pondering it.

Would it soon slip into Arthur Diamond's heart and send him into eternity?

CHAPTER XIII.

ARTHUR DIAMOND'S FATE.

THE morphine hypodermic gave Henry Luke false courage and a certain degree of recklessness. Yet he was no fool. It was alien to his nature to venture into danger without first sizing up the situation from all angles. So, though keenly tempted to murder

young Diamond, he hesitated. All circumstances and the drug considered, he did not hold back from the dark deed on ethical grounds. Safety was his main concern.

He wanted another drink of whisky, but was too sensible to risk becoming befuddled. If he decided to go ahead with the killing, the slightest blunder might prove fatal to himself.

So an hour and more slipped by, after Doctor Baynes' departure, and still Henry Luke lounged in his chair in the library. By this time the red coals in the fireplace were turning to ashes and he was in almost jet darkness. But the black did not terrify him. Nor did it even make him uneasy.

The only thing that he feared at present was the electric chair in Columbus. He wondered what it looked like. It struck him as odd that he never before had contemplated the chair as ready all these years, possibly for him. Ah, well, a doomed man must undergo agonies while awaiting the hour of execution. But, once strapped in that chair, the end must come swiftly. Luke did not believe in a hereafter. His philosophy of life was that death brings complete extinction—annihilation, with no survival of personality or memory. Accordingly, he was not sure but what he would prefer the electric chair to a long term in prison, such as he would serve if his embezzlement were discovered.

Now, he reasoned, there was not much chance of the servants hearing him if he stole into Diamond's bedroom. Confound them! They slept like logs, as he well knew from various occasions when he had rung for them after retiring. The victim, drugged to the deepest depths of unconsciousness, would not struggle or cry out.

Luke knew a bit about anatomy from his association with Doctor Baynes. He knew, for instance, where to stab for

the heart. He recalled that Baynes had told him that on several times in recorded history a person has been found with the heart on the right side instead of the left. Luke, in his fantastic imaginings arising from his shot of morphine, reflected what a grim joke it would be if Diamond turned out to be such a case and had to be stabbed twice before departing this life.

And all the time his own heart pounded vigorously and a feeling of tension told him that the drug had not lowered his blood pressure that had been raised by overindulgence in alcohol.

A desperate man was Luke, at the end of his rope. He had stolen a fortune. Diamond might play square, live up to his bargain and, in supposed death, assume guilt for Luke. Again, as Baynes had pointed out, Diamond might not. There was nothing to prevent him from coming back and blackmailing his ex-employer. Such things had happened before.

Luke worked himself into a rage at Diamond. He pictured him in the guise of a blackmailer, himself the suffering victim. "Dirty skunk!" he whispered savagely—for the mental picture riled him as acutely as would the real thing. Baynes had put his finger on the weak link, all right. As long as Diamond lived, Luke could not be sure of his ground. Day after day he would be haunted by a fear that the young man would return and begin extorting hush money. It would be just a question of time until he would crack under the strain—that constant fear and ominous waiting.

About four o'clock, Luke made up his mind.

"I'll kill him!" he decided.

Once he had reached this determination, he experienced a great feeling of relief. He glanced at his watch and was surprised at what its radium dial disclosed. He had expected to find the

hour much later. His intense concentration and debating with himself had seemed to last an eternity.

Luke was like a man in a trance. He did not hear the howling wind nor the vicious pelting of sleet against the windows. His senses were very alert, but only as regards this mighty serious undertaking that lay ahead. His ears, for instance, were vigilant only for sounds that might herald peril to himself.

He left the library, softly closing the door behind him. Up the stairs he went, silently, and on to his bedroom. There he removed his shoes. After a moment's meditation he undressed and donned his pajamas. Thus clad he could, in any sudden emergency, dart into bed and feign to have been asleep for hours.

Cautiously he rolled up his sleeves, for spurting blood can be more readily washed from the bare skin than from cloth.

He loved nothing on earth at this instant quite as much as the pointed surgical knife. Fondly he caressed it and was almost startled at the friendly, velvety feel of the blade.

Luke set forth on his foul mission, leaving the door of his bedroom open for swift retreat. The hall was as black as an underground river. He was thankful that he had, for sake of economy, trained his servants to leave no lights burning at night. Never before had he appreciated how invaluable darkness is to the criminal. Why, in broad daylight or bright artificial illumination, he would not be gliding along this hall, intent on murder, for a king's ransom.

He reached Diamond's room. The young man, he found, had obeyed instructions and not locked himself in. Still, he was hardly entitled to any credit for loyalty on this score. Doctor Baynes had reported that Diamond was so drowsy that he could not undress without aid. In such a condition, he

was not apt to give any attention to the matter of locking the door.

Despite his belief that his prospective victim's drugged sleep was sound, Luke proceeded warily. He devoted minutes to turning the door knob with infinitesimal slowness, and more minutes to opening the door without making any sound.

Once inside, he closed the door with the same prudent silence. Here, also, he was in jet darkness. This did not bother him. Luke was thoroughly familiar with every square inch of his mansion and its furnishings. Moreover, he had a fine sense of location. He could, with his eyes shut or in the black of night, locate things in this room as accurately and easily as he could reach for a document in an inner pocket.

He listened. From the bed came deep, rhythmic breathing. Luke was a bit surprised that he could hear the sound, that it was not drowned by the tumultuous pounding of his heart. The beating was double, in a sense, being noticeable in both of his ears.

He crossed to the side of the bed. His right hand clenched the surgical knife tightly. His left reached forth and touched the coverlet. Though his exploring fingers rested ever so lightly, they told him that underneath were the sleeper's knees.

The fingers traveled gently up along the contour of the body. Both arms, he found, were beneath the blankets. This dovetailed perfectly with his intentions. The layout could not have been more satisfactory if he had arranged it himself. Slowly he pulled back the bedding until he had the breast uncovered.

His fingers now performed a surveying task, shoulder to shoulder and down to the cardiac region.

Finally he had the tip of the knife directly over the heart. In the darkness Luke smiled maniacally. A few

seconds more, and Arthur Diamond, as a danger, would be eliminated. Ah, unfortunate sleeper, breathing peacefully, unaware of impending doom. Ah, foolish man, that you did not lock your bedroom door.

Luke clenched his teeth. He held his breath. He raised his blade and then struck downward with all his strength.

Far off in a distant part of the city, Marjorie stirred restlessly in her sleep and moaned. It was such a lament as might ensue if, in dreamland, she knew of her lover's peril.

The girl was in the clutches of a frightful nightmare. As swiftly changing as a kaleidoscope she saw Arthur in a succession of dangers—on the verge of falling over a cliff; stepping into quicksand; drowning and going down for the third time; prostrate under a man-eating tiger; being stabbed to the heart.

With a convulsive gasp she wakened and, after an eternity in which she thought she would never get air into her lungs, she shrieked.

A warm liquid spurted upon Henry Luke's hand as he withdrew the dagger from the bosom in which he had plunged it. He dropped the knife and stepped back, clenching his hands. Instantly he unclenched, for the blood felt sticky. It nauseated him. Or was his sudden giddiness merely the normal reaction of a murderer?

Luke realized that he was trembling violently. He strove to master his nerves, telling himself that all was well. Certainly he had done the killing far easier than he had anticipated. Some sort of struggle, he had imagined, would be inevitable. But the victim had not cried out. The body had, to be sure, jerked and heaved convulsively. But that was all.

Luke was in a state of half collapse.

His knees went limp. He sagged; drooped to the floor; sat on the rug for several minutes. His heart now was thumping faster than ever, as though attempting to pound its way out of his chest. He wondered if he were going mad, so riotous were his thoughts. He did not know that if he had not been insane for the last few hours he would never have committed the crime.

How long had he been on the floor? He could not tell, having temporarily lost his sense of time.

"This won't do," he muttered. "I must get out of this room and call doc to help clean things up before we rouse the servants and claim Diamond died of heart failure. Gad, I didn't reckon on the blood. We'll have to change the bedding and destroy whatever has the red stains."

He rose unsteadily to his feet and lurched to the door. Hand on the knob, he paused. Had he, after all, really killed Diamond—or merely wounded him? The job could not be left half done. He must make sure.

He returned to the bed and felt for his victim's pulse; he found none.

But a pulse, he knew, can be so faint that fingers cannot detect it. Very well, then, he would examine the eyes. Possibly by their expression—or utter lack of it—he would know for a certainty.

To do this, he must have a light. Promptly he was almost overwhelmed by a terror of emerging from the cover of complete darkness. However, it was imperative. The room was so cold that he knew a window must be open. That meant, a shade was up. He crossed and pulled down the blind.

From a smoking stand beside the bed, he procured a match and struck it into flame. The light wavered, for his fingers still were tremulous in the extreme.

Only for an instant did the illumination last. He did not blow it out. Instead, he crumpled it in his fist.

For the face of the dead man, disclosed by the light, was not that of Arthur Diamond.

It was the countenance of him who had suggested this murder—the sinister Doctor Curwin Baynes.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP.

HENRY LUKE had killed the wrong man. Instantly he understood the cause of the catastrophe. Doctor Baynes, escorting Diamond to bed, had mixed up their respective rooms. He had led the young man to the quarters intended for himself. Apparently Baynes had been more intoxicated, even earlier in the evening, than he had admitted. Or was it a grim blunder engineered by fate? Luke wondered. He was too stunned, too horrified, to debate the matter.

Then, too, it was no time for crying over spilled milk. Luke was in a frightful predicament. For Doctor Baynes was dead. There could be no doubt about that, no mistaking the glassy expression of his open eyes. Luke knew a corpse when he saw it. And, though the match had flamed for only a moment in the darkness, it had revealed the doctor's lifeless countenance.

By nature of the error, Diamond must now be abed in the near-by room intended for the victim of the surgeon's knife. "Stupefied by drugs, too!" Luke muttered. He cursed despairingly. "And he's the only person in the house that I could bulldoze into helping me dispose of this body."

He meditated swiftly. One thing was certain. If he were to escape arrest and electrocution, he must get the corpse hidden and all traces of the murder removed before the servants wakened for their next day's duties. That would not be far off. Dawn's clammy gray light soon would appear. Far out on the boulevard, beyond the stone wall

of his estate, he heard the rattling of a motor truck—probably a milkman making his rounds.

"Diamond has slept for a matter of six hours," Luke pondered. "Perhaps the effects of his dose of hasheesh are wearing off. Maybe I can waken him and, by whisky, stimulate him into a state where he can help me."

Quietly he stole out of the room. He locked the door behind him. A few paces brought him to the other guest's chamber. The door was unlocked. He entered, closed it, and switched on a reading lamp.

Luke exclaimed in surprise.

Diamond was sitting up in bed, propped comfortably on pillows. He, too, was astonished. He had heard Luke enter, but imagined it must be Doctor Baynes.

"Listen!" Luke blurted out in a hoarse whisper. "There's been an awful mistake. Baynes is dead."

Diamond's eyes bulged. "Come again! Am I dreaming?"

"By Satan himself, I wish you were," said Luke hoarsely. "But Baynes is as dead as Napoleon. It's the real thing we're up against."

"We!" Diamond echoed, on the defensive. "How do you get that way?"

"Blast you! You've got to help me hide the body."

The man in bed turned ashen. "Oh, oh!" he moaned. "I didn't get what you were driving at. So you murdered him!"

Luke gulped. He nodded. Then dazedly he rubbed the back of a hand across his eyes. "I'm glad to find you emerged from the drug," he said fervently. "Doc was lit up like a church. He must have given you a smaller dose of hasheesh than he thought."

Diamond laughed sourly. "So it really was hasheesh, was it?" he asked. "Well, I figured it was poison—that you and he intended to croak me for sure. I didn't take any chances. I

didn't swallow the truck. Coming upstairs, I pretended to be getting drowsy."

"But I saw you drink it," Luke protested.

"No, you didn't. You saw me raise an arm and tilt back my head and go through the gestures of drinking. But I was at the window, my back to you. Oh, I'd provided for just such a trick. I had a sponge. I dipped it into the wine glass of drugged mixture and soaked it up before lifting it to my lips. That was why the glass was empty when I turned and handed it back to Baynes."

"I'm glad," said Luke. "Your brain must be fairly clear. Heaven knows, mine isn't. You're in good shape to help me."

"Outside!" Diamond responded firmly. "I don't have any scruples about assuming blame for your embezzlement, to escape prison for my pay-roll padding. But I draw the line at murder—even as accessory after the deed. Not by a jugful!"

Luke was doubly terrified, and showed it in his wild glare and twitching cheeks. "But you've got to!"

"Do I, though? Just try to make me and find out."

"Come off your high horse," said the murderer gruffly. "You're already implicated in the crime that resulted in murder. Any jury would send you to the chair along with me."

Diamond shook his head stubbornly. "I call your bluff," he said. "I don't know much about the fine points of the law, but I do know that I'd rather take a chance on what you threaten than I would on mixing up with disposing of the corpse."

Insane fury gushed through Henry Luke. Ah, if he only had the blade that he had dropped on the doctor's bed. He would plunge it into Diamond's heart with glee. But he was unarmed, save for his brute strength.

His fingers curved and half closed. He shrank back, crouching for a spring.

The young man sensed his danger. His right hand darted from under the coverlet. It held a menacing revolver, the one he had bought from the old pawnbroker.

"Keep your distance," he said metallically. "I am within my legal rights in defending myself."

Luke's teeth began to chatter. "Don't shoot, my dear chap!" he implored, raising a crooked arm as though to ward off a bullet. And then the very life seemed to go out of him. The fires of his emotions changed to cold ashes. He tottered; collapsed into a chair. There he pressed his face into his palms, and groaned.

"How did you come to kill Doctor Baynes?" Diamond asked.

Luke responded dazedly, as if he were in a trance. "I thought it was you. He botched things—put you in his room and himself crawled into the bed intended for you."

The young man's lips went suddenly dry as flour. He felt a psychic cold penetrate to his marrow. The tip of his tongue moved nervously around his lips.

"So-ho!" he said faintly, weak at his narrow escape from assassination. "You intended to kill me, what? And now you have the nerve, despite that, to come to me and ask help at covering up your crime."

The murderer appeared not to hear. He rocked back and forth, cudgeling his brain for a way out of his trouble. After a long silence he looked up. "If I'm caught," he said, "it means the electric chair for me, no doubt about that. Awhile back, alone in the library, I fancied I'd prefer the chair to a long prison stretch. But now that I'm face to face with a show-down, I've changed my mind. Ah, but life is sweet!"

He paused and scrutinized Diamond cunningly. "Tell you what!" he pro-

posed. "I'll destroy the fake set of books at the office. I'll restore the genuine records that will pin the embezzlement on me. I'll go to the pen and serve my time. I'll keep my mouth shut about your pay-roll padding. You can go free, marry your sweetheart and be happy. I'll do all this, I swear it, so help me! if you'll only assist me at getting rid of the body and destroying the bedding. One man can't handle the job alone. Two of us can. I'm not strong. Doubt if I could lift the corpse alone. Drugs and whisky have weakened me. We'll take the body in my car, out to the country, and bury it. When Doctor Baynes turns up missing, I'll claim that he changed his mind and did not stay overnight. You can bear me out, under oath."

Escape from his predicament; freedom to marry Marjorie; the bait was tempting to Arthur Diamond.

"Think it over," Luke urged craftily. "But think fast. We haven't any time to waste. The body will have to be underground before dawn. That's not far off."

"The matter," said Diamond quietly, "does not require lengthy deliberation. I can give you my decision at once. It is—no! never!"

"What else do you want?" the killer entreated. "Name your price—anything I have shall be yours."

"Nothing doing, sir. You have offered me the only things I really desire, the only things that would make life worth while. But I refuse to mix up in a murder. Then, too I could not look Marjorie in the eye with such a load on my soul. The deception would be maddening. Sooner or later, I would have to confess the whole dirty business. It would kill her. The sweetest flowers yield most quickly to the icy blast."

"There is no hope for me in your direction—no chance of you changing your mind?"

"Not in the slightest."

Luke's eyes roved wildly. "But what about me?" he demanded. "What am I going to do?"

For an instant Diamond pitied him. "You should have thought about that before you set forth to kill. Far be it from me to advise any one to commit suicide. But I know what course I would take if I were in your shoes. Or, I wonder, would I? One never can tell until he faces the real thing."

"Suicide!" Luke repeated hollowly. The word seemed to fascinate him. He rested his chin on his clenched fists, and meditated. "Yes, that would solve the problem for me, all right—enable me to escape prison and the executioner."

Diamond interposed grimly, "You might find a worse fate awaiting you on the other side of the grave. If the hereafter is what I believe it, you would be jumping from the frying pan into the fire. No, Mr. Luke, you must pay the penalty for your awful crime. There is no escape in death. Either you would suffer in spiritland, or have to come back to earth again and live a miserable existence."

The employer sneered. "Stuff and nonsense!" he grunted. "That's all balderdash. Death brings complete annihilation. I'm sure."

"In your case, I wouldn't wonder if it did," said Diamond significantly. "Certainly there wouldn't be much loss. You have done mighty little to make other people happy in this world. Financially you made yourself a great success, before the cards turned against you. No one can deny that you built up a big business. But spiritually your life has been a wretched failure."

"Ha, ha!" Luke jeered. "Where do you get off, handing me such a pious line, you low-down pay-roll padder?"

Diamond paled. "The charge you make is true. I was a crook. But I'm telling you that I've suffered the

agonies of hell in the last few months. If spiritual misery can atone for sin, I've paid in full."

"Can the chatter," Luke growled. "I've got to move fast. No suicide for me—not until the police close in on me, if ever. Ah, I have it! Maybe the crooked undertaker who was in on this deal with us will see me through if I slip him enough jack. I'll phone him."

"A lot of good that will do you. The undertaker can't make out a death certificate. This is a job for the coroner."

Luke was fairly bubbling with renewed hope. "Is that so?" he scoffed. "Well, maybe the undertaker knows a doctor as crooked as Baynes—one who, for a price, will make it seem that he was summoned in the night to attend a man dying a natural death. That is one way. Another lies open. The undertaker and I can plant the job to look like suicide. It would seem plausible, if we put the knife back in the wound and clench Baynes' fingers around the hilt, for the blade came from Baynes' own surgical kit. It has his initials carved on it."

Elated, Luke reached for the room's extension phone on the table by the bed. But Diamond was ahead of him. He snatched the phone away and thrust his pistol into Luke's face. The employer snarled in rage.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded.

"I would be legally liable if I let you get away with what you propose," Diamond informed. "Furthermore, you have wrecked my life, and it will be a rare treat to turn the tables on you. I'm going to stew you in your own fat, Mr. Luke."

The murderer was ghastly white. "You don't mean——"

"Surest thing you know. Watch me bare the whole works." Diamond lifted the receiver from its hook.

"Number, please," said a musical feminine voice over the wire.

"Give me police headquarters—quick."

CHAPTER XV.

THE THING THAT REALLY COUNTS.

LUKE was dead when a motor car bearing a flying squadron of detectives arrived from police headquarters. The murderer knew that he could not escape the electric chair. So he perished by his own hand.

They found him lying on the floor, lifeless, beside the bed that held the body of Doctor Curwin Baynes. In Luke's heart was the same surgical instrument with which he had killed the wrong man by mistake.

The detectives all shuddered as they contemplated him.

None of them spoke for some time. Then one said unsteadily, "I've seen a lot of suicides, but never one that had such a terrible expression frozen on his face. I guess what he saw, when the gates of the hereafter opened, wasn't what he expected."

As is characteristic of suicides, he had left a note. It was brief:

TO THE PUBLIC: Remember me for generous donations to charity, and for my standing as an employer of high ethics. Between the electric chair and taking my own life, I courageously choose the latter.

HENRY ARCHIBALD LUKE.

This absolved young Diamond from any suspicion that he might have killed either of the two men, Luke's tremulously scrawled message being a confession that he had murdered Baynes and killed himself. Though one should speak only good of the dead, regardless of their record, it is doubtful whether Luke in his last moments was decent enough to protect young Diamond. It is strongly probable that, if it had occurred to him that he might falsely implicate the young man, he would have done so. But characters like Luke, facing death, think only of themselves. So he died. And no one mourned him.

The detectives took Diamond to headquarters, largely as a matter of routine. He was alert, guarded in his answers to their questions. What had instigated the murder? As to that, he responded, he had no idea. Luke and his victim seemed friendly enough when he parted from them and went to bed at ten o'clock. Yes, the servants would vouch that he retired at that hour. What else did he know about the double tragedy? Nothing, he insisted, except that Luke, apparently crazed by drugs—the coroner had found many hypodermic scars on the dead man's arms—had come into his room and confessed the crime. Why had he bared it? Diamond said that he did not know—possibly it was due to an irresistible urge to confide, typical in killers.

Diamond told such a straightforward story that the police accepted it. They let him go his way unmolested. After all, he had a spotless reputation. The only thing against him was his presence in Henry Luke's mansion that fatal night. This, too, was plausible. The servants testified that he had been, as a business associate of Luke, a frequent visitor.

The morning following the murder, Diamond showed up at the office at his usual hour, nine o'clock. His eyes were bloodshot, his cheeks pale. Fellow employees believed this due to the shock and strain of being a participant in the dreadful affair.

Alas, he was not yet out of the woods. Luke, his ferocious taskmaster, was gone. And with him out of the way, along with Baynes, no living person knew of Diamond's pay-roll padding. But Luke already had substituted the fake ledgers that pinned his giant embezzlement on Diamond.

If he could locate the genuine ledgers, along with missing subsidiary books, it would prove him innocent. He searched high and low, from storage vault to cellar. The records had disappeared.

In a few days the auditor would discover the embezzlement—and have Diamond arrested.

Never was man more miserable.

He did not go out for lunch, being in no mood to eat.

Shortly after noon, Marjorie came in to see him. He greeted her wanly. Her excitement over the tragedy, which had the whole town talking, changed to agitation as she sensed his deep distress.

"My dear!" she exclaimed in anxiety. "What is wrong?"

Diamond's lips set tightly. He struggled to repress his emotions. Then tears came to his eyes. He could endure the strain and deception no longer.

Brokenly he confided his secret.

Marjorie was stunned. He misinterpreted her silence.

"That is all," he said dully. "I have told you everything. What a fool and cad I was, not to have confessed to you before I asked you to wear that engagement ring. Well, I suppose everything is over now, as far as my hoping to marry you. But, Marjorie! in years to come, don't think too harshly of me. I was wrong, and I'm not trying to excuse myself. But if Henry Luke had given me half a chance, I could have made restitution. The money I stole by padding the pay roll is still cached in banks, with the exception of a few hundred dollars. I would have saved and repaid those hundreds, too. He refused. He wanted to hold me in his clutch and make me do his bidding. Believe me, I have aged years in the last few months."

The girl was crying. "It is a terrible blow to me," she said. "Oh, I was so proud of you—boasted of your honesty."

There came an interruption. The office door opened. Marjorie averted her face to conceal her tears. Diamond frowned.

"Well," he asked harshly, "what do you want?"

Jim Purdy, the old assistant book-keeper, had entered. He stood respectfully with his back against the closed door.

"Mr. Diamond," he queried in a whisper, as though fearful of being heard in the outer rooms, "are you in trouble? Again, as before, I urge you to allow a battle-scarred veteran to extend his counsel."

The young fellow blinked rapidly. "What do you know?" he demanded. "What's up your sleeve?"

Jim Purdy stepped forward. He leaned over and stood with his finger tips on the desk. He sprang a great surprise.

"Drop your mask," he advised keenly. "I know all—your pay-roll thefts and your criminal conspiracy with Luke."

Diamond gave a start. "I guess I might as well toss the sponge," he admitted. "I'm in for it now, all right. How did you get wise?"

Purdy's answer was evasive. "It is my business to know many secrets without disclosing my sources of information." He smiled grimly. "As you know, Mr. Diamond, I toil in a little cubby-hole by myself. It will surprise you to know that I have connection with this room by wire. If you will turn and look behind the steam radiator at your elbow, you will find a powerful sound-magnifying device, the well-known dictograph. You must pardon me, but I have overheard most of your conversation with this charming young lady. It was, obviously, the psychological moment for me to walk in upon the scene."

"A dictograph!" Diamond echoed. "Then you must be a detective."

"A government operative," planted in this office by the Internal Revenue Department," said Purdy. "My mission here has been to ferret out some income-tax evasion on the part of your deceased employer, Luke. It is a score that goes

back to war-boom days, when he was very rich."

"So!" Diamond commented. "And it has been incidentally that you learned of my secret."

Purdy nodded. "I am a much older man than you," he said. "Ah, Mr. Diamond, I took a fancy to you from the start. You resemble strikingly my own son who gave his life for his country on the battlefields of France. That is why I come to help you."

Diamond laughed bitterly. "Help me? I am beyond help."

"Don't be too sure. The office books, the fake set recently substituted for the genuine ones, pin guilt on you for Luke's big embezzlement. If you could produce the real records, they would clear you on that score. But Luke destroyed them. It is fortunate, indeed, that, toiling at night, I made a copy of them for Washington. To-day, my boy, they replace the phony ones."

Diamond gasped with delight.

"But I'm still guilty of pay-roll padding," he reminded Purdy. "And I haven't enough cash to make restitution in full."

"Sometimes," Purdy suggested thoughtfully, "a man has assets of which he is unaware. I wish I could help you. But I'm in debt myself. Government employees are not over-paid."

Marjorie interrupted. "How about your insurance, Arthur?"

Diamond snapped his fingers. "I never thought of that. I have a policy that must have a cash value of several hundreds. Then there are accumulated dividends that I turned back as additional insurance. I can cash them."

"And if you are not too proud to accept aid from the woman you love," said Marjorie loyally, "I have quite a snug savings account. Oh, my dear, if you had only come to me before!"

"I tell you what!" Purdy suggested. "Rake up what you can. Add it to

that major part of your stealings which you have cached in banks. Turn it over to me. I'll quietly restore it to the cash account. No one will be any the wiser except us three. If you haven't quite enough, and will give me your oath to pay later into the corporation's conscience fund—well, it's a bit irregular, considering my official capacity, but I'll forget what I know."

Diamond could not believe his good luck. "How about the thousands Luke gave me to spend while I lived, under cover, the life of an embezzler?"

Purdy shrugged. "That money," he informed Diamond, "came from Luke's personal funds. It amounts to a pre-death legacy from him, though I fancy he must be turning in his grave at the thought. Where did Luke get this money? It was not stolen from the

company. He had dipped too far into the corporation's assets—dared not take more. In the course of my investigating, I learned that Doctor Baynes supplied Luke with the money you spent. What arrangement they had between them, we'll probably never know."

Though he was an old man he had once been young himself and in love with the most wonderful girl in the world. So Jim Purdy turned and trudged out of the private office

He glanced back as he closed the door—and smiled. They made a pretty picture, Marjorie and Arthur, in each other's arms.

"After all," Purdy reflected, "love is about the only thing in life that really counts. That boy will go straight as a die from now on. I'm playing a winner."



SCOTLAND YARD KEEPS TABS ON NIGHT CLUBS

FOR some time past, Scotland Yard detectives have been in regular attendance at the fashionable night clubs of London, posing as guests of the establishments. The detectives have been gathering evidence for the Home Secretary, who desires to ask for legislation giving the police greater control of these resorts. While on this assignment, the Scotland Yard men have been powerless to prevent the sale of liquor after hours when it is permitted under the law, owing to the fact that they had no search warrants. Alarmed by this police activity, the proprietors of the night clubs are planning to move to the fashionable West End, Kensington, and other suburbs, as it is getting too risky for them to continue to conduct their business in the downtown districts of the British metropolis.

HIS TWELFTH MISTAKE

ALTHOUGH only twenty years old, Joseph de Martini has been arrested twelve times, with seven convictions. On these seven convictions he has served about five years in various jails, or one quarter of his life. His latest misstep was one in which he showed extremely poor judgment. While riding in the subway which connects Manhattan Island with Long Island, he attempted to pick the pocket of a man whom he judged to be a likely victim. However, the proposed trick failed, De Martini obviously lacking Thubway Tham's technique in selecting persons from whom to lift leathers. The man whom he tried to rob proved to be Detective William Kinken, who at once placed him under arrest. De Martini's first arrest occurred when he was eleven years of age.

Big-nose Charley and Madey-line

by Charles W. Tyler

Author of "Tramps—Hobos—Bums," etc.

I—I BEG yuh puddin', mum," said "Big-nose Charley," holding out a fat gold-mesh bag, which he had just rescued from the sidewalk, "but don't this belong to youse?"

The lady uttered a little squeal. "Oh, dear! How terribly stupid of me. Why, of course. Yes." She took the bag, and then turned on Charley a pair of large, luminous orbs that gleamed with gratitude. "Oh, you great, big, wonderful man! How can I ever repay you?"

"Oh, 'at's all right, leddy," said Charley, lifting his hat and making a bow. "Ut wa'n't nuthin' er tall. I wuz wery glad to be uh service to yuh. Warm, ain't ut?"

"But you might have kept it," cried the lady, beaming on Charley. "You might have run off with it. I think it is really marvelous. Why, you don't know how much money there is in there." She pinched the meaty portion of the gold-mesh affair and shook her head. "I wish I might reward you. I would if I were not afraid of giving offense. One could see at a glance that you are a man of affluence. If you were of the lower classes the matter could be adjusted so simply. Really, I am quite embarrassed. At least you might tell me to whom I am so indebted."

Big-nose Charley shifted his weight from one foot to the other and fumbled

his hat about, wondering if it was all right to put it back where it belonged. "Meh mon—I mean meh name is Hosey Barnum," said Charley at last.

"Really," purred the lady, ogling the gentleman. "Posey Barnum. How quaint. And mine is Madey-line. Madey-line Bright. Shake hands, Mr. Farnum."

"I'm pleased t' meetcha, Miss Wright," said Charley. "Lots of folks in Los Angulus this mornin'."

"Oh, and I just love crowds," Madey-line affirmed, clasping her hands and rolling her eyes. "I was never so happy as when caught in that seething crush of humanity at the corner of Sumner and Washington Streets, Bawston. Dear-r, old Bawston!"

"Do youse come from Bost'n?" said Charley, taking a little more interest in Madey-line. "'At's meh ol' stampin' groun', too. Oh, my, yea-ah."

"You-u come from Bawston?" exclaimed Madey-line. "Goodness, how thrilling! And I might have known from your knightly manner. You know"—lowering her voice—"Westerners are so crass. Don't you find them so, Mr. Farnum?"

Charley admitted that he did. He thought, however, that it was the way they talked.

"The sword of Bunker Hill!" cried Madey-line dramatically, pressing one hand against her bosom and looking at

the top of the Biltmore Hotel. "Con-cud and Lexington! The old State House! The cradle of our l-libert-e! The home of swe-et freedom! My-y Bawston!"

Big-nose Charley eyed Madey-line a little doubtfully, while he began to edge off. He was not quite sure what sort of a grand dame this was. She was a swell looker all right, but she talked as though she might be just a little bit sun kissed. People were beginning to notice them, and Charley had distinctly heard one withered old lady exclaim with deep disgust "Will ye look at the *bean-eater!* Hump! Bah! Will ye look at him!"

"I'm sor-reh, leddy," said Charley, sneaking his hat back on his head, "but I got t' be goin'."

"Oh, must you?" Madey-line seemed disappointed. "Dear me, I could just talk Bawston with you all-l day. It makes me quite homesick, really. Are you living in southern California now, might I arsk?"

"No'm," said Charley, shooting a glance up and down Hill Street; "I come for me healt', but ut don't agree with meh."

"Oh, dear," sighed Madey-line. "I'm so-o sorry. I'm so-o sorry it doesn't agree with you."

"'At's all right," Charley assured her. "I'll be fine as soon I git off the main stem an' back to the sticks. I wuz thinkin' some of goin' to Bishop fishin'."

Madey-line's eyes took on a peculiar cast and she welcomed the opportunity to scrutinize Mr. Barnum closely while he was fidgeting and gazing up and down the street, seemingly very ill at ease. The faint trace of a contemptuous smile flickered for one brief moment on her face, and then the Beacon Street mask was again drawn up over her features.

"What a picturesque manner of speech," gushed the lady as Charley's innocent gray orbs once more turned her

way. "Bawstonians are always so-o entertainingly original."

"Yes, mum," agreed Charley.

The lady now pursed up her lips and waxed a trifle confidential, while she watched Charley with shrewd eyes that were shuttered by long lashes. "I'm so sorry you must hurry; I was just going to look at some gems."

"H'm!" said Charley.

"And think!" cried Madey-line. "How terrible, how humiliating, it would have been to have made extensive purchases, only to discover the loss of my money. Ah, my dear, kind Bawston friend, how much I owe you."

Big-nose Charley removed his hat again, as though preparing for a longer stay. His face lighted up, and he seemed to take a new interest in Madey-line. He fished tobacco and papers from his pocket; then returned them.

"Oh, smoke! Do!" The lady, it seemed, wished to put Mr. Barnum at his ease. "I love gems, precious stones," she went on.

"Jums is meh hobby, too," said Charley.

"Oo-o!" cooed Madey-line. "Isn't that wonderful. To think that our tastes are in similar channels. May I hazard the guess that you are a connoisseur, then, of jewels?"

"No, mum," said Charley cautiously, "I never got enough f'r that."

"It is quite the thing among the élite, an interest in art treasures," declared the lady warmly. "Perhaps you would like to help me in making one or two selections. Oh, but I forgot; you were in a hurry."

"Well, I tell yuh," Charley said. "Ut wuz only a real estater that's goin' to sell a couple hotels I got in Hollywood. Ut can wait. Big deals ain't nothin' to me—just a li'le fun an' amusement. Yuh has quite intricked meh, mentioning jums. If yuh would like meh, I'd take pleasure in assistin' yuh to pick out some swell rocks—I mean di'mun's, or any-

thin'. I'd like to get meh a couple me-self."

"Splendid!" cried Madey-line, patting her hands together, and dropping her gold-mesh bag again at the same time.

As Charley rescued it once more, the lady's eyes became luminous with some strange emotion. "Oh, I'm getting so stupid. I—— Really, I should not be out alone. Thank you, so-o much," she said as Charley returned the flimsy affair for the second time. "I'm quite overcome."

"Yes, mum," said Charley meekly.

"I know so little of the shops in Loce Ahng-hayl-ais," the lady rattled on. "One hardly knows which way to turn. Could you suggest a really reliable jewelery establishment?"

Charley didn't know. He was thinking rapidly. In the meantime, he looked as stupid as possible, which required no great amount of effort. At last he suggested they stroll around the corner; he thought he remembered a joint—a store where there was a rather impressive display of the jewelers' art. It made Charley's mouth water when he thought of the "di'muns" and things lying around on their little velvet-lined trays, and doing nobody any good at all.

As Madey-line Bright and Posey Barnum fell in and started off, Detective South and Inspector Morrison, who had been watching from a respectful distance, trailed along.

Inspector Morrison was from Boston himself. He had spent many hectic hours in the Hub trying to get the goods on Big-nose Charley. He had never been lucky enough to nail the lanky scalawag bang to rights. The inspector was in California for his health, and, being related to Detective South, on his wife's side of the family, he spent considerable of his time in the company of the Los Angeles dick.

A sailor's idea of a good time when on shore leave is frequently to get a

boat and go rowing; and a mill worker often takes his vacation by putting on a white collar and hanging around where he can watch the gang come out at noon, and a carpenter out of employment likes to sit on a fence and watch some other carpenters build a house. And so with a copper off duty; he is never happy unless he can drop into the ward room occasionally and gossip with the boys for a few minutes.

Inspector Morrison, homesick for the force, was quite content when in the company of Detective South, on duty. It pleased him in particular to be prowling along on the trail of Big-nose Charley again. The officer even found himself possessed of a little bit of affection for the old rogue from Kerry Village. California was not half so bad with Charley popping up for a diversion now and then.

Detective South was jubilant. He was sure that within a very short time Big-nose Charley would be in the clutches of the law. Once the thief had been sentenced, Inspector Morrison could drop a line back to Pemberton Square and acquaint the Boston dicks with the fact that it had taken a Los Angeles copper to send the old crook over the road.

Detective South chuckled, his shoulders shaking, as Madey-line and Big-nose Charley disappeared around a corner. "Pretty neat, eh, Morrison?" he said.

"I don't know," was the somewhat doubtful reply. "I never did think much of framing any one, even a crook."

"Well, you know the guy is guilty of a lot of jobs that you could never prove on him, don't you?" demanded the detective.

Inspector Morrison admitted that this was so.

"Nothing to it then," affirmed Detective South. "He should be in stir right now. All right, we'll make hay while the sun shines. Brains against brains.

We'll dig a pit and just let the bird fall into it."

"You think you can do it?" asked the inspector. "You think this woman is smart enough to pull a convincing come-on."

"Aw-w, sure!" cried Detective South. "She's one of the best operatives in the business. Sam Nichols and I went over it two or three times. You see, Nichols was at headquarters once. Now he's running an agency on his own. I was telling him about Big-nose Charley, and he volunteered to let Madey-line help me out. That old stiff has been hanging around downtown here a week now, his eyes on the jewelry stores. Fair enough; we'll give him all the jewelry stores he wants for one spell."

Madey-line and Charley entered a doorway that was bounded on either side by broad show windows in which glittered all manner of costly jewels. A suave and polished gentleman with a shiny bald head approached and hovered in front of the newcomers.

"Good mawn-n-ing," greeted the salesman.

Madey-line beamed her prettiest and cooed a refined salutation.

Big-nose Charley bowed, and said: "Howdy do, adm'r'l."

The salesman, when he had done smirking at Madey-line, cast a cool glance at Charley. He did not like smart Alecks, but Charley's expression was so vacant that the gentleman was almost sorry for him.

"I would like to look at some unset diamonds," said Madey-line, beaming on the salesman.

"Yes. Certainly, madam."

"This gentleman has kindly consented to assist me in making one or two selections," the lady took pains to point out. "He rescued my mesh bag a few moments ago, and it has developed that we are both from Bawston."

As the salesman placed a tray of unset stones on the top of the showcase,

he looked at Charley as much as to say: "It is a wonder that you didn't run off with it." What he did say aloud was: "Ladies are prone to be very careless. You should be more careful; Los Angeles is full of crooks."

Big-nose Charley grinned foolishly. "Ain't ut the truth?" he said. "Oh, my, yea-ah."

Madey-line began picking up the stones, one at a time. She did not seem to care so very much for the assortment. At length she asked: "Are these all you have?"

"Oh, no," the salesman hastened to assure her. "We have larger, more expensive stones." He departed in the direction of the open safe a short distance to the rear.

Madey-line once more dropped her bag. Big-nose Charley stooped to pick it up. As he did so, Miss Bright deftly palmed three fairly sizable diamonds. An instant later she was once more all confusion and full of apologies concerning her utter stupidity. She received the gold-mesh affair from her companion, and then said gushingly: "Oh, dear, dear! I told you I needed a guardian. My fingers are all thumbs this morning."

The salesman returned with a tray of sparklers that almost made Big-nose Charley burst out sobbing. These seemed to inspire interest in Madey-line at once.

"Oo-o! The dar-r-lings! Stones set me crazy!" The lady turned to Charley. "Aren't they s-simply gor-r-geous?"

"Them is swell rocks," Charley agreed.

The salesman scowled, turning a mean eye on the fashionably attired old reprobate across the counter. "Are you interested in diamonds?" he demanded ungraciously.

"I'm loony about 'em," Charley confessed.

Personally the salesman thought the

other looked like an old nut, but he did not say so.

Big-nose Charley suddenly decided to roll another smoke. He fumbled in his side coat pockets for the makings, and as his hand came out of the pocket nearest Miss Bright the flap was left conveniently open. A moment later Madey-line craftily dropped therein three diamonds, which she had lifted from the tray. Then she glanced casually toward the door, and was gratified to note that Detective South and his friend, Mr. Morrison, were within signaling distance.

Madey-line, with a most gracious air, asked Mr. Barnum if there was anything that he would like to look at besides diamonds. Charley scratched his ear, which was a bad sign, and finally requested the salesman to show him a pair of binoculars. The gentleman called a brother in the trade, and some field glasses were produced.

Madey-line continued to examine the diamonds. Charley assisted her by looking at them through the glasses. He then examined the door, the ceiling, the salesman—anything that caught his eye.

The men behind the counter exchanged glances and rolled their eyes to high heaven in token of the fact that here was an old cuckoo for fair—and Madey-line took advantage of the opportunity to palm an eight-hundred-dollar diamond, which she almost at once dropped into Charley's pocket with the other three.

The diamond salesman scowled and began to cast suspicious eyes at both of the customers. Big-nose Charley took the cigarette, which he had rolled, but not lighted, from his mouth and dropped it into his pocket, while he licked his lips and began unscrewing first the lens, and then the eyepiece, and then screwing them back again, and trying all of the focusing adjustments. He inquired the price. They were eight power; one hundred and ten dollars, and a bargain.

Madey-line picked up diamond after diamond, and at last glanced toward the door again. Charley felt for the makings once more. He removed some of the rice-paper leaves from the little orange-colored pack, and then suddenly seemed to change his mind. Always his hands were moving, and with a sort of cumbersome ease that was deceiving. He replaced the tobacco and tissues, and resumed his contemplation of the glasses.

Charley unscrewed the eyepiece again and looked down the hole as though trying to discover what made the pictures. He took out the lens and looked through the prism. Objects were visible, but the magnifying power was gone. A guy could have lots of fun with the things. He replaced the eyepiece and lens, after some fussing and fidgeting, and began a study of objects by gazing through the wrong end. He paid particular attention to his lady friend, much to her annoyance. She scowled at him.

"H'm," said Charley at last, as the binocular salesman returned from an errand at the front of the store. "A hun'erd an' ten bucks. Ain't yuh got some cheaper uns, perfess'r?"

"Yes; six power," said the salesman snappily, handing Charley another pair. "Fifty-eight dollars. A bargain, I can tell you."

"Cheap at half the price," declared Charley, pulling out a roll of bills. "Put 'em in a bag."

It was at this point that Madey-line apparently reached the conclusion that there was nothing here that suited her. Also, the diamond salesman, who had been looking over the sparklers on the two trays sharply, discovered that all was not placid on the Hudson. Some of the gems were missing, as sure as his name was Felix. He looked about him, his mouth open and ready to call for help.

Unseen by the salesman or Charley, Madey-line flashed a signal to the wait-

ing officers outside. Detective South and Inspector Morrison entered hurriedly. The salesman near the trays containing the unset stones spoke sharply to a gentleman who, it developed, was the junior partner. The personage who had sold Charley the binoculars walked swiftly around the counter and ordered the uniformed attendant to close the door and lock it.

Detective South flashed his badge. "What's the matter here?" he quickly demanded.

"These folks were looking at some diamonds," said the salesman who waited on Madey-line, "and I have just discovered that there are some stones missing."

"Well, that isn't so hard to answer," declared Detective South. He took Friend Barnum firmly by the arm. "This fellow here is Big-nose Charley. He's a crook from Boston."

"You have deceived me," reproached Miss Bright, rolling her eyes at Charley. She then glanced appealing at the detective. "Why, he told me his name was Hosey Farnum."

"Barnum," corrected Charley.

"Hosey Barnum!" exclaimed Inspector Morrison. "That's a good one. Ha-ha!"

"Why, how d' ye do, inspect'r," greeted Charley, smiling at his old nemesis. "Ain't yuh gone back to Beantown yet?"

"That man is a thief?" cried the junior partner incredulously. "He doesn't look like one."

"Thieves never look the part," said Detective South. "This swell-dressed old stone getter has served more time and stolen more stuff than any crook I ever heard of."

The diamond salesman had been taking account of stock. He now reported that there were five stones missing, with a total valuation of about two thousand dollars.

Madey-line uttered a panicky little

squeal. "Oh, dear!" she panted. "Oh, dear me!"

"Who's the woman? Is she a crook, too?" demanded the junior partner.

Miss Bright came to her own defense and explained hastily how she had come to meet this Mr. Posey Farnum. She dropped part of her cloak of affectation, and Charley looked at her quizzically. Madey-line drew back and assumed a modest pose.

"That's your story," said the diamond salesman, "but you were the one who handled the stones. That bird was looking at binoculars."

"You'll arrest them both?" said the junior partner, raising his eyebrows. "They will have to be searched—unless they care to make a clean breast of it all right here."

Miss Bright and Detective South exchanged glances.

"Oh, the woman is all right," said the dick quickly.

"How do we know?" demanded the junior partner, who seemed to be of a prying disposition.

After Charley had rescued Madey-line's gold-mesh bag from the floor the last time, the lady had placed it on the counter. It rested there now under the nose of the junior partner. The gentleman glanced at it sharply. "Women are clever thieves," he said. He picked up the ornate purse and opened it suddenly, and the first thing he saw, nestling among some crumpled bills, was an unset diamond.

"There's one of them!" cried the salesman as his eyes lighted on the stone. "In the woman's bag."

"I told you!" exclaimed the junior partner.

Madey-line Bright's eyes popped wide open, her jaw sagged, and a startled cry came from her lips. "How did *that* get there?" she gasped.

"You tell us," said the salesman coldly.

The junior partner looked at the de-

tectives. "A lady crook! I guess this big fellow was only a stall."

Detective South let go of Charley's arm and began rubbing his jaw. Here was a fine mess! Somebody had pulled a bone. He looked at Madey-line. The lady spoke, but there was no flowery Bostonese cloaking her words now. She would tell the cockeyed world that she was nobody's goat! If a blasted diamond got in her bag somebody *put* it there; she didn't!

Big-nose Charley eyed Madey-line sadly. "I didn't think ut uh yuh," he said. He took out his tobacco and a cigarette paper and began rolling a smoke for himself, shaking his head gloomily at the same time. "Yuh know, ol' Solomun, he says: 'Whose hatred is covered by deceit, their wickudness will get showed up in front uh the whole bunch.' Oh, my, yea-ah. 'At's what th' ol' kink says."

"You big mutt, *you* put it there!" accused Madey-line. "If I was a man I'd haul off and knock your eye! You—you long-legged, funny-faced, queer old thing!"

"There's something wrong, I am sure," put in Detective South. "This lady is a private detective, one of Sam Nichols' best operatives. I suspected that this crook was going to hold up a jewelry store, and we were trying to get him in the act. Sam and I are old friends, and he offered to put Miss Bright here on the job for a day or two. He handles the protective end for you folks."

"I know," said the junior partner, "but even detectives get light fingered, and this woman might have thought it was a good chance to get one of the pretty stones for herself."

"I tell you I don't know how that diamond got in my purse!" Madey-line reaffirmed. "I—I am not a thief!"

Detective South turned to Big-nose Charley. "What did you put that diamond in the lady's purse for?" he

shouted angrily. "Come on! Come on, now!"

"Why, of 'is'r," said Charley, sticking the cigarette into his mouth, "yuh got meh all wron'; I never done nothin' of the kind." He turned to Mr. Morrison. "Will yuh kindly give meh a light, inspect'r?" he asked.

Inspector Morrison proffered his half-smoked cigar, a peculiar light in his eyes. Charley had not played his ace, and the Boston officer could not help feeling a glow of pride in this Boston-reared old scalawag. It wasn't going to be the cinch to send him up that Detective South had anticipated.

"And, furthermore," the junior member of the big jewelry firm was saying fretfully, "I don't like the idea of steering crooks in here without giving us some warning."

"I didn't steer him in!" cried Madey-line.

"No; he steered you in," sneered the salesman, "and that was just as bad."

"Charley, you going to hand over those diamonds, or have we got to take you out back and frisk you?" demanded Detective South.

"I ain't got no di'mun's," said Charley stoutly.

"You're a liar!" cried the dick, now thoroughly angry. "You have got them, and you planted that stone in this young lady's purse to throw suspicion on her. No more monkeying, you going to come across?"

Charley shook his head.

"You got a place where we can take this fool apart?" the detective asked the junior partner.

A moment later Detective South and Inspector Morrison were in a back room with Charley. At the end of half an hour the old scamp was allowed to resume his garments. No diamonds had been found on him.

Detective South was in a perspiration. He mopped his forehead and went out to talk with Madey-line. He was furi-

ous. Something was outrageous in Denmark. "I've telephoned for the matron," he told the lady. "You're next. We got to do it to satisfy these gentlemen."

"Oh, go as far as you like!" replied Madey-line in a shrill voice. "But Heaven help you when I get out of here. Sam and his favors! Bah! Rats! Fools!"

And there were no diamonds on Madey-line. The police matron was sure; she had been very careful.

Detective South began to feel dizzy. He looked helplessly at his friend, Inspector Morrison. "What in the name of Mike would you do in a case like that?" he cried.

The inspector shook his head. "We've been through it before," he said. "We've had Big-nose Charley with us a good while, and he shows us a new one every now and then."

"You sure you lost more than one diamond?" Detective South turned desperately to the salesman.

"Humph! Say, don't you suppose we know how many stones we had here?"

"Yes, I guess so." Detective South waxed mournful. A fine scheme to send Big-nose Charley to San Quentin was up the creek. Four diamonds had gone into thin air. He eyed Charley savagely. "For a plugged nickle, I'd give you a punch in the eye, on general principles!"

But Big-nose Charley was not listening. He was talking to Inspector Morrison, of Boston. "I'm awful glad to meet yuh, inspect'r," he said. "Yuh al-lus treated meh fine, an' the other boys at the club house up to Pemb'rt'n Square. Give 'em meh regards when yuh get back, won't yuh?"

"I'll tell them that I saw you, Charley," said the inspector, "and that you are just as good as ever."

"I like yuh, inspect'r," Charley went on, "an' I'm goin' t' make yuh a li'le present."

Inspector Morrison laughed. "Yes?"

"I just bought a pair of swell binickl'rs," said Charley, picking up from the counter the glasses he had selected and paid for, "an' I'm goin' to give 'em to yuh—f'r ol' times sake, when you an' me wuz leggin' ut up an' down Tremont Street."

Charley handed the glasses to Inspector Morrison. The latter took them and turned them over and over wonderingly.

"You mean it, Charley?" he asked at last.

"S-sure. I j'st paid the guy fer 'em a minut' ago. Yuh may need 'em some time. I'm goin' to buy me another pair so's I can look f'r you coppers." Big-nose Charley turned to the salesman who had waited on him before. "Show meh some more uh them see-fars," he directed.

A few minutes later, Big-nose Charley had selected and paid for a pair of eight-power binoculars. One hundred and ten dollars, and he believed that the money was well spent.

"An' now," he said, addressing Detective South, "if yuh ain't got any more objections, I guess I'll be leavin'. I wuz goin' down to Wenice this arternoon, or some place."

Detective South waved his hand helplessly. "On your way. But you wait, there's another day coming."

Big-nose Charley removed his hat and now bowed low before Miss Madey-line Bright. "I wuz awful glad to meet yuh," he said politely, "an' I hope I sees yuh in Beantown some time; I'll show yuh all aroun'. Goo'-by. Goo'-by." He gave a little flippant wave and shambled out of the door.

What Charley did not pause to explain was the fact that he had suspected a frame-up when he caught a glimpse of Detective South and Inspector Morrison hovering in the background during his early conversation with Madey-line.

When this lady dropped her purse in

the jewelry store, she little suspected that Mr. Hosey Barnum had already palmed a diamond and had it ready to plant on her when the opportunity was presented. It was Charley's idea of a joke. But an instant had been required to put it in the gold-mesh bag when he stooped to recover it. The rest had been simple, after leaving the flap of his coat pocket invitingly open, and he had prac-

ticed a bit of legerdemain with the gems that Madey-line accommodatingly planted on him.

Later that day, in the privacy of his room in an apartment on Western Avenue, Hollywood, Big-nose Charley removed from the interior of one barrel of the binoculars he had purchased, four diamonds, each wrapped carelessly in a bit of cigarette paper



ESCAPE JAIL WITH MAKESHIFT TORCH

SEVEN convicts recently broke out of the Riverside Penitentiary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, by burning their way through the roof in the North block with a makeshift electric torch. They were all long-term men, their offenses ranging from robbery to murder. Two of the fugitives were captured in making their get-away. One was shot in the leg by a guard and fell, another was recognized by two motor-cycle patrolmen and captured. The other five fled in a stolen auto.

The jail break had been planned for weeks, according to Lawrence O'Leary, one of the captured men. While O'Leary kept watch for the approach of the guards, the others began using a piece of carbon and electric current from an ordinary light socket. They burned a hole through the metal ceiling of the building in which they were allowed to walk at will for four hours during the afternoon. They made their way to the attic and then to the outside roof by breaking through the slate, thence to the wall, by an easy leap. From this point, it was a simple matter to gain the ground outside the wall with the aid of a wire rope, which had previously been prepared from scrap wire.



DOOR KEYS FURNISH CLEW TO ROBBERIES

WHEN detectives raided an apartment at 155 Amity Street, Brooklyn, New York, a little while ago, they arrested two men and seized five thousand dollars' worth of jewelry and other valuables which they identified as having been stolen from thirty or more homes. A more significant find, however, was a loop of wire on which were strung two hundred door keys. In the opinion of the police, these keys furnish the solution to a series of mysterious robberies. One of the men placed under arrest was a locksmith by occupation and had been employed at a locksmith's establishment on Third Avenue, New York, for several months. During those months, he fashioned duplicates of two hundred keys belonging to his employer's customers. When he left his job last October, the locksmith-burglar began to rob the homes to which he had obtained the duplicate keys. His burglaries mystified the police, as they gave the impression that the homes had been robbed by thieves who got out through locked doors and sealed windows. The find of the collection of keys disposed of this mystery.

Hung on Wire

By Ernest M. Poate

Author of "Seeing Things," etc.

IT was five o'clock. The boss, who was so particular about starting the milking on time, had not showed up.

For a few minutes, Peter Brady went on absently bunching the fragrant clover; then, with a worried glance at the sun, he started for the house, trailing his pitchfork.

"Oh, Mis' Madison!" he shouted into the kitchen door. "If them pails is ready, I expect I better take 'em out, and start milkin'."

An old lady thrust out her white head. "I expect you better had, Pete," she answered nervously. "The pails is all ready, right in the milk house. I don't know what's keepin' Henry. The boy's always so prompt."

"Where's Ralph?" asked the hired man. "I sh'd think he c'd help a feller oncet in a while."

The little old lady creased her apron with unsteady fingers. "Oh, Ralph—why, Ralph, he went to the village 'long 'bout four o'clock."

Brady nodded rather sullenly and turned away. "Might know he'd dodge milkin' time," he muttered to himself. "Dang good fer nothin'. Oh, well, I s'pose he's too strong to work. But it beats my time what Henry Madison wanted with keepin' such a gosh blame loafer 'round the place."

He whistled shrilly. "Where's that dang dawg?" Then he stepped into the milk house, and emerged with half a dozen nested pails, which he carried into the long, low basement of the cow barn. This was strictly against the rules; but

if the boss couldn't come home to attend the milking he'd have to stand for it being done the best way it could. Thus mutinously thinking, Brady slammed the pails down on the cow-barn floor, and whistled again. "Here Shep, Shep! C'me 'ere b'fore I kick your dang head off!"

Thus apostrophized, Shep appeared from his cool hollow beneath the milk house, one foot at a time, yawning tremendously. He glanced at the hired man, and immediately assumed an expression of sheepish guilt. Mechanically he dodged the kick which Brady as mechanically proffered; and an entente was established.

"C'me on, Shep," invited the man. "Go fetch 'em!"

Flag waving, the dog bounded happily off down the long lane toward the hill pasture. Brady yawned widely, and propped himself against the side of the open cow-stable door. He chuckled; then put both hands to his mouth, and sent a long, mellow call ringing up the hillside: "Co-bo-o-o-oss!"

He idled, calling at intervals, for another ten or fifteen minutes, perversely putting off what he knew he should have done at once. For the hill pasture was large, and contained a wood lot; the most intelligent cow dog could scarcely round up the herd without considerable difficulty.

But neither Henry Madison nor Henry's cousin appeared to help him; so finally, muttering to himself, the hired man started sullenly down the long lane. Halfway down, he stopped just this side

of the rough bridge which spanned a small creek, and shouted once more. "Coboss! Go git 'em, Shep." Here the thick growth of willows on either side obscured his view. There were no cows in sight. He muttered profanely, and stamped impatiently on across the bridge. "Beats all Henry Madison wouldn't— Great gosh a'mighty!"

For perhaps thirty seconds Brady stood rigid, with an odd expression upon his broad, stolid features. His little, pale eyes stared stupidly at something hung upon the woven-wire fence at the left of the lane. At first glance, it seemed a mere bag of clothes, a scarecrow carelessly thrown aside; it was so limp, so motionless.

Yet it was no scarecrow. It was the body of a heavily built young man, pitifully limp and flaccid. Obviously, the man was dead. The body lay half suspended from the top of the low three-strand wire fence; its chin was hooked over this wire, which sagged low with the weight. The face was invisible, looking downward, overhung by a shock of thick, black hair; on the other side of the fence, the arms dropped loosely, and the trunk sprawled backward to wide-thrown, half-bent legs, so that the dead man seemed to have pitched forward from a kneeling posture to be prevented by the wire from falling on his face.

"Great gosh a'mighty!" repeated the awestruck Brady. "Looks like he had his last fit." He grinned mirthlessly.

He advanced half fearfully toward the body, but did not touch it. Thus he stood for an uneasy moment, stupidly wondering at the dark-purple flush of the half-hidden face, which was cut off so cleanly by that strangling wire. At last he scratched his head, his brow corrugated with unaccustomed thought.

"I s'pose I oughta tell somebody," he muttered.

He half turned, cast back one uneasy glance at that still body, and started

slowly toward the house. After a few steps, he stopped again to glance over his shoulder; then he went on faster, and faster, until he was running at top speed.

Peter Brady burst into the house; his face was distorted, unhealthily mottled with bluish red; his eyes bulged, his breath rattled hoarsely in his throat.

"Mis' Madison," he wheezed, almost voiceless. "Mis' Madison! We gotta have a doctor—Henry's out there—" He broke off abruptly, to turn that apprehensive glance over his shoulder.

The little old lady dropped a frying pan, so that it rang vibrantly upon the scrubbed floor. "My Henry's dead," she declared evenly. Her face was perfectly placid. "Where is he?" A brief pause, then: "He had a fit, I suppose?"

Gradually, her veined old hands began to tremble; a visible tremor ran over her whole bent, shrunken body. Her withered lips twitched; and then the frozen calm of her face was suddenly broken up into a pathetically unbeautiful distortion.

"I—I don't know what to do," she quavered, wringing her hands. "What shall I do?"

"Send fer Doc Sanders, I s'pose," grunted Brady. "He's the coroner." He spoke with mild scorn, his own agitation calmed by the old lady's tragic ineptitude.

Mrs. Madison threw her apron over her head. "I wisht you'd see to things, Pete," she implored. "Henry, he—always said you was the best hired man he'd ever had here."

Peter Brady nodded sullenly. "Aw right," he agreed ungraciously, and stamped out. His moment of excitement was past; he reacted according to type. "This ain't what I was hired for," he grumbled beneath his breath. "Pity she c'dn't have done it herself; anyways, where's that dang Ralph? He's too brash, that feller; I'd like to see him git his comeuppance!"

He walked around the house, looking this way and that for the sorrel mare which Ralph Madison had driven. Then he reëntered, and marched sulkily through to the front hall, where he wound the crank of the wall telephone. "Gimme Doc Sanders," he demanded.

"Doc Sanders? . . . That you, doc? . . . Say, you'd better come out here; Henry Madison's dead. . . . Huh? Yeah, a fit. Hung himself over the fence. . . . What? Naw, I ain't touched him, ner I ain't a-gonna. . . . Huh? A' right, if I gotto."

He hung up the receiver, muttering, and marched reluctantly back toward the body of his erstwhile employer, to mount guard until the coroner should come.

For fifteen minutes he stood upon the little bridge, with his eyes carefully averted from that still form. The cows drifted past, one by one, their milking time long past; from the barnyard the sound of uneasy lowing began to arise.

At last, upon the road that ran some two hundred yards away, Peter Brady perceived a distant cloud of dust, from which emerged a lean, long-headed horse, traveling swiftly, with the curious rocking motion of the pacer. "'Bout time Ralph was gettin' back," muttered Brady. "Bet he founders that mare some day, an' then Henry'll—" And there he paused, remembering that Henry could no longer protest. "By 'mighty! W'y, the mare belongs to Ralph now—and the whole dang place! Huh. I expect I'd better quit!"

At the opposite end of the long road a new and larger cloud of dust appeared, and advanced rapidly, accompanied by a rising clamor. "There's Doc Sanders, now. Him and Ralph'll get there about the same time."

The clamant dust cloud neared, and from it emerged a rattling, disreputable motor car, still decorated with the mud stains of last spring; yet it must have

been sound beneath the mud, for Doctor Sanders drove furiously.

"Got Doc Pettibone with him, looks like," speculated Brady, and raised a long, carrying shout: "Ah-hoo!"

In the racing car, now opposite, some one turned a head; Peter Brady waved his arms violently, semaphore fashion. An arm was tossed up in answer; and the car roared on, to turn into the Madisons' driveway.

Peter Brady grunted, and sat down on the edge of the bridge, his back carefully turned to the body. He produced a noisome pipe, and stuffed it moodily. "They'll talk, and talk," he grumbled. "What's the use? Anybody c'd see what killed him. Heck, I wisht it had of b'n Ralph!"

Presently three small figures appeared at the end of the lane, and came swiftly on. Between the two physicians walked Ralph Madison; tall, slimly erect, and darkly handsome. His slender, well-kept hands were busy; he talked rapidly, his large, brown eyes moving from one companion to the other. His narrow face quivered with grief.

On his left walked Doctor Sanders, short and slight, emaciated, consumed with nervous energy. He walked jerkily, smoking so fast that he seemed to be burning inside, for a continuous plume of smoke floated behind him. On the other side walked Doctor Pettibone, large, rotund, and ponderous, monumentally calm.

The three passed Peter Brady, and went on toward the body. The hired man, ignored, scrambled to his feet and slouched after them. Ralph Madison stepped forward, wringing his hands. "Oh, Henry! Poor Henry!" he cried throatily.

"Yahr!" snorted Pete Brady.

While Ralph stood at one side, his hands decorously covering his face, the two physicians advanced toward the body. "Well, well, well!" barked Doctor Sanders irritably. "Ought to take

him down, first thing; don't look decent to leave him."

Doctor Pettibone removed his flat-crowned derby hat, to wipe a vast expanse of forehead that was dead white, despite the July sun. "We might—ah, make an examination *in situ* first, perhaps," he offered suavely. "Perhaps, the jury——"

The smaller physician writhed with annoyance. "The jury'll take what I tell them!" he declared.

None the less, he approached the body without touching it; and for a moment the large pale doctor and the small red one leaned over that unmoving figure with professional interest.

"Perfectly simple—obvious," declared Doctor Sanders. "Strangulation during an epileptic fit."

"Ah—quite so," agreed Doctor Pettibone, softly, chafing his large, pale hands together. "Mechanical asphyxia during a grand mal epileptiform convulsion."

His attention distracted by a noise from the direction of the road, Doctor Sanders jerked quickly about, and began to stare. "Heavens!" he said. "Here comes the 'epileptologist.' Now, how on earth——"

"Ah!" remarked Doctor Pettibone blandly. His large, pale face remained placid; but there was an ugly glint in his bulbous eyes. "An interesting young man. Yes, yes, yes."

Sanders gave a complicated wriggle of disgust. "Ha!"

"Perhaps a trifle opinionated," Doctor Pettibone continued benignly. "He actually insisted that Bessie Proudfit was not epileptic but hysterical."

Sanders snorted venomously. "Blasted impudence! Just because he spent eight years at the epileptic colony. He told me Bill Patterson wasn't epileptic either; said he was a paretic."

"And did you have a lumbar puncture?" inquired Doctor Pettibone with bland interest.

The other turned redder yet, and ground his teeth. "Ye-ah!" he admitted. "And the darn fool was right."

"Ah!" remarked Doctor Pettibone gently. "Yes, yes, yes." Massaging his large, white hands, he slanted a glance of pity downward at his colleague.

Doctor Sanders started like a shying horse. He clinched hairy fists; his small, black eyes grew keen with suspicion.

"And how about Bessie?" he inquired his usual staccato utterance softened to a malignant pur. "What happened to Bessie? You sent her away, didn't you?"

Once more, the larger physician wiped his tremendous face. Though still pale, it had suddenly become beaded with perspiration. "Ah—uh!" he replied lucidly.

Sanders made a complicated gesture of exasperation. "You big fraud!" he yapped. "She *was* hysterical; you know it! The 'epileptologist' was right."

The larger man seemed to shrink inwardly. He gave a forlorn, shamefaced nod. "Again!" he admitted.

Both men turned to stare toward the road, and the figure advancing from that direction. "Fool whippersnapper!" they pronounced in perfect unison.

By the roadside stood a small car; a flivver, stripped of body, fenders, windshield; a mere chassis, with one bucket seat. "Swell car for a doctor to drive!" growled Sanders. From this had descended a notable figure of a man, who was now approaching the group.

He was a rather awe-inspiring person; though not much over the average height, his circumference was tremendous. He seemed almost globular, and as he walked he rolled majestically, ponderously; yet he advanced with surprising speed. Presently he stood by Henry Madison's body, eying the two physicians from the opposite side of the fence.

Facing him, Doctor Pettibone appeared almost slight. The newcomer

had the healthy fatness of a well-fed baby; he had a baby's face also, tremendously enlarged. His cheeks were round, and pink and white; his eyes were baby blue and guileless. He had an absurd button of a nose, and a tremendously long upper lip, beneath which a wide mouth curved into a disarming smile.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he offered blandly. His voice was high pitched, piping, babyish.

"Good morning, Doctor Strickland," replied Pettibone with bitter courtesy.

"Har!" snorted Sanders.

"I heard that Henry Madison was dead," the newcomer continued ("Must have had your ears pinned back," muttered Sanders, *sotto voce*) "so I thought I'd just come out and see. An interesting case, Henry; mighty nice chap, too."

The other two physicians exchanged a disgusted glance. "Well, well! Let's get to work," urged Sanders. He ignored Doctor Strickland; again the two older physicians leaned over that quiet body. After a rather unnecessarily minute inspection, both straightened. "Satisfied?" asked Sanders; and, "Satisfied," answered Doctor Pettibone.

His soft, blue eyes wide with apparent admiration, Doctor Strickland observed this formality. "And what did he die of, gentlemen?" he asked respectfully.

He received a double stare of unutterable scorn. "Of asphyxia during a convulsion," announced Doctor Pettibone. "Man died in a fit!" barked Sanders.

Strickland's innocent-seeming blue eyes drifted from the faces of his colleagues downward, to rest on the quiet form still hanging from the fence. "In a fit," he repeated softly. "In—a—fit. Remarkable!"

This comment the other two ignored. "We'll take him down now," decided Sanders. He glanced around for Peter Brady; but Peter had vanished. From

the distant cow barn came a clanging of milk pails. Sanders glanced at Pettibone, and the two started awkwardly to scramble over the low fence.

"Permit me, gentlemen," piped Doctor Strickland, in the manner of a well-trained servant. He stooped, and, without apparent effort, raised the limp body of the dead man, turned it in the air, and laid it easily upon the grass.

"Died in a fit," he repeated reflectively. "Extraordinary!"

Thus decently laid out, the body was that of a heavily built, black-haired young man, with a square face which must normally have been rather stolid, though now it was purple and distorted. The congested eyes bulged; the tip of a black tongue showed between parted lips. Across the throat lay a deep-cut crease, made by that choking wire. Here the dusky purple of face and upper neck ended with startling abruptness. Below, the skin was dead white.

Sanders and Pettibone had climbed the fence. "I suppose I'd better impanel a jury," offered Sanders, who was coroner. "Get this thing over with."

Doctor Pettibone nodded solemn agreement. Strickland was upon his knees beside the body, examining its neck with curious intentness. Presently he rose, and stepped to the fence, to examine its top wire; then he returned to the dead man.

"Perhaps you could enlighten us, doctor," offered Pettibone with elaborate sarcasm. "We should be delighted to receive your expert opinion."

"I don't know much," replied the fat young man modestly. He lifted the dead man's right arm, and let it drop back with an audible thud. Rising to his feet, Strickland absently patted pocket after pocket. At last, finding what he sought, he extracted a pipe from his vest pocket, not without difficulty. It was a black and odoriferous pipe. In meditative silence, the epileptologist charged this with virulent to-

bacco, tamping it home with a chubby forefinger. So much accomplished to his liking, he set the pipe-bit between his teeth, and searched himself once more for matches. That black and reeking pipe seemed extraordinarily incongruous in the midst of his wide, baby face.

During all this while Strickland had kept silence. But, when his pipe was lighted, he emitted one vast cloud of blue-black smoke, and drew down his long upper lip and spoke around the pipe stem.

"I don't know much," he piped, "except about epilepsy." And now his voice dropped a full octave, and became deep and assured. "But I do know quite a bit about the epilepsies. Quite—a—bit. And I don't believe this man died in a fit."

"No?" asked Sanders.

"How nice of you to let us know!" drawled Doctor Pettibone with sick malice. "Would you be kind enough to tell us how he did die, then?"

Doctor Strickland's pink-and-white face seemed suddenly to have grown more mature. Fine lines appeared at his eye corners; his wide mouth tightened into a hard line. "Come here, gentlemen," said he gravely. "Take a look at the top wire of this fence."

Reluctantly, the others obeyed; and saw nothing of consequence. "Well, well, well! What of it?" demanded Sanders.

"Woven wire," replied the epileptologist. "With a right-hand twist." He nodded significantly. "Now look here."

He knelt again beside the body of Henry Madison and lifted its chin to show the deep crease beneath. "See those marks?"

"What of that?"

It was a new voice, sharp and insistent. Ralph Madison, who had been standing all this time in the background, absorbed in his own sorrow, had now stepped forward. His hands were

clenched; his whole finely muscled frame was tense. His chin was thrust forward, and his large, black eyes held an insistent question.

Doctor Strickland glanced at him inscrutably, and nodded, as who should say: "Here's one man with sense." But he did not answer the question; still addressing himself to the other physicians, he went on dispassionately.

"This man is limp, not rigid; he has no *risus*. He was strangled, without a shadow of doubt; but in a fit? I—think—not."

"Rubbish! Why not *petit mal*?"

"For several reasons," replied Doctor Strickland with assurance. "For one, Henry never had anything but major convulsions; he had no weaknesses, no fainting attacks." He paused deliberately. "Besides——"

"Well, well, well!" Doctor Sanders' whole meager frame twitched with uncontrollable irritation. "What did he die of—since you know so much?"

Strickland puffed at his villainous pipe for several moments. His face was bland as Buddha's, yet the two physicians and Ralph Madison leaned toward him, tense and unwillingly impressed. In his own good time, the fat young man spoke quietly, almost indifferently.

"Strangled, of course; but not in a fit. He was murdered."

"You fool!" exclaimed Sanders disgustedly. "You're crazy! I got too much to do to listen to any more such rubbish. Ralph"—turning to the dead man's cousin—"I wish you'd go up to the house and phone Sheriff Rogers. Ask him to pick up a jury and send them out here."

Ralph Madison stood irresolute. His slender hands opened and closed, his lips twitched. His narrow face was white. He swallowed twice, with a clicking sound, and spoke difficultly: "But—but, if there's any doubt—I mean, if poor Henry was really mur-

dered—though I don't see how it was possible—we ought to——”

“Rubbish!” Sanders' small, black eyes were red rimmed and furious.

“Do as I tell you!”

Ralph Madison turned obediently away. Sanders and Pettibone turned ostentatious backs upon the interloper, Strickland. But the epileptologist seemed content to be ignored. For a time he wandered rather aimlessly about, glancing here and there; once he dropped to his knees to scrutinize the grass beside the dead man. Then, rising, he began casting about in widening circles, eyes searching the uneven turf.

At last he paused, shaking a dissatisfied head; then he approached the two physicians rather diffidently. By now, Ralph Madison had almost reached the distant barn. The three doctors were alone with the dead man.

“Look here, you fellows,” Doctor Strickland began uncertainly. “I know you don't like me much; but I want to play square. You know that a *grand mal* convulsion begins with a tonic stage; continuous muscular contraction.” Again his voice deepened authoritatively. “Now, I have watched a number of Madison's fits; and in all of them the tonic stage was much prolonged. Suppose that he had stood here, at the onset of a convulsion. He would have pitched forward, perfectly rigid, not even breathing; he would have been almost suffocated before his clonic twitchings began. Now, if he had fallen against that wire at the onset of his convulsion, between the fit itself and the choking of the wire, he must have died *in the fit*. That would mean cadaveric spasm; instantaneous post-mortem rigidity. He would have been as stiff as a board, supported only at the neck and by the tips of his toes. Instead, he was limp as a rag; and still is. He can't have been dead more than a couple of hours.”

The man's quiet confidence commenced to have its effect. Sanders and

Pettibone exchanged an uneasy glance. “I was just thinking——” muttered the latter.

“Of course you know the autopsy findings of death during a convulsion,” Strickland went on. The other two nodded rather uncertainly. “Congestion of the nose and throat, pulmonary œdema, acute degenerative changes in the kidney, and so on. Why not do an autopsy? If you find any changes in this man except those due to strangulation, I'll—I'll never claim to know anything about epilepsy again.” Doctor Strickland's face became cherubic.

“Of course, of course!” said Doctor Sanders. “Course I'm going to do an autopsy; meant to all the time.”

“Another thing,” the epileptologist continued. “That wire has a right-hand twist. Now, look again at the mark on this man's neck.”

The other two, impressed in spite of themselves, bent once more above the dead man's discolored throat.

“You see, here in the middle, is the mark of the top wire of that fence; with a right-hand twist. But it's superimposed! Underneath is the mark of another strand—with a *left-hand* twist. Look here at the sides; see, the marks there are clear—of a three-strand wire with a left-hand twist. Now, look!”

Without visible effort, the epileptologist lifted Madison's limp, heavy body, turned it over, and laid it carefully in its original position. “Now look,” he invited them. “The marks on his neck run more than half around it; but this wire only touches his throat.”

“Ah—no doubt he twisted about somewhat,” offered Doctor Pettibone wisely.

“He must have twisted violently, to have untwisted that wire, and then wound it back into a left-hand twist,” suggested Doctor Strickland.

Doctor Pettibone subsided. “Yes, yes, yes,” he muttered weakly.

“No, I tell you this man was murdered. Somebody came up behind him,

and garroted him with a bit of three-strand wire. It ought not to be hard to trace; there isn't much wire made with a left-hand twist."

Doctor Sanders nodded decisively. His black eyes snapped; he shook an emphatic finger beneath Pettibone's nose. "I thought there was something funny about it all the time," he declared. "And I bet I know who did it, too—that surly, overbearing hired man, Pete Brady!"

Doctor Pettibone looked wise. "Yes, yes, yes. Doubtless."

Doctor Sanders began to hop about excitedly, gesticulating. "We'll get him!" he cried. "He thinks he's safe—oh, I put him off in good shape! Now we'll get him; we'll jump him; we'll get a confession right here and now!" Again that emphatic forefinger menaced his bulkier colleague's nose.

"Quite so," agreed Doctor Pettibone with dignity, stepping backward.

The coroner glanced about for further approbation; but the epileptologist had disappeared. He could be heard thrashing about like a mired elephant among the willows which fringed the little creek. The other two physicians did not seem to regret his absence. They exchanged a glance of mutual understanding, and looked toward the cow barn, whence Ralph Madison was now advancing.

The young man came on swiftly, at a half run. As he came nearer, he called out excitedly. "Sheriff's collecting a jury; he'll send them out in about an hour. What have you decided?" Despite the heat, and his exertions, Madison's face bore an odd pallor; it seemed sharper than usual. His black eyes were fierce. "If it's true that Cousin Henry was murdered, I'm going to—I'll——" He covered his face, weeping with rage.

Doctor Pettibone laid a fatherly hand upon his quivering shoulder. "There, there, my boy," he soothed. "Don't get

excited; just let us see to it. Quite so."

"Huh!" barked the coroner. "I'll attend to it; clear this thing up right away! Just you skip back to the cow barn and fetch Pete Brady."

Ralph Madison gave the two men a questioning stare. "Do you think—Did he do it?" he whispered tensely.

"Now, now! Run along," ordered the coroner not unkindly.

Ralph Madison hesitated one more moment. "Where's Doctor Strickland?" he inquired.

"Yahr! How do I know? Now, beat it; you hear?" The epileptologist's very name aroused Doctor Sanders' volatile temper.

Madison departed; and when he was out of earshot, the coroner turned to his colleague. "And where the devil is the epileptologist?"

Doctor Pettibone smoothed his pendulous cheeks. "I can't hear him," he stated. "Perhaps he's stuck in the mud."

But even as he spoke, the willows began to shake convulsively; among them appeared the round and beaming face of the epileptologist. It appeared turtle-wise from beneath the edge of the bridge, and glanced up and down the long lane. Seeing the two physicians alone beside Madison's body, Strickland emerged ponderously from among the agitated willows, and advanced toward them. He was wet to the hips; from the knees down his trousers were stained with thick, black mud; his shoes were full of water, and squelched moistly with each step. But his face wore a smile of cherubic contentment. He held both hands behind his back. "Well, what's the next step, gentlemen?" he inquired with an air of respectful admiration which caused the coroner to flush angrily.

"Wait and see—wait and see. You'll find out!" barked Doctor Sanders.

The epileptologist sat down tailorwise

and fell to restoking that black and villainous pipe which was so oddly incongruous in the midst of his infantile countenance. He seemed to have detached himself from the situation; he had become a spectator, only mildly interested.

Presently Ralph Madison appeared from the direction of the cow barn, followed by the hired man. Ralph walked with nervous haste; but the other lagged reluctantly, and once or twice stopped dead in apparent protest. At last, with an angry gesture, Madison gripped him by an arm and half dragged him onward.

Thus, like captor and captive, they came toward the waiting group. "Ha!" remarked Doctor Sanders significantly. "Guilty conscience."

On the bridge, Peter Brady had stopped. "I doan want to come any further," he protested. His broad, stupid face was sickly white; his little eyes darted restlessly about, as though seeking an avenue of escape. "I've told them all I know, I tell you!"

Ralph Madison's narrow, handsome face was set and stern. "You come on!" he ordered; and the other, cowed, obeyed sulkily, his little, pale eyes looking everywhere except at the dead man.

"Now, Peter Brady," said Doctor Sanders, "you found Madison here? Tell us all about it—and mind you tell the truth!"

Brady shifted his feet clumsily. Beads of perspiration stood on his broad upper lip. He looked at the ground; and the muscles of his wide jaw swelled and relaxed rhythmically. Beside him, like a guard, stood Ralph Madison. His handsome face expressed scornful pity; but his eyes were hard and alert.

"Speak up!"

At the coroner's sharp order, Brady started nervously. "I do' know nothin' about it," he muttered indistinctly. "I b'n cockin' up clover ever since dinner time; you c'n see fer yourself out the

further side of the barn. Come five o'clock, when Henry didn't show up, I went to fetch the cows—and I found him"—with a queer, furtive gesture toward the dead man—"a-hangin' there just like you see him."

"You found him!" repeated Doctor Sanders significantly. "Ha! Were you alone?"

"Uh-huh. You don't think this feller'd help milk, do yuh? He was off som'ers, like he mostly is." Beneath lowered lids he cast a look of scorn at Ralph Madison.

"I was out driving," offered Ralph quietly.

"Alone?" interpolated the epileptologist.

"Alone," returned Ralph.

Coroner Sanders swelled visibly. His lean, wrinkled neck reddened like the wattles of an enraged turkey. He thrust a quivering forefinger right at Brady's face.

"What did you kill him for?" he demanded.

Brady's squat figure quivered convulsively. His face turned livid. Then he straightened, to face his accuser, not without dignity. His little eyes were steady now; and there was a ring of injured innocence in his voice.

"Aw, have sense," he advised. "Fer what w'd I kill him fer? Me and him always got along fine. I'd——"

"Didn't he knock you down yesterday for beating a horse?" asked Ralph Madison sharply.

"Aw, well, what does that amount to?" A curious wave of feeling swept across the broad, stupid face, so that it suddenly became crafty, vicious. "Say, why don't you ask *him* about this?" A broad splayed thumb indicated Ralph Madison. "If anybody wanted to git rid of poor Henry, if anybody wanted to choke him with a bit of wire, it would be Ralph, here! Ask him who gets the farm, now! Just you ask him who gets everythin'!"

Brady's heavy face had turned crimson. With lowered head, he faced young Madison, like an angry bull. "Ask him!" he rumbled fiercely. "Ask him where was he when this here happened."

Ralph faced this accusation with white scorn. A quiver ran over his well-knit form; his fists clenched, his lips set ominously. "That's enough from you, Peter," he said. "Of course, doctor, I can prove where I was—if you wish."

"He'd better!" roared Peter Brady. "What is he better than I am, to be left out of this? You murdering——"

Crack! The sharp impact of a blow; and Brady went down like a pole-axed steer. Ralph Madison stood over him, quivering, his thin face white with murderous fury. "I'll kill him—I'll kill him," he muttered over and over, beneath his breath.

All this while the epileptologist had sat motionless, cross-legged, smiling like Buddha. Now he puffed strongly upon that awful pipe and spoke around its stem:

"Some years ago," he offered with an air of complete detachment, "St. Peter also denied an accusation 'with cursing and swearing.'"

Coroner Sanders leaped, like a nervous, fly-stung horse, and turned a harassed face toward the speaker. "Wish you'd either come in, or stay out," he muttered half audibly. "Fool whipper-snapper!"

Doctor Pettibone rubbed large pale hands together. "Ah, yes, yes, yes!" he murmured suavely. "Quite so. And where were you, Mr. Ralph Madison, at the time of this—ah, unfortunate occurrence, if I might ask?"

Ralph Madison began to tremble visibly. His face was disordered with rage; he seemed about to attack his questioner. But he fought bitterly for self-control, and presently achieved a voice.

"I was out driving at three o'clock," he choked.

Whereupon Sanders and Pettibone exchanged a pregnant glance. "Three o'clock; quite so!" vouchsafed Doctor Pettibone. And, "Ha! three o'clock," repeated Sanders and faced Ralph Madison once more.

"How did you know," he demanded intensely, "how did you know this man was killed at three o'clock?"

For an instant young Madison's eyes flashed this way and that. He bit a trembling lip. Then he mastered himself, achieving a frozen calm. "If I am to be accused of this—this hypothetical murder," with a venomous glance at the epileptologist, who received it smiling, "if I am to be accused, I shall stand upon my rights, and refuse to answer."

Peter Brady was now sitting up, holding his head between both calloused hands. There was a look of stupid amazement on his face. But at these words he glanced up slantwise with a sneering grin. "They'll cut yer comb!" he muttered; and threw up a defensive arm.

But Madison ignored him. "How about it?" asked the young man. "Are you going to try to hang this on me?"

Sanders and Pettibone conferred in important whispers. One caught a word here and there: "Opportunity—motive—credit." At last the coroner turned toward his new suspect. "I think——" he began gravely.

But now the epileptologist knocked out the dottle of his pipe against a boot heel. At the little tapping the other four started nervously. Only the dead man lay unmoving, uninterested in revenge or justice.

Doctor Strickland rose ponderously, thereby taking the center of the stage. Standing near the dead man's feet, he faced his audience of four, and began to speak didactically, like a professor to his class.

"Some one," he stated, "left a horse

tied to the fence out there where my so-called car stands. Left a horse hitched there for some time, this afternoon."

"I knew it—I knew it!" exclaimed the coroner. "Ralph Madison, you're——"

But the epileptologist continued to speak, smothering Sanders' interruption by sheer indifference to it. "On the other hand—— But we might as well begin at the beginning."

He paused to make certain that all eyes were upon him; then he brought his right arm out from behind a massive back, and ostentatiously tossed something to the turf beside the dead man's head.

It was a bit of twisted wire, perhaps five feet long; but its two ends had been knotted into loops, so that it had a grotesque resemblance to a shortened skip rope. It twisted as it fell, until it lay across Henry Madison's discolored throat, almost upon that sinister crease.

For a space, no word was said. Doctor Sanders was apoplectic; Doctor Pettibone wore a look of dignified pain. Just beyond them, Peter Brady and Ralph Madison stood side by side, their animosity forgotten. Both were white of face, and tense; Ralph's proud eyes were steady upon the dead man's face. His sensitive lips quivered with repulsion. "Was that how it was done?" he whispered. "With that—from behind?"

But Peter Brady stood with bowed head. A curious vibration began in his wide-set legs, and grew and spread over his body until he shook as with ague. His little eyes jerked here and there; but he did not glance at that bit of wire.

"It was really clever," declared the epileptologist in a tone of mild admiration. "It took brains. Why, if Henry hadn't been so limp—or if the tonic stage of his seizures had been less prolonged—I'd never have seen it myself.

"What happened was this: Some one stepped up behind poor Henry, whipped this bit of wire around his neck, holding it by these loops at the ends, set a knee between his shoulders, and quietly garroted him. When the poor devil was dead, this person laid him face down over the fence, being careful to fit the top wire into the mark of his garrote. I don't suppose he ever noticed that one wire had a right-hand twist and the other a left-hand twist."

"Took brains—of course! Ralph did it. Said so all the time!" ejaculated Coroner Sanders defiantly.

Peter Brady's trembling moderated, and he cast at the other a glance of venom. But Ralph Madison only held his handsome head the higher and gazed at his accuser with eyes of luminous scorn.

"I am inclined to think so myself," granted the epileptologist seriously. "But, I fancy we can check up." He paused for a moment, and the tension became almost unbearable. Two physicians leaned forward with narrowed eyes.

Only the epileptologist remained unmoved. He paused to restoke and relight his atrocious pipe, and at last spoke very calmly, through a cloud of noisome vapor.

"For all of his epilepsy, Henry Madison was a strong man. It must have required a good deal of force to strangle him; and those wire loops are not padded. Did you wear gloves on this drive you took?" he asked young Madison.

"No!" The monosyllable came boldly enough; but Ralph seemed to flinch a little, and glanced dubiously at the backs of his slender well-kept hands.

"Very good," pursued the epileptologist; and again his high-pitched voice dropped to that deep, assured tone. "The man who murdered Henry Madison must carry the marks to prove it. His hands were cut by those wire loops

—cut almost as deep as poor Henry's neck!"

Suddenly dominant, calmly terrible despite his rotundity, Doctor Strickland moved forward to the fence and faced the two who stood upon its farther side. "Ralph Madison—Peter Brady! Let me see the palms of your hands—both of you!"

An instant's breathless pause; then both men began slowly to obey. Out came Ralph Madisons' slender hands; up came the gnarled and hairy hands of Peter Brady—palms down.

"Turn them over!"

With an effort, Ralph Madison obeyed; but his eyes were not upon the epileptologist's face. Peter Brady's trembling had increased; and now he retched convulsively. His shaking hands began to move; and then, abruptly, with the speed and ferocity of a wild beast, he struck at Madison, who was nearest, and whirled to flee.

The epileptologist set a pudgy hand upon the fence post, and vaulted cleanly over, despite his bulk. But he was not needed. As a hawk upon the swift-flying heron, so Ralph Madison leaped upon the fugitive. A brief, convulsive struggle; a whirl of arms and legs; then Peter Brady lay upon his back, help-

less. His captor knelt upon him, both hands buried fiercely in that short, thick neck. "Murdering hound!" he sobbed thickly. "I'll kill you—like you killed him!"

"Take it easy, son," advised the epileptologist gently; and gripped the avenger's wrists. Yet it was difficult, even for his vast strength, to break that steely grip.

His fingers once loosed, Ralph Madison submitted docilely while the other lifted him from his victim. His face was sick and white with spent passion; his eyes were vacant. Presently he sat down, and began to weep bitterly.

Peter Brady lay supine, semiconscious. His broad, calloused palms were outspread; and across each, just above the root of the thumb, ran a deep, red, corrugated indentation.

The epileptologist stooped briefly. "Wire marks," he announced. "With a left-hand twist."

Peter Brady sat up, and looked confusedly about. He put a fumbling hand to his throat. Then his little, red-rimmed eyes turned sick and hopeless.

"You got me," he admitted. "I done it— Well, anyways"—with a flash of vulpine ferocity—"Henry Madison won't beat me up no more!"



DUMMY SAFE MASKS ROBBERY

THE familiar device of using a dummy safe to mask the operations of burglars on a real safe was adopted by the men who recently entered Edward Friedman's shoe store on Broadway, Brooklyn. In order to allay the suspicions of the policeman on the beat and any others who might be familiar with the layout of the premises, the burglars shifted the heavy safe from the front of the store to the rear and set up a dummy safe made of black oilcloth in its place. Working unobserved in the rear of the store, the thieves got the real safe open and stole two hundred and fifty dollars from it. They then made their escape by a rear window, leaving the dummy safe behind them. At last accounts, detectives were trying to trace the burglars by seeking fingerprints on the oilcloth of the dummy safe.

The Man They Couldn't Arrest

by Austin J. Small

Author of "The Bond of the Silent Six," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

VALMON DAIN is a famous inventor. Although still on the threshold of the thirties, he has already earned for himself the title of the English Edison.

Seated in a sound-proof laboratory high above the traffic of Kingsway, he is enabled by means of one of his inventions to learn the secrets of thousands of people. He writes an unsigned letter to Scotland Yard informing them that the Silver Arrow group have planned to steal the Duchess of Renburgh's jewels. Later, he finds that Willard Lyall, the father of Mercia Lyall—a girl that he is greatly attached to—is connected with the Silver Arrow group. He realizes that he has placed Lyall within the reach of the law and sends an unsigned letter to Lyall warning him to stay at home on the night the theft is to take place.

Lyall is perturbed by the warning, and calls upon a member of the gang, named Tansy, and warns him that there is a traitor in the camp who must be apprehended at once. Five members of the gang are captured by the Scotland Yard detectives the night of the attempted burglary. Tansy sees Dain making note of the news while riding in an underground train and rushes to Lyall's home with the news. They determine that Dain is the hunted man, and Lyall declares that Dain will be a dead man by midnight.

Lyall goes to Dain's home at Hendon to murder him, but when he pulls the trigger of Dain's trick revolver, he is killed himself. Dain sends the revolver to Scotland Yard, and then collecting other evidence he places it in a steel box and carries it away to his laboratory at Kingsway, where he is known as Landring Dent. The next morning Scotland Yard detectives go to Hendon, where they find Lyall's dead body, but no trace of Dain.

Tansy alarms Mercia and Mrs. Lyall by calling them up to see if Lyall has returned. They are terror-stricken when the detectives call at Greydene for information, and they find that Lyall has been murdered. While the detectives are present, Valmon Dain rings up to tell Mercia that he was not responsible for her father's death, but it is necessary for him to conceal himself for a short time.

The detectives visit Tansy's shop. Tansy is missing, but they find numerous jewels. Later, Dain overhears Tansy talking to Count Lazard, one of the most popular and sought-after diplomats in England. Dain is amazed to find that Count Lazard is a crook. Tansy tells the count about Dain, and Lazard vows that he will finish him.

Count Lazard goes to Kingsway and threatens Dain, but the inventor laughs at him and accuses Lazard of many crimes. Lazard begins to lose his iron nerve when he sees how Dain has surrounded himself with clever inventions. Dain forces a signed confession from Count Lazard and then allows him to leave. The count dares Dain to come to Court Row the next evening, and he accepts the challenge.

Scotland Yard receives Intimation No. 36 from Dain advising them that Count Lazard is a crook. They do not believe this information is correct, but men are sent to investigate.

Dain disguises himself and leaves his laboratory. He is pursued by Scotland Yard detectives, has an encounter with Mercia, and is only able to return to Kingsway by renting a masquerade uniform. A few moments after his return he hears a sharp knocking at the door.

CHAPTER XIII—(Continued.)



HE knocking came again, sharp and insistent. It set Valmon Dain's faculties working at lightning speed. Throughout his tenure of that office he had never once been called upon to receive a caller, until Lazard himself ran his head into

the noose. In his Landring Dent guise he had no occasion to expect visitors. He was down in the trade directory as an export merchant, and that was all that was known about him. Export merchandising is an indefinable business; it may mean anything or nothing. In Dain's case it meant nothing. Even

commercial travelers knew the futility of calling on export merchants.

It meant that whoever was outside that door was one of three people—with just the possibility of a fourth. It was either the elevator man, Tansy, or Lazard. They were the only three people who were aware of the existence of such a person as Landring Dent. Count Lazard could be ruled out without further thought. Lazard himself had just been telephoning from a call box right out at Barnet. He would scarcely have had time to get out of the box, much less present himself outside the door of Office No. 6.

The elevator man also was improbable. He had never had cause to come to that office before; and in any case it was most unlikely that he could come there at that time of night. He could have no business at all so urgent that it could not wait till the ordinary office hours in the morning. Furthermore, for all the elevator man knew, Landring Dent was out. With equal celerity Dent ruled out the elevator man.

There remained only Tansy—and that fourth possibility. That fourth possibility was the police. The last thought was a horrifying idea. If it were the police it meant that his game was up; the law had tracked him down and was outside demanding admittance.

Dain was torn between two desperate possibilities. If it were the police outside, his only hope of bluffing them was to remain in his commissionaire's disguise and act the part out to its last final letter. If it were Tansy, then he would be simply throwing away his advantage over Lazard, unless he showed himself as Landring Dent. If Tansy saw him rigged up as a unit of the Corps of Commissionaires, his secret would be humming over the wires five minutes after Tansy got out of Denbigh House.

The knocking came again, a little more softly. Dain made a bold decision.

"It's the jeweler," he muttered to himself, and in the same second he was hurriedly divesting himself of his uniform garments. "It's the jeweler, for a thousand pounds! The police would be raising Cain out there by now." He dressed swiftly in his own clothes, bundling the others back into the box out of sight. Then he crept to the door and threw it open suddenly.

It was Tansy all right. He started badly at the unexpected jerk of the door. It was part of his nature that his eyes should switch first to the little handful of polished steel that Dain was holding against his hip.

Dain recognized him the moment his eyes lit upon him—the unlovely, unhealthy face that had peered down on him in the train that morning before Lyall came crawling in through the window to murder him.

Tansy broke hurriedly into a cringing whine and his eyes never left the shining horror in Dain's hand.

"Don't start shooting, gov'nor—there ain't no call for any of that," he said, backing fearfully against the opposite wall. "I ain't going to make no trouble. I'm here to talk sense, I am. I ain't going to do no fancy stuff."

"Then what are you frightened of?" asked Dain quietly.

"That there thing in your hand. Put it away, gov. It might go off. And I'm on the level to-night, straight I am."

"What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you—private."

"Getting tired of Count Lazard?"

Tansy looked up quickly and licked his lips. "I'm only trying to do you a good turn, gov'nor," he mumbled. "I could tell you a lot you want to know. Treat me fair—that's all I ask. I'm risking me neck comin' round here at all. The police are after me as hot as they are after you."

Dain held the door wide open and stood aside.

Tansy walked in, looking nervously

around. The sight of the giant instrument in the long room frightened him; the humming of the dynamos scared him, and the whole mysterious picture of the thousands of series of wires, shinningly bright, and the tiny bead points of light flickering about among them, gave him a horrible feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach. That huge apparatus looked as though it had the unwritten secrets of the world locked away in its metallic soul, a myriad dreadful possibilities trembled on its very wires.

He gazed round and took off his hat, holding it in nervous fingers that, quite unknown to him, persisted in twiddling it.

"Well, and now what is it that brings you here?" Tansy shied away from the voice. It came from just behind his ear, and there was an ominous note in it that struck a cold shiver down his skin.

"It's—it's about Count Lazard," he said hurriedly. "I didn't know you knew about him—straight I didn't, gov'nor. I thought I was giving you the straight tip."

"It happens that I *do* know about your principal employer. I also know that your present address is Court Row, Aldgate. And that a particularly thorough welcome is being prepared for me there to-night. You——"

"That's where you're wrong, gov'nor," broke in the jeweler eagerly. "I've had enough of this crook game and I'm through with it. I'm turning straight—and I know you've been playing the straight game ever since you first broke into the game. And I want to get on your side. It'll stand in my favor a bit when the dicks get me. And they'll get me all right. I can feel the net closin' in all around me now. They've drove me into a mighty deep hole—and I can't get out. I'm afraid I'm done."

"I see—and so you want to enlist my sympathy and do a little bit of good

in the eyes of the law before the crash comes, eh?"

Tansy nodded weakly. "Yes, gov'nor," he whined. "I crawled out here to tell you what's going to happen to-night down in Court Row. You've got it all wrong. You think the count is going to fix you up a deuce of a packet, don't you? You think he's going to have all his gang there to knock the stuffing out of you as soon as they've made you talk. Well, you're wrong. There ain't going to be no one there except the count himself! He's going to do the job on his own. He's done jobs before on his own like this; and he knows how to get rid of dead bodies—leastways, when they're dead down East anyhow. He knows the ropes. He don't trust no one else in with him on murder jobs. And I've come all the way out here to tell you. If you want to nail him, you've got the chance of a lifetime to-night. You'll only have him to deal with, alone."

Dain stood and looked at him. His eyelids had come down till they almost obscured his eyes. Scarcely five minutes before he had been listening to Lazard himself giving orders to his gang leader to call up his forces for the meeting in Court Row that night. Just for one minute he was puzzled almost to bewilderment. Then deep down in his heart he began to smile.

"Is that all you have to say?" asked Dain after a silence that had become almost too tense to endure. In that last minute there had been a rapid sizing up of each other's power and potentialities. They had been mentally circling round each other like a couple of dogs spoiling for a fight. Tansy's subterfuge was too transparent for words. The only thing that puzzled Dain was the reason for it. He could not make out what was behind it. Tansy was hardly the man to spring a job on his own account.

"Well, it's enough, ain't it, gov'nor?" The jeweler's whine had increased; it

was more plaintive than ever. To Dain's critical ears it also sounded a hundred times more forced. It was false, unreal. And there was an atmosphere creeping up in the room that was wholly at variance with the situation. Tansy was not begging favors. He was laying out the ground for action. It was becoming more and more obvious with every second that passed. The only thing that was holding him in check was the sight of that unknown instrument of steel and horn in Dain's right hand.

There was a wicked glitter in Tansy's eyes, and his lips had gone dry. Dain admitted that for a specimen of mere mob intellect the jeweler was acting his part very well indeed. But it requires an intelligence born to its trade to act realistically when a matter of life and death form the thesis of the play. Tansy's trouble was that he was untutored in the finer arts of the game; he was overacting. And behind the mask of the player the soul of the actor showed stark and malignant.

"Shove that blinking gun away, gov'nor. It's givin' me the creeps," he snivelled.

"It isn't a gun," said Dain quietly. "It's something much more impressive—and quite as effective. Won't you sit down? You look dreadfully uncomfortable standing there twiddling your hat."

The jeweler eyed the chair sourly out of the corner of his eyes. There was something ratlike about the way those eyes slid round.

"No—I—I'd rather stand, if you don't mind, gov'nor," he said. He had begun to go a trifle white round the mouth.

Dain smiled. "So you've been having a little talk with Lazard, have you?" he said grimly. "Apparently his excellency has acquainted you with some of the little surprises I keep here for unwelcome visitors."

"No, I haven't, gov'nor—straight I haven't," gasped Tansy earnestly.

"Bah! Don't stand there mouthing your filthy lies at me! When you came in through that door you were waiting, with your ears stuck out like a stoat's, for the click of the cameras. You've been looking at this little slab of steel in my hand as though it had mesmerized you. You think it's the same instrument that put the fear of the devil himself into Lazard. Your eyes are wincing even now from the flash of the magnesium you expected when you first entered. You've been slipping sidelong glances at the doors, wondering why they haven't swung to of their own accord. You've been waiting for the thud of the bolts shooting home. You'd have sat in that chair like a lamb if you hadn't known before you came in that enough electricity can be switched through it to shred the very flash off your bones. Lazard has primed you to all you can expect in this laboratory."

"Gov'nor—you've got me all wrong," Tansy broke in hurriedly. "I'm on your side. All I——"

"Back! Get back, you swine—or I'll burn the eyes out of you!" Dain suddenly turned such a glare of ferocity on him that he fell back appalled. The jeweler had been flexing himself slowly for a sudden flying leap at Dain's throat, but his nerve failed him when he saw Dain wave that frightening, glittering thing in his hand.

That mysterious weapon was a new one to him. Lazard hadn't told him anything about that, and he was out of his depth with it. Like all his breed he was horribly afraid of the unknown. And Dain had so many shocking defenses at his fingers' ends that he felt his courage oozing out of him when he contemplated that fresh one. And that ripped-out threat about burning his eyes out sounded too unnerving for words.

"You—you Judas!" The words ripped out between Dain's teeth with all the contempt of his whole body bottled up in them. He advanced on the scared

jeweler with the shining thing flashing in his hand, his forefinger crooked round the trigger spring. Tansy broke ground, with his eyes nearly popping out of his head.

"You come to me with the cringing offer of help, swearing friendship and the desire to atone for some small part of the wrong you have done. And all the time you are paving the way for some new scoundrelism on the part of your master. What is this latest move? Eh? Answer me—or you'll go out of this building feet first. What new deviltry is Lazard hatching?"

"I don't know, guv. I ain't in on it. I'm on me own now. I don't know nothink about the count." The words came tumbling out of his mouth in a flying stream, almost falling over each other in his hurry to get them out.

"You do! And you'll tell me what it's all about, or I'll dry up the very blood in your veins. Listen to me. Thirty seconds before you knocked on that door Count Lazard was talking to the leader of his gang of thugs. He was speaking from Barnet and he was ordering his man to get his crowd up in full force to Court Row to-night. Was that message false or not?"

"I don't know, mate, reely——"

"Where is Lazard? Where did you last leave him?" Dain had edged him right up against the far bench, and he waved the glittering handful of steel at him again.

"Down—down home!" blurted Tansy.

"Where? At Court Row?"

"Yes, guv'nor."

"How long ago? Less than an hour?"

"Yes—I came straight here."

"Then Lazard couldn't have been in Barnet. He hadn't time to get there. That message of his was a fake—a fake to get me unawares. Out with it! Is that so?"

"Y-yes, guv'nor." Tansy's eyes had begun to glitter again. He was in a

corner, driven there inexorably, and every word he uttered was only driving him further in. And, like a cornered rat, he could see his only way out was the fighting way. He was measuring the distance between with the baleful eye of the professional crook, to whom murder was nothing more than the riding himself of a danger.

Dain pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his lips. It was a big black silk one.

"Well—and now tell me what Lazard's game is," he demanded with tight-lipped viciousness.

Tansy leaped. With a wild fear in his heart and with fingers, talonlike and wide open, he took the last dregs of his courage and sprang sheer at Dain's throat. There was something almost heroic about it. He stifled his deep-bitten fear of that lethal thing in Dain's hand and went all out for the fighting finish.

In that same second Dain whipped the black handkerchief over his eyes, thrust the steel thing out at arm's length, and pulled the trigger.

There was a terrific blinding streak of light. It streamed out of the shining thing in Dain's hand and filled the room with a silent burst of explosive brilliance that drenched the very hair in a white-hot bath of radiance. It came with tremendous abruptness, a sudden swishing into existence of a blinding white incandescence that assaulted the senses, obliterating everything in its radius save the blazing heliotrope core from which it emanated.

Tansy screamed, staggered forward a step and fell back, clawing madly at his eyes. They were pricking, searing, burning as though a giant sunglass had for one terrible second been concentrated on the very center of his eyeballs.

The light, bursting out into its livid entirety within six inches of his wide-open eyes, had scorched them, stung

them into a sudden agony of ferocious pain. In that moment he felt as though the retinas had been struck with red-hot poniards. And the light had gone on, fluid as electricity, penetrating his wildly upflung hands, piercing through his eyelids, and on to the very nerve centers of his brain. He screamed again and collapsed in a writhing heap on the floor.

He was blind; he could not see; all that was left to him was an unseeing, helpless groping. All that existed in his stunned world was the reactive glare of that gigantic flash sizzling about in front of his eyes.

"You've done me in—you 'ound—you've got my eyes!" he cried.

In that single second it was all over.

The resultant darkness was like that in an unlit auditorium. The green gloom still lingered, but it was so faint in comparison that it almost seemed as though the electric lights had failed. It was just a faint, neutral-colored glimmering in the darkness. Into it merged the quiet monody of the humming dynamo, a drone of power that whispered to the stricken man of yet unnameable things still locked away in their whirling drums.

The jeweler floundered about on the floor, whimpering fearfully at the horror of the thing that had overtaken him.

Dain slowly withdrew, the handkerchief from his eyes. The thick, black silk, bunched to a heavy pad, had been pressed hard over his face. But even through the manifold thicknesses the light had penetrated. He felt as though he had been staring wide-eyed into the heart of a fierce arc light. He dropped the heated instrument with a clatter on the floor.

"The gang'll claw the life out of you for this," whined the jeweler dazedly from the floor. "They'll get you! They'll carve the livin' soul out of you."

Dain slipped a pair of smoked glasses over his eyes.

"Quite. It's about that gang that I want a morsel of information," he said.

"I'll see you dead before I'll say a word to you—you butcher," yelped the jeweler.

"At present," said Dain quietly, "you have got away with your life. You should count yourself fortunate. You came here with the deliberate intention of killing me. So did Lyall. And Lyall died. So did Lazard. Lazard lived for no other reason than that I think death would be too simple a reward for him. Lazard has earned twelve years' penal servitude in one of our good English jails. I intend to see that he gets it. I have let you off for a precisely similar reason. The only way society can feel in any way satisfied with its tolerance of you is to know that you are safe behind prison bars for a long term of years."

"You've blinded me, you——"

"Oh, no, I haven't. I've paralyzed your optic nerves for the time being. You are quite blind, but only temporarily. In three or four hours you will begin to regain your vision. That is, unless those optic nerves receive another shock of similar intensity, in which case I doubt whether you would ever see again. No—don't try to get up; you might electrocute yourself. You have only to touch one of these myriad wires in this room; your end would not be very pleasant. And the wires are everywhere, Tansy. If you take my advice you will stay just where you are and be sensible enough to tell me what I want to know."

The jeweler broke into a weltering outburst of blasphemy. Dain waited until he had sunk into a helpless silence again.

"One more flash in your eyes, Tansy, and you are blind for life," he insinuated gently. "A combination of oxygen and magnesium, burning in the gap of a high-powered arc—another dose of it would break down the nerve tissues for

good. Now then, let's have the truth. Where is Lazard?"

"In Aldgate." The information came falteringly from the bemused fence.

"And that telephone message?"

"A bluff, gov'nor. Lazard hadn't no intention of being there hisself. He's scared of you. If you *did* turn up he was going to leave you to the boys."

"Very pleasant. And how did they propose dealing with me?"

"The same as they do the squealers. Hold 'em in a bath of river water till they're drowned; and then take 'em along to the river and dump 'em in, somewhere where it's quiet."

"Thank you. How much did Lazard pay you for to-night's little affair?"

"A thousand. I had to kill you and wreck this here machine."

"And then he was going to smuggle you out of the country, I suppose?"

"Yes, gov'nor. That's what he said."

"Well, I hope you are satisfied with your evening's amusement. I'm going to keep you here for a little while, Tansy. I'm going to pay a little visit to a friend of yours. I may not be back for two or three hours, perhaps even a little longer. You won't mind if I tie your arms up, will you? I should deeply regret it if the inaction irked you and you began trying to find your way out—I particularly want you to do a little penal servitude; and you'd never live to face the judge if you took it into your head to start exploring among these wires.

"When I get back I shall let you go. But if I'm gone more than four hours I'm afraid you must expect a rather urgent visit from the police. I'd hate to have to do that because it would mean that I should miss Lazard. And that is too unpleasant even to contemplate. No, on the whole I think I shall let you go; and then scoop you in with the rest of the gang. I thank you for your information—particularly for your footnotes about the count. I gave him

credit for greater courage. By the way, why did he leave this job to you? Why didn't he send all the gang round? Surely they could have made a far handsomer job of it?"

"He said you wouldn't open the door to a crowd. He thinks you've got some way of being able to see out into that passage without opening the door. If the whole bunch came round he said you'd spot 'em and lay low. But he was dead sure you'd open the door to me. Then I could do you in and smash up this here contraption of yours. He reckoned it would make too big a mystery for the police to be able to tackle, what with Lyall and—and all the rest of it."

"And very plausible, too. There was also, Tansy, a streak of white liver about his deductions, too, but you probably missed the point. It was cheap at a thousand pounds. He used you for a cat's-paw. Still——"

Dain bound him up with strong electric cable, tying his hands behind his back and securing his feet to the legs of one of the great frames.

When he had got him securely triced he brought the telephone instrument over to him.

"There's just one little thing more, my friend," he said. "You're going to talk down this instrument to Count Lazard—quite a short conversation; just to tell him that you've succeeded in your job, that you have murdered me and wrecked my machine."

Tansy wriggled in his bonds. "I'll never do it," he squeaked, a sudden flash of realization bursting over him.

"In that case, Tansy," said Dain in his ear, "you get that other smash of light in your eyes." His thin brown fingers went out to the shining thing on the floor.

Tansy gasped and whimpered in the blindness that held him. There were none of the blind man's instincts to come to his rescue. His blindness was a new

thing that had come upon him with jolting suddenness. His helplessness was that of the new-born kitten whose eyes had not yet opened, whose eyes had never seen the light.

He could see nothing, could not even visualize his position in the room. He could only hear, and that with a vagueness that was confusing in itself. He heard the rattle of the telephone instrument against his ear. He heard the slight sound the dreadful flash gun made on the floor when Dain picked it up. He heard, too, the even fainter swish of the black silk handkerchief coming out of Dain's pocket.

He quivered in the wire bonds that held him. "For God's sake, don't use that on me again!" he cried with a sudden rush of words. "Take it away! You'll kill me if you give me another dose." He began to scream in a high-pitched voice of sudden terror, filling the air with ear-splitting animal noises. In his terror he even yelled for the police to come and help him.

Dain waited till his paroxysm had subsided, and then gently pointed out the uselessness of such efforts.

"These walls are entirely sound-proof," he said quietly. "The police couldn't hear you—not if a choir of twenty joined in your little solo. Even the noise of a gunshot wouldn't carry beyond this room. Come, now, are you going to speak to Lazard?"

Tansy squealed again as he felt the chill touch of the gun flash against his face.

"Don't do it, guv'nor! Don't do it," he yelled. "I'll talk to him—I'll tell him!" He wrenched his head convulsively away from the touch of the cold steel.

Dain breathed deeply and put the gun down.

"Very well, then," he said. "But mind you, Tansy, one false word, one tiniest hint to Lazard, and you'll never see again."

He reached for the telephone and gave the count's number.

"You'll just tell him in your own words," he warned him, "that Valmon Dain is dead, and that you are clearing out to another hiding place for a few days until you see how things turn out. Tell him you crept up behind me and broke my skull with a jimmy. And that you have shattered every wire in the entire machinery here. I'll hold the instrument for you. All you'll have to do is to answer Lazard."

A voice came on at the other end and Dain requested that the count should be brought to the phone. In a few moments the cultured accents of Lazard came over the wire.

Dain thrust the mouthpiece against Tansy's lips and held the receiver up with a firm forefinger.

"Who is that?" demanded Lazard a second time.

"It's me, guv'nor," said Tansy in a husky voice. "I've rang up to tell you about that job. It's all right. I've done it."

Lazard was irritated and profoundly relieved in the same breath.

"You fool!" he said. "Why did you want to ring me up? Couldn't you have waited till I arranged to see you?"

"Well, guv'nor, I thought it would ease your mind to know it was all O. K. And besides, I'm going away. Going to clear out till I see which way the wind blows."

"Did you see Mr. Dent?" Lazard was not giving anything away, even to possible listeners on the telephone.

"Yes, I saw him all right. He let me in like you said he would. He wanted to talk to me. Tried to pump me for what I knew. I pulled the line of talk you told me to. And he fell for it. He said I done the wise thing in siding in with him. I gave him the jimmy, guv'nor, right where you said."

"And you're sure about it?" Lazard's voice had just the faintest touch

of querulousness in it. "There was no bungling?"

"It—it's very cold here, gov'nor," said Tansy significantly. "And I've seen 'em go to sleep before."

"And the other little matter?"

"Went all over it with a wrench. I switched off the dynamos and broke all the wires. It would take Dain himself to put this lot to rights again. And he can't! No one could recognize it for what it was. It looks like a junk-dealer's shop."

"Very good. I'll see you personally in a week's time. Can you hold out till then?"

"Yes, gov'nor."

Lazard shut down and the jeweler relaxed.

"What you goin' to do with me now?" he whined.

"I've a little visit to pay, over in the direction of St. James Square," said Dain pleasantly. "With your permission I will leave you in your own excellent company for an hour or two."

Tansy heard, for the next ten minutes, some sounds that he could not fathom. It was almost as though Dain were undressing and then dressing again.

Then the locks clicked, the outer door slammed and the bolts shot home. And Tansy was alone in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITH THE AID OF A WHITE CAPSULE.

DAIN went down the stairs, nodded to the elevator man, remarked that it was a fine night, and walked out into Kingsway. He looked the perfect embodiment of one of the Corps of Commissionaires, that exceedingly fine body of men whose watchword is service and whose greatest attribute is integrity.

He took his businesslike way through the pulsing heart of the West End, through the lights and the glitter and the hurry and bustle to that secluded

backwater that lies off the sumptuous thoroughfare of Piccadilly.

Because the Corps of Commissionaires has never yet been an object of suspicion, his road lay open and unchallenged to him. And he went about his business with a methodized purposefulness that has stamped its hall mark on all who wear the black uniform.

"Things," he remarked to himself, "have reached that stage when something has got to be done in a hurry." One end of his plans had rushed ahead too quickly. It had got out of hand. Something had got to be done to level things up. Something drastic.

Dain took out a little box and examined the contents quietly. A single white capsule—about the size of a walnut, but flatter—rested in a little nest of wool. It was a capsule he had taken from the box which Willard Lyall had brought with him on his last night on earth. Dain smiled to the grim thought that, quite conceivably, that was the identical capsule Lyall had intended to use on *him*. He dropped the box down a convenient drain and slipped the little white thing into his hat.

St. James Square is not a very brilliantly lighted neighborhood. At ten o'clock at night it is even gloomy. Solemn old Victorian houses raise their somber bulk in the night and seem to frown across the square. They are deceptive, these great houses, dull and ugly without, but perfectly appointed within.

In Dain's eyes they had another shining merit. Victorian houses are the simplest buildings in the world to break into. Their doors and windows and their general architecture seem to be an eternal open invitation to the house-breaker.

Dain glanced up at the one he had come to enter. It was in a quiet angle of the square, darker even than most. A long passage led up to the rear of the premises, which were shrouded in dark-

ness. He walked quietly up it and took his position.

The windows were all in darkness, save immediately overhead where a dull red glow issued from behind thick red curtains.

Dain took out a thin steel blade and silently slipped the catch of the window underneath it, waited for a moment, and then cautiously raised the sash.

Valmon Dain peered in through the open window and strove to penetrate the gloom within. But the darkness seemed to envelop him, thick and heavy as the folds of a black curtain.

He took out a torch and flashed it around. The glass was deeply frosted, and only a faint luminance shone from it. But it was sufficient to give him his bearings.

The place was a storeroom of all the various commodities that came under the housekeeper's charge. There were rows and rows of foodstuffs, delectable things in bottles and jars and cans, shelves full of choice eatables in boxes and fancy packages, a side of beautifully cured bacon hung in the corner, and from the ceiling depended a pair of luscious hams. On the other side were stacks of glassware and crockery; there were sacks of vegetables on the floor and a great cupboard near the door was apparently the spare-linen store.

Dain climbed in without a sound and slowly closed the window behind him.

He opened the door and peeped out. The same impenetrable darkness met him. That end of the house was apparently little used. The servants' quarters were in the basement in the front of the house. He deduced that much from the existence of an area leading down to the tradesmen's entrance.

He turned his light on the lock of the door. The key was on the outside. Gently he removed it and replaced it on the inside. His operations in the room upstairs might call for a hurried and

very urgent retreat, and it was just as well to make a few advance arrangements. Pursuing servants could be held up at that locked door long enough for him to make a quick get-away. He pulled the door to, but did not latch it.

From the storeroom a passage, chill and airless, led each way. He chose the one that appeared to lead toward the front of the house. He crept up it, using his torch sparingly. At the far end the passage turned abruptly and a faint mist of light warned him that he was approaching a more habited part.

He turned the corner and found himself on a wide landing with stairs running both up and down. There was a wide balustrade all round it, and a profusion of exotic palms and flowery shrubs set in tubs. Dain leaned over the banisters and listened.

From down below came a subdued murmur of servants' voices and the occasional clatter of a plate or cutlery. Elsewhere a complete silence reigned. Then from along the opposite passage—a handsome approach that was more like a miniature hall—came the sound of an opening door.

Dain made a silent dive down behind the palms and remained, doubled up on his hands and knees, as motionless as a rock. Soft footfalls sounded on the thick carpets and some one approached. Dain saw him for the fraction of a second through his leafy screen; a man in evening dress, faultlessly attired. He passed leisurely and went up the stairs, humming a quiet little snatch of melody from one of the operas. Dain could not recognize him as any one he had ever met before and put him down as a guest, or more probably, the count's private secretary.

Dain waited till the sound of his last footfall had vanished, and then followed up in his wake.

He reached the next landing without further alarm. That landing was obviously the main section of the house. It

was beautifully appointed in old Moorish style. Fine tapestries hung in panels on the walls, beautifully worked, exquisitely colored. Dim lights peeped from hidden niches, and wonderful ornaments and treasures of beaten brass filled the odd corners. In the center a fountain played, tiny little jets of water that plashed back among marble rocks with a musical, restful tinkle. Thick velvet curtains shaded two lovely alcoves that seemed to be padded out entirely with rich-tinted silk cushions. The floor, a wide shadowed sweep of it all round the fountain, was a wondrous mosaic of beautifully tessellated marbles.

Dain was tiptoeing across that floor, striving to silence the touch of his heavy boots, when a second interruption occurred—and one that almost wrecked his efforts. He was trying to get across to the wide main hall that abutted on the landing, when, without warning, he heard the secretary returning.

He was caught in the act. There was not even time to scramble back down the stairs to the sanctuary of the palms again. To have run across that sounding marble to the curtains would have been fatal. Dain took the only chance that offered.

He snatched off his hat and stood in an attitude of respectful puzzlement, blessing in his inmost soul the capsule for not falling out and giving the game away. Almost in the same instant the secretary reappeared, still humming blithely under his breath.

The secretary was apparently one of the carefree young gentlemen who are appointed from time to time to fill minor diplomatic posts, and who take their responsibilities lightly. He checked up suddenly when he saw the slightly embarrassed commissioner standing there, cap in hand, and looking as though he had found himself unexpectedly in the center of Hampton Court Maze.

"Hello!" he said in surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"Begging your pardon, sir," said the commissioner respectfully, "I was sent up from the hall. I've an important message to deliver to the Count Lazard personally. They told me where to come downstairs, but—I—I think I've lost my way."

"Oh, yes," said the young person pleasantly. "Of course, it's the butler's night out, isn't it? Just across there on your right. First door. The count is disengaged; I've just left him." The secretary, with a cheerful nod, picked up the rhythm of his broken melody and continued on his way downstairs.

Dain drew a huge sigh of relief. That thrice-blessed uniform of his was a passport to anywhere. Nobody, it would seem, ever dreamed of challenging it or doubting it.

Dain picked the capsule out of his hat and tiptoed across the wide floor. There were more heavy curtains shielding Lazard's door; he pulled them carefully aside and bent down at the keyhole. His heart gave a great beat of thankfulness when he looked inside. He couldn't see much, but such restricted view as he had, showed him a view by far more promising than he had dared to hope.

Lazard was sitting in a great armchair with his back to the door. Only the top of his head was visible above the thick padding of the chair. His feet were outstretched in indolent luxury toward the warmth of a crackling log fire, and the blue smoke of a long cigar curled upward through the soft light of dim red lamps. He was reading; a number of official-looking documents and crested letters were open on a reading frame that swung from the arm of the chair.

On an inlaid table at his elbow lay a dispatch box. It was open and a pelt of other documents peeped out of it. That, and the side angle of a heavy safe

was all he could see in the tiny frame of the keyhole.

But it was enough. It was as much—and more—than he had dared to hope. Barring a positively fiendish accident Count Lazard's defenses had already fallen. Without knowing it he had left his guard wide open.

Dain estimated afterward that he spent a full minute in turning the handle of that door. He did it in a chill horror of suspense. At any moment the debonaire figure of that blasé young secretary might come sauntering up the stairs again, he might even take it into his fool head to make inquiries among the footmen as to who had let him in, and why he wasn't properly conducted upstairs. Or any one of a dozen servants might have appeared, forcing him to hurry the job and make a noise.

It was the most desperate minute he had ever spent in his life. The handle itself might have squeaked or grated, which would have been the most dreadful catastrophe of all.

But he got it open at last. His fingers were gripped like a steel clamp over the handle, and he turned it by hundredths of an inch at a time. The door opened. As the pawl slipped by the lock the door slid open a bare inch. A faint whiff of warm cigar smoke pushed by his nose from the suction of the door.

Silent as the shadow of an owl in the night he pressed the door farther open. He squeezed himself softly inside and very gently closed the door behind him.

Lazard stirred in his chair and muttered something under his breath in puzzled French. Some little trick in that trickiest of all diplomatic languages was perplexing him. He puffed jerkily at his cigar and studied the document more closely.

Dain had got halfway to him, stooping down almost on all fours to be out of his line of vision should he turn, when he saw the count's immaculate hand go out subconsciously to the table

and begin groping about there among the papers. In a little while the fingers closed on what they sought, a bulky French dictionary.

Dain edged in closer and stood up. Lazard was deeply immersed in the dictionary, his thin, immaculately manicured forefinger running slowly down a line of difficult verbs. Dain took the white capsule between his finger and thumb and leaned forward.

Lazard did not move. His thoughts were too far away, too deeply concentrated on the amazing ramifications of an irregular French verb, for him to get back to earth in a single moment. And besides, it all happened in a flash. He was faintly aware of a strong, virile-looking hand sliding soundlessly in front of his face from over his shoulder, a hand which was tanned to a rich, healthy brown, and had an unpleasant atmosphere of gripping strength about it; a hand, moreover, which held delicately poised between forefinger and thumb a flat, round, white object.

A fleeting look of utter bewilderment danced for the merest second across Lazard's face, his eyes focusing in dumb surprise on the little white sphere under his nose. The thing was so startling that, for the moment, he couldn't move.

Then he tried to switch round in the chair. The little mistake he made was that, in whipping round, he gasped—a hissing intake of breath, forced on him by a compound of fear and shock. It was the most natural thing to do. But in Lazard's case it was fatal. For in that same second Valmon Dain's fingers squeezed the capsule. There was just the tiniest wisp of sound, as though a frail swallow's egg had been crushed. But the effect on Lazard was practically instantaneous. His face constricted as though he had just inhaled a terrific draft of double-strength ammonia, his eyes dilated, and he stiffened in his chair. Dain had broken the capsule

within an inch of his nose, and the ambassador had taken the full force of it.

The hand that held the capsule seemed to shiver once in a most erratic way. A darkness danced in front of Lazard's eyes, a darkness that was shot through and through with livid, painful stabs of red. Then in some miraculous fashion, the capsule seemed to swell. It grew and grew until it enveloped his whole vision, absorbed him, and left him dangling for one dreadful moment right in the very heart of it. Then the blackness crashed over his brain.

The count collapsed without a sound. The great dictionary folded up as it slipped from his nerveless hands. Dain, with a swift dive, caught it neatly before it had a chance to crash to the floor. Lazard's head lolled forward, and his arms hung motionless over the arms of the chair.

With swift precision Dain set about his business. He pushed Lazard back in the chair and propped the volume, open, on his knees. With a deft flick he tossed the capsule into the fire, where it burned with a tiny puff of fierce white flame.

He cast a rapid glance over the documents in the deed box and realized thankfully that he would have no cause to open that great safe in the corner. There were keys hanging from a ring on the table and Dain did not doubt that one of them would have opened that safe. But seconds were precious. The drug would not last long. Although its effects were tremendously sudden they were also of only short duration. Two minutes, at most, was all he had to hope for—and there were all the documents he needed in that gaping deed box. Lazard was, apparently, putting the final polishes to his great coup for the morning. All the letters, references, documents, and papers in connection with that great scheme were lying there handy to his touch.

He quickly scrutinized sheaf after

sheaf. Many of them were in French, a few in Italian, but most of them were in English. From the English ones Dain began to get a glimmering of the root idea of Lazard's machinations. And then slowly the whole perfection of it became apparent; it grew before his eyes in all its beautiful simplicity. There was not the slightest doubt that Lazard was using his official position, and taking advantage of the high favor in which he stood in the English court, to further a financial swindle of an immense and elaborate nature. The evidence against him became more and more damning with every document he scanned.

It seemed that Lazard was working in league with some of the cleverest financial crooks in Europe. Their headquarters were in Paris and they had branch offices in Berlin, Vienna, and Rome. Lazard had laid his plans with such consummate skill that even when the crash came his name would still be as spotlessly untarnished as ever it was. No breath of suspicion could attach to him. He would appear guiltless and blameless.

Dain went over the documents with quick, steady fingers, picking up more and more of the fabric of the swindle with each successive sheet that he scanned.

The full significance of the undertaking burst upon him with a sudden flash when he arrived at copies of letters which had passed between Lazard and his confederates in Vienna and Berlin. Those letters were written in the initial stages, and explained a great deal more than could be gathered from the references in later correspondence. They gave him a comprehensive grip of the whole affair.

The thing had come to a head. All that was left to do was to draw the actual money from the bank and for Count Lazard to stall off any further developments until his confederates had

had time to get away with their share of the loot.

The papers showed that the sum of no less than two million pounds was ultimately involved, of which nearly a half would remain tangled up in Lazard's own fingers.

It was a state loan to a foreign protectorate, and the whole of the negotiations had gone through on the authoritative basis of an embassy transaction. The securities advanced, while appearing sound and desirable in every way, were fictitious and worthless. They comprised the exclusive working concessions of all the oil and mineral rights in the protectorate concerned—assets which in actual fact were non-existent. Various papers showed that neither oil nor workable deposits of minerals had ever been found in the territory. On the contrary, secret surveying reports established the fact that the land was barren from the commercial point of view.

The engineers' reports and assays were all faked. The metallurgist's estimates, glowingly but conservatively worded and officially authorized, were fraudulent from beginning to end. There was not a genuine report among them. Many of them Lazard had himself written. There were the initial drafts in his own handwriting, all there, showing the alterations and emendations made before the fair copy went through to the printer.

The rest of the coterie, having fulfilled their duties, were merely waiting to transfer the money into foreign securities, cover up the trail, and decamp. The letters even showed the final arrangements that were pending in that direction. They were all clearing out to South America, safe from pursuit, arrest, or extradition. And Lazard's only consideration was to keep the matter in abeyance until they signaled the "all clear."

Exposure, of course, was inevitable.

That was obvious from the beginning. But the coterie, wealthy for life, would be beyond the law. Lazard himself, a millionaire, would remain on in England, exuding nothing but his own righteous indignation at having been made a party to a fraud, basking in the sympathy of both his friends and the higher authorities.

When the crash came there would be but one scapegoat at whom the finger of accusation could point, the chancellor of the protectorate's exchequer. And he would already have removed himself and rejoined his colleagues in that friendly land from which no criminal is ever handed back to the tribunals of justice. There are no shores quite so solicitous to the decamping criminal as those of the South American republics. They open their arms to them. And once within their wide embrace they would be as safe as though they were on another planet.

And then in a smaller portfolio headed "Bank of England" Dain discovered the reason for Lazard's sudden anxiety. Lazard himself had said that the deal would have to be ratified on the morrow or the whole thing would blow up. Revelation would come with the force of a sledge-hammer blow. The scandal that would follow would shake the chancelleries of Western Europe to their foundations. For the loan bills had been presented to the bank for payment long since; and on the morrow, Saturday, they fell due for payment! Lazard's case was more than urgent. It was critical.

He knew that Dain was aware of his machinations, knew that he was waiting, tigerlike, to pounce on him the moment he consummated his fraud. He would be caught like a rat in a trap—with the goods. Yet before midday struck on Saturday he had to present himself at the bank in his official capacity and receive the official transfer of two million pounds of English money.

The suggestion had been made, and the British government had approved, that the loan should go over in Bank of England notes of the denomination of one hundred pounds. Twenty thousand of them; yet a man could carry them comfortably in a suit case.

Dain realized, with a grim smile, that there was every excuse for Lazard's panicky anxiety. His position had suddenly become desperate, acute. On Saturday twenty thousand hundred-pound notes would be removed from the Threadneedle vaults and packed ready for Lazard's acceptance. And if he defaulted, or could give no adequate explanation of his inability to take up the loan, the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance. For when a great state department moves in its official capacity the arrangements are expected to work with clocklike smoothness. And failure to attend results in very nasty inquiries.

Whichever way it was viewed, Lazard could not avoid the issue. He would have to be there at the bank, with his official courier and envoys—or face the music. And that music showed every possibility of turning itself into a particularly horrifying tune. With the treasury officials on one side and Valmon Dain on the other he was caught between two ferocious fires.

Lazard himself had realized the desperation of his predicament when he conceived his double plot to murder Dain. There was Tansy at Denbigh House and a whole murderous gang waiting for him in case he turned up in Court Row. Lazard realized decisively that one of the fires had got to be eliminated—and that one was Valmon Dain.

Dain hurriedly scrutinized the remainder of the documents. They all formed separate and individual links of evidence in a chain that was strong enough to hang Lazard. Each one added its quota of substantiation to the huge proofs Dain already held. He began to replace them carefully. One or two of

the more vital ones he crushed into his pocket. But the rest he put back as near as he could to the positions in which he had originally found them.

A fluttering sigh came from the man in the chair, the first signs of Lazard's returning consciousness.

Dain picked up the telephone.

"Scotland Yard, please," he said. Then after a little silence: "Put me through to Inspector Delbury, will you? Thank you. Hallo—is that Delbury? This is the Ghost here. Yes. Speaking from Count Lazard's house, St. James. What a pity you didn't follow up Intimation No. 37. Never mind. Even ghosts must expect little setbacks, I suppose. Intimation No. 38 will be with you in the morning. Good-by!"

Dain shot a swift glance over his shoulder at the unconscious man. Lazard's lips were slightly parted and he was breathing through them in short, jerky little gasps. His face, which a few moments before had been chalk white, rigid with the pallid stiffness of coma, began to tinge with the faintest flush of returning color.

Dain recognized the first warnings of the drug's waning powers. Though the effect of the gas was complete while it lasted, its potency relaxed with amazing speed. It was like a skilled boxer's knock-out blow. Its recipient was rendered unconscious immediately, but the return of the faculties was equally swift. And the after effects were negligible. A slight blank for a few seconds, a slight dizziness for a moment or two more, and the subject is completely normal, rather puzzled to know what has happened to him.

"Thirty seconds," muttered Dain. "That gives me just about time—with all the luck the gods can give me."

He looked round hurriedly to assure himself that he had left no traces of his visit and then stepped over to the door. He pulled it open boldly and peered out. There was not a soul in sight, not a

sound to be heard anywhere in the great house save the far-away clatter of a typewriter in a distant part of the building. With silent speed he closed the door behind him and set off.

He tiptoed across the wide marble floor, past the splashing fountain, and reached the head of the stairs. A second's pause there with his head cocked over the balustrade and he was slipping down the stairs, his boots padding softly on the thick pile of the carpet. Over the next landing he went without pausing in his stride. Neck or nothing was his slogan; luck had been with him so magnificently up till then that he scarcely cared what happened. There was still his wonder-working uniform to fall back on and if any suspicious servant should happen to notice him and demand explanations there was still a chance of catching his man unawares and making a sudden rush.

But the necessity did not arise. The luck held. With six damning documentary proofs stuffed tightly in his coat pocket he got through to the dark passage without a soul seeing him. After that it was more or less simple. The only requirements were caution and silence. From somewhere behind him he heard the faint sound of a carefree young voice, humming as it passed across the landing.

He reached the storeroom, took out the key, and replaced it on the outside, opened the window, and crawled out. The place was deserted, and a raw, chill wind was blowing outside. Dain shivered, as much with the sudden cold as with the feeling of desperate relief that swept over him. He scarcely realized, until his toes touched the ground outside, what a ferocious risk he had been taking every second of the time he had spent in that house.

Gently as silence itself he eased the catch in the frame, closed the window, and slipped the catch right back. He walked very quietly till he got clear of

the house, and then made his way briskly down into Piccadilly.

Taxis were no use to him; taxi drivers have an awkward habit of remembering fares when detectives are nosing around on the inquiry trail. He walked along till he got to Trafalgar Square, and then boarded a bus which was making for Kingsway.

And back in St. James at that precise moment the Count Lazard was sitting up in his chair, blinking dazedly at the dictionary in his lap, and wondering what on earth had happened to him. The red lights were swaying about a little dizzily in front of his eyes, and his head housed a particularly violent ache that lasted for exactly eight seconds. It cleared with remarkable suddenness, and his puzzlement increased. There was a queer sticky taste in his mouth, and the upper passages of his nose tingled as though he had just taken a mild whiff of electric snuff.

But otherwise he was as normal and as clear-headed as thought that sudden crash of unconsciousness had never struck him. He blinked again and licked his lips. At first he thought he had been the victim of a sudden fainting attack, a phenomenon he had never experienced in his life before.

Then, with a jolt of wonderment, he remembered that brown hand sliding in from over his shoulder, remembered the odd, capsule-shaped object of white that was cupped in the supple fingers.

He wheeled round with a startled look on his face, fully expecting to see the owner of that hand standing over him, demanding his surrender. For that brown, swart-looking hand was the hand of Valmon Dain, no other. He could have recognized it among a thousand.

But the room was empty, silently empty, except for his own twitching presence.

He passed a hand tremblingly across his forehead. Dain? He was going mad. Dain was dead! Tansy himself

had been through on the phone less than an hour ago to tell him so. He had drunk a silent toast in old brandy to the jeweler when he put the receiver down. And Tansy was not the man to make fool mistakes. He had gazed on the face of the dead before, had done a killing job himself twice, and knew the signs unmistakably.

And it was Tansy's voice without a doubt. There was no mistaking those cockney gutturals; that cringing whine would have placarded its own identity among a million.

He turned with a jump to the precious deed box on the table; and he sighed with unutterable relief when he saw the documents still there. He was going to run through them quickly to see if any were missing. But there was cigar ash on the top sheets. They could not have been touched.

His cigar was still burning on the floor; his nose detected the singeing of the carpet. He knew he couldn't have been unconscious for long. And his bewilderment increased.

There was a quick knock at the door, and the secretary came in.

"Oh, here you are, sir," he said cheerfully. "I've typed those memoranda. If you will sign them I'll get them off by—— Why, what on earth's the matter——" He broke off and looked wonderingly at his superior.

"How—how long have you been gone?" asked Lazard breathily.

"Oh, I dunno—about six minutes, I should think; certainly not more, sir—why?"

"You're sure of that?"

"Oh, absolutely—but why? What's the matter? Has that commissioner given you bad news?"

"That *who*?" gasped the ambassador.

"That commissioner. The fellow I passed on the stairs. Said he had a private message for you and was to deliver it personally. Haven't you seen him?"

"What—what was he like?" Lazard's voice was faint almost to a whisper.

"Dashed good-looking chap. Clean shaven, rather tanned. Mass of black hair parted down the side and brushed over. Looks as though he might——"

Lazard, with his face draining white, sat down heavily in the chair.

"Quick!" he said painfully. "Get me Scotland Yard on the telephone."

The secretary gazed at Count Lazard in bewilderment. He automatically went to the telephone, but paused with his hands on the instrument.

"Did I understand you to say get Scotland Yard on the phone?" he asked blankly.

"Yes, yes! And hurry!" Lazard was snapping his fingers with nervous irritability.

The secretary gave the call, and then looked across at his superior.

"Perhaps you would rather I left the room?" he suggested. "Here's your call just coming through. Shall I go?"

"Yes, clear out and stay out till I send for you," snapped Lazard. "Don't leave the house till you've seen me again. I may need your services urgently to-night. Find out while you're away who let that commissioner in."

The secretary handed him the telephone and went out of the room with a look of blank surprise still stamped on his handsome young face.

Lazard waited till the latch of the door clicked, and then barked for a responsible officer to be sent to the phone.

A gruff, businesslike voice answered him.

"This is William Delbury speaking. Inspector Delbury. You are speaking from Count Lazard's number, are you not?"

"Yes, I am Lazard."

"I've been expecting a ring from you, sir. Has anything unusual been happening there to-night?"

Lazard checked up with a sudden

shock. His first electric tinge of panic had worn off. His fright had momentarily got the better of him and sent him flying off with a jump for the protection of high authority. He realized that he had made a bit of a fool of himself. Dain he knew already as a master genius; but he certainly had never ascribed to him the ability to return from the dead. In going to the Yard he was simply forcing his head into the lion's jaws.

"You—you say you were expecting a ring from me to-night—why?" he said evasively.

"To be perfectly candid, sir, somebody has already rung up from your address to-night. The statement he made personally to me rather led me to expect a further communication."

"But who was it?" demanded Lazard hurriedly.

"That I can't tell you, sir. For one thing it isn't our policy to give any information of that nature, and for another—we just don't know. All I can tell you is that there is absolutely nothing against him—but that, oddly enough, we are particularly anxious to find him. Anything you can tell us about him will be regarded as strictly confidential."

"But you surely must know the man?"

"We don't. We only know of him. Nobody here has ever seen him. But he keeps on cropping up into our business in a most disconcerting way. He has been to your house to-night. He telephoned me from there. I'd like to know what is at the back of it."

"But this is the only telephone in the house. Nobody but myself has been in this room all the evening. When did you get the message supposed to come from here?"

"Less than ten minutes ago, sir. There's not the slightest doubt that it emanated from your house. I relayed the call back through the exchange immediately. Exchange assured me defi-

nately that your number was still plugged in on that call."

Lazard fenced, desperately. He needed all the help he could get from Scotland Yard, but he wasn't going to give any away. Already he could see the black clouds of hopelessness gathering thick about him.

He cleared his throat.

"I think there must be some mistake, officer," he said. "At least, as far as your mysterious friend is concerned. What I wished to inform you is that a commissionaire—or somebody wearing the uniform of a commissionaire—has been seen in this house within the last few minutes. And I cannot account for his presence in any way."

"That's very odd, isn't it?"

"Extremely so. I didn't see him myself. But my secretary reported the matter to me only a moment or so ago. As this is the official embassy, I thought it my duty to acquaint you of the facts."

"Quite so, sir. And I'm more than obliged to you. You say he had no business at all in the embassy?"

"None that I can think of. The secretary is away making inquiries about him now. He declared that he had a specially private communication to give to me; and accordingly he was directed to my room. But he never got here. I certainly have never seen him. Whether he is still in the building or not I cannot say. Most mysterious, isn't it?"

"Most. Have you any exceptionally important papers there, sir—or, say, a large sum of money on the premises?"

"Nothing worth half an hour of anybodys' time. Just a moment, will you?"

He rang a bell and in a minute or two the secretary reëntered.

"Well?" asked Lazard.

"By Jove, this is a most extraordinary business, sir," he said. "Do you know, there isn't a soul in the house who knows anything about that commissionaire fellow. Nobody let him in; nobody has seen him. I'm almost believing that I've

been dreaming. He seems more of a hallucination than anything else. Yet I swear I saw him most distinctly standing out on that landing there."

"The servants?" queried Lazard.

"I've questioned every one of them, sir, personally. They were as surprised as you. They swear that nobody has come into the house to-night. I went round and inspected all the doors and windows and sent the entire staff of servants round on a searching exploration through all the rooms. They found nothing; absolutely nothing. There isn't a sign of him. Whoever he was, he seems to have forced his way in—and out again—without leaving any trace whatever."

Lazard turned to the telephone again.

"It's all right, sir. I heard your conversation; you needn't repeat it," came the terse voice over the wire. "The protectorate loan goes through to-morrow, doesn't it?"

"Y-yes," said Lazard, and his fingers twitched.

"Then I think I'm beginning to see a little daylight," said the grim voice. "And I also think I had better come round and see you—don't you?"

"Is it—is it absolutely necessary, at this time of night?"

"I think so, sir. I can see so much more on the spot than with trying to get the hang of a double tangle over the wire."

"I'm afraid I can't possibly see you to-night, officer. I shall be deeply engaged in most important business until far into the night. You can come round any time to-morrow, when I shall be pleased to see you and give you all the information in my possession.

"Very well, sir. I'll be along."

Delbury put his phone down and swung round on Shaughnessy with a jump.

"Mick! Did you hear that!" he barked. "Good God! man—the Ghost was right! We've got the whole shoot-

ing match rigged up and dancing a hornpipe! It's the event of a lifetime!"

"And what are ye after blatherin' about?" demanded Shaughnessy, looking up from a pile of notes.

"That was Lazard on the phone. He's scared out of his life. Like a cat in the rain. Doesn't know which way to turn. Sparring and fencing all over the place. Stammering and stuttering like a kid caught in an orchard."

"Well, it's meself that's always laid my money to the Ghost, bless the sweet soul of him," said the Irishman placidly. "The Ghost has been round to St. James, puttin' the fear of holy hell into his noble excellency, has he not?"

Delbury was silent and there was a hot glow on his cheeks. His shrewd brain was galloping along at a racing pace. The whole field of events covered by the last four amazing days was rushing across his mental vision like a kaleidoscopic slide.

And he was beginning to see light in a dozen dark places.

"I'm askin' ye—has the Ghost been gallivantin' around at St. James to-night?" demanded Shaughnessy eagerly.

"Has he?" said Delbury warmly. "I'll tell the world he has. All dolled up like a commissioner! Ye gods, what a wheeze. There's something moving at the back of all this that'll beat the world when it comes out—and we're right bang on the track of it at last! Quick! Get the word through to all the Kingsway flying squad vans to keep every eye skinned for that commissioner! Tell them to pull up every black uniform they meet and to verify his identity from headquarters. Any one they get, about whom they have the slightest suspicion, hang on to him like grim death. Never mind excuses. That Ghost is as slippery as an eel. Jump to it!"

"And are ye going round to take a little cup of tea with his excellency?" asked Shaughnessy.

"Not I, my son. I don't know a

cent about him yet, and I'm not burning my fingers. But if he's only half what the Ghost says he is, he's got enough rope round his neck to hang himself fifty times over. That protectorate loan goes through to-morrow! And the ambassador himself will be signing the deed! You'll shadow him wherever he goes—from six o'clock in the morning onwards."

"And pleased I'll be to do it," said Shaughnessy. "I'm kind of keen to make the acquaintance of the Ghost. You can lay to it he won't be very far astern of him."

Shaughnessy hurried off to put a jerk into the Flying Squad vans, for there was still a very good chance that the commissioner had not yet had time to get through to Kingsway.

Delbury called up the chief at his private house, and gave him the latest developments.

"There's a most astonishing confirmation just come through, chief, about that last Intimation from the Ghost," he said. "You remember—the one about Count Lazard; the one we disregarded?"

"Why, what's happened?" asked the chief.

"Well, it seems that there's something more than fishy about that gentleman's behavior. Whether he's all that the Ghost alleges or not I wouldn't like to say. I feel the same as you do about that. A bit on the idiotic side, and all that. But about a quarter of an hour ago I got a phone call. The voice declared that he was the Ghost, and that he was speaking from Lazard's house. He was speaking from Lazard's house all right, because I verified it immediately. And I also believe it was the Ghost, because he knew so much about what had already happened. He also knew the numbers, he actually said that Intimation No. 38 would be in the office here in the morning."

"Pretty good evidence—well?"

"He just rang up as laconically as you like, and said what a pity it was we didn't follow up his information. That's all. He rang off, and a minute or two later Lazard himself came through, in a perfect frenzy. Altered his tone about five times in as many minutes. Said a commissioner had been seen in his house. Nervous as the dickens, he was. And I'm positive he was holding back something he was too scared to tell me. I wanted to go round to-night. But he wouldn't hear of it."

"H'm! very odd," said the chief. "Have you warned the vans about that commissioner?"

"Shaughnessy is talking to them now. Lazard is to be at the Bank of England to-morrow at eleven o'clock to receive the transfer of that protectorate loan. Two million pounds in negotiable scrip. I didn't know it till to-night—there's a note here on my desk saying that a plain-clothes guard of five men is required to escort him from the bank back to the embassy."

"Expecting trouble?"

"A heap of it."

"Better sleep at the office to-night, Delbury. I'll be in early in the morning. I'll take charge of this case personally. Either it is getting too involved for any hope of extrication—or it is suddenly becoming remarkably clear."

"That's exactly what I think about it, chief."

"All right. Ring off, will you?"

CHAPTER XV.

WHO WAS THE POLICEMAN?

To THE CHIEF COMMISSIONER, C. I. D.
New Scotland Yard.

Intimation No. 38.

Reference. The Crime Master.

Per Post.

I saw Count Lazard last night and obtained from him, without his knowledge, six different documentary proofs of his complicity in a matter so grave that I am not yet at liberty to disclose the full details.

By midnight to-morrow night, if you will

hold a responsible officer at my disposal, I shall be able to present to you decisive proof of a somewhat extraordinary nature. I will also deliver into your custody one Tansy, a jeweler, for whom you have already issued a warrant. His hiding place is Court Row, Aldgate. But you will not find him there. At the same time, any person found on the premises should be immediately arrested and held on suspicion. They are all members of Lazard's personal group of hired thugs.

Also I shall deliver into your hands Valmon Dain, together with a complete, living proof of what happened in the Hendon house the night Willard Lyall died. I have already told you that Valmon Dain was innocent of that murder—that, indeed, no murder was ever committed at all. The Australian mail leaves on Monday. In that mail is a parcel addressed to Valmon Dain, Melbourne. The contents may be of interest to you.

Lastly, I trust you will do nothing indiscreet till I have obtained for you the incontrovertible proofs you need. I cannot do that until midnight to-morrow night, i. e., to-night. Yours faithfully,
THE GHOST.

Delbury read the missive the moment it arrived. He was thumbing his chin pensively, with Shaughnessy staring over his shoulder. It was just a replica of the other thirty-seven amazing cards that had landed in Scotland Yard since the Ghost first went out on his lone foray. At the bottom was the same neat red wafer with the thumb mark pressed boldly in. And it was written in the same neat print hand that had characterized all the others.

But this one was the most amazing of them all; the most tremendously portentous thing they had ever read. For long seconds neither of them said a word. They scarcely breathed.

Then Delbury burst out: "Gosh! Mick, what do you think of that?"

"I'd reckon it's no use racking me brains over it," said Shaughnessy. "The Ghost seems to be hot on the trail of something or other; but, like the sweet hound he is, he won't be after tellin' us what it is. It's a delightful creature he is. He won't tell us 'owt, for fear we get ourselves into trouble, meddlin' with things that might burn the fingers

off our hands. Sure and it's one of nature's own gentlemen he is. Tell me now, did ye ever suspect the Ghost of that other clever gentleman we're chasin'?" Shaughnessy paused and regarded his chief with a thoughtful frown.

Delbury looked out through the open window to where the dirty old Thames was glittering in the morning sunlight.

"Not—not till last night," he said slowly. "But, having put all the numbers together I reckon it's a thousand to one that the Ghost and Valmon Dain are one and the same man."

Shaughnessy studied the letter card cautiously. He himself had fostered that same idea about Valmon Dain almost since the story first burst on the startled capital.

"Then what's behind it all?" he muttered musingly.

"The devil alone knows," said Delbury, reaching out for the card. "But the moment Lazard came through on the wire and began jabbering about a commissionaire who couldn't be found, I got the notion right up under the skull that those two identities merged into one. How else could he have got through the Kingsway barrage? How else could he have tricked us time and again? How else could he have got on the trail of Lazard? How else could he have known a tenth of the things he has revealed in these intimations? It's the stickiest thing I've known. It's obvious now that Lyall knew it was Dain who was pulling these wires on the crooks. Lyall knew! That's why he went out there to kill him, Dain turned the tables and now the same situation is coming to a head again—but with Lazard in the title rôle."

"Then what are ye going to do about it?"

"Can't do anything, except wait for developments. Lazard is due at the bank in about three hours. You will be there with the plain-clothes men. You'll be in charge of that end. Get into touch with me the moment anything untoward

arises. Lazard, with his couriers, will be walking away from that bank with two million pounds on them—so anything may happen. Special envoys are taking it over the Channel on Sunday morning, so the breeze may not blow up till then. The Ghost says he will have him fixed by to-night; but that's all up in the air yet. We shall have to see what happens."

"And are you staying on here?"

"I'm going to be that responsible officer of which the Ghost speaks so feelingly. I haven't the foggiest notion of what's going to blow up in the case yet, but I've a pretty sound idea it's going to be something huge. And I'm going to be right on hand when it bursts. Unless I'm mistaken, and unless the Ghost is a hoax from beginning to end, this is going to be the most extraordinary case on record. The chief is coming in to take charge; so you'd better get out on your end. Got a man out at St. James?"

"Sure—he's phoning every half hour. The house isn't awake yet. But he's been up along the back alleyway there and he reckons the Ghost could have got in easily through the storeroom window. It's on the ground floor and opens into a part of the house that is only visited about twice a day."

"Right—phone through to the G. P. O. Tell them to find that parcel and deliver it here with all speed. If the mails have already left to go on board, tell them to wire Southampton."

The parcel was delivered in something under two hours. The chief himself opened it. He took out the backfiring revolver and turned it over in his fingers. At first he could not see any difference in it to that of an ordinary revolver. But a closer inspection revealed the hidden mechanism.

The gun was empty. It only held but one cartridge, and the empty case was still in position under the hammer. He pulled it off once or twice, holding it well away from himself while he worked

the trigger. Each time the trigger moved a beautifully fitted slot at the back lifted and disclosed the small round hole of the real barrel, the one that sent its bullet smashing clean into the brain of Willard Lyall.

"Neat, isn't it?" he murmured. "Hullo! What's this? Bless my soul! A five-pound note!"

He picked it out of the box and examined it.

"Brand new," said Delbury. "I'll find out the date it was issued."

The chief smiled. "Oh, yes—I see," he murmured. "I think you will find that it coincides with the date stamp of the postmark. Proves that it wasn't posted until after Lyall died. That very same night. That's evidence, I suppose, to show that this trick thing wasn't made as an afterthought—a clever get-out of a murder charge. Cute—don't you think?"

Delbury nodded glumly. "Seems to be too brainy to be strictly honest," he said.

Then the phone bell from the watcher in St. James rang.

"Headquarters?" he called. "Lazard is just leaving in his car for the bank. Two envoys with him."

"Follow him up," said the chief, "and give orders that if any one remotely resembling Valmon Dain is seen anywhere in the neighborhood of the bank he is to be shadowed all the way by a good man. Don't arrest him right away. Let him lead you on to his retreat. We have a chance here of clearing out the whole nest. See that you don't bungle it. Who is in charge of things at the bank end?"

"Shaughnessy. He has a guard of five out there with him, chief. He's going to phone through to me the moment anything moves. I have a fast car waiting now."

"Very good; everything now swings on what happens in Threadneedle Street, I take it?"

"That's about the size of it, chief."

In Threadneedle Street there was the usual traffic jam, a rolling half mile of drays and buses and vans and cabs that glutted the thoroughfare and proceeded in forty-yard crawls. Lazard had been held up in jam after jam all the way from the lower end of the Strand. The continued delays were gnawing at the count's nerves.

The clocks were already hammering the hour of eleven. Lazard put his head out of the car and saw the long lines of crawling traffic that still lay between him and the bank. He made a quick gesture to his envoys and climbed out.

Together the three of them finished the journey on foot with a man in blue uniform ten yards behind them all the way.

Lazard gave his name at the doors and was ushered straight through to a solidly furnished private office. A high official received him, bowed and assured him that everything was in perfect readiness for conveyance.

The ambassador nodded perfunctorily and took out a gold fountain pen.

"Is the guard here?" he asked.

"Five plain-clothes men, sir. They will escort you back to the embassy. This money crosses the Channel in the morning, does it not?"

The ambassador looked shrewdly round the office.

"You have a telephone in this room," he said quietly. "I prefer not to answer that question; it has been demon-

strated to me that even telephones have ears."

The official smiled and rubbed his hands gently. Well, well, well! All these great people had their own little idiosyncracies. They were entitled to them. That is why they were great. And he was paid very handsomely for humoring such.

The actual conveyance was a very simple matter.

Lazard signed a few documents and the official signed a few more. Some important-looking stamps were produced, stuck on to various parchments, and canceled with a few more signatures. A little entry was made in a very large book. The ambassador signed that too, and the ritual was complete.

All that remained to do was to count over the money to him. Two hundred neat little blocks of notes for ten thousand pounds each. They were totaled up to him and the stamped number voucher was given to him. The two envoys packed the notes away in a two-handed bank bag and locked it on to their wrists. Lazard appeared to be thoroughly bored by the whole business.

His car was waiting for him at the curb.

A blue-uniformed policeman held the door open for him.

Lazard glanced at him as he entered, and he turned deathly white.

"The embassy, sir?" asked the chauffeur.

"Yes, quickly," said Lazard faintly.

To be concluded in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.



BOB-HAIR BANDIT IS MODEL PRISONER

UP in Auburn prison, Celia Cooney, the erstwhile "Bob-hair Bandit," who achieved much notoriety last year by her depredations in Brooklyn, New York, is now paying the penalty for her misdeeds. According to reports from the prison, the young woman is one of Auburn's model prisoners, as is her husband, Edward Cooney. She has permitted her hair to grow and is saving the two thousand dollars which she received from a news service bureau for writing the story of her career. This money will serve to start her husband in the welding business, when the couple regain their freedom.

Some "Lulu!"

By Roland Krebs

Author of "The Star That Went Out," etc.

THE DUDE sauntered majestically out of the bank. Before its polished, brass-bound doors he paused for a moment, oozing a faultless imitation of opulence that he did not possess and rocking on the balls of his feet, a figure a trifle too plump for a man as young as he was.

Any passer-by observing The Dude might have supposed that he just had made an important deposit or an equally important withdrawal from the Pine Lawn Savings Bank before which he lolled.

The passer-by would have been entirely wrong. Eddie Nott—The Dude—had gone inside, stalled around a writing desk for a moment and looked the place over to see if he thought he might hold it up successfully.

He had decided that it would be a cinch—a great, big, juicy, creamy cinch. Wherefore The Dude's air of satisfaction as he rocked on the balls of his feet.

Eddie Nott was not as idle as he appeared to be as he lolled before the bank. He was carefully taking the measure of Flora Boulevard, on one of whose corners the institution stood. Flora Boulevard, on either side of the street-car tracks, was torn up and dug up, all part of the process of making it a street instead of the puddle-pocked road it had been.

"This dump is just right for a job," The Dude reassured himself. "Just suburban enough to have punk police protection. It'll be a push-over."

But all of a sudden he stopped his rocking and the genial glow left his face. He stared across the street. What he stared at was Patrolman Tom Phelan, as neat a policeman as ever he had seen. Mr. Phelan just had turned a corner and now was peering carefully up and down Flora Boulevard in quest of possible law violators. What disturbed The Dude was that Patrolman Phelan made no haste to be on his way. In fact, the officer appeared about to attach himself to the immediate neighborhood for quite some time.

"Guess I'll have to stick around here a couple of days," Eddie Nott advised himself, "and make a memorandum of how that guy divides his beat so he won't be using the landscape to walk on when we want to use it for our stick-up."

Ten minutes The Dude waited, but Tom Phelan made no move save to saunter about the corner and watch automobilists to see that they made a fool of no traffic regulation.

Twenty more minutes passed and there was no change. Frequently, Eddie Nott looked at his watch, then gazed intently up and down Flora Boulevard, as if he were awaiting some appointment. This he did as an excuse to stay in one spot without exciting suspicion as to why he might be there. He wondered if Officer Phelan had any other function than to idle on street corners. He decided upon subtle inquiries. Eddie observed a young man in overalls sweeping the sidewalk before

the bank. He appeared none too bright. Sort of ripe for questioning.

"Pardon me," The Dude interrupted. "That policeman over there looks a lot like an old friend of mine, Harry Gilbertson, of the Elm Street Station, downtown. Is that him?"

The sweeper was grateful to Eddie for the interruption. He loved all interruptions of his work.

"Nope," he said, ignorant that there was no such person as a Harry Gilbertson of the Elm Street Station. "That's Tom Phelan. He never was in a downtown district. Been out here ever since he got out of the army. Peach of a guy, too."

"Looks like it," said The Dude agreeably. "Gilly was a nice fellow, believe me. I must look that boy up." He paused and watched Patrolman Phelan across the street. "He looks tired out, don't he? Not anxious to do much walking. I guess that does get tough on a fellow."

"Oh, no," said the odd-job man. "He ain't got much of a beat, mister."

The Dude was careful not to exhibit too much interest—or disappointment. He merely pursed his lips and lifted his eyebrows in a way that might be meant to say: "Oh-h-h, I see! Handshaker with a drag in the front office, hey?"

The sweeper must have feared that that was exactly what the opulent-appearing gentleman had surmised, for he hastened to explain:

"You see, mister, this is a pretty important bank for this part of town. You can see for yourself that Flora Boulevard is a good business street—lots of stores, all doing a good business.

"Well, sir, the Flora Boulevard Merchants' Association put up a squawk a year or so ago and said they wouldn't stand for no hick-town police protection like a lot of neighborhoods on the city-limit line put up with. That ended up with Tommy Phelan's beat being cut in half and him told to parade

the boulevard for six blocks and back and nothing else."

The Dude's heart sank at this. His was a sort of work that never could reach its full flower while a lot of nose-y police buzzed near by.

"Peach of a fellow," the man exclaimed again.

Eddie Nott saw that this obtuse employee of the bank was an admirer of the police officer and that a chance to praise Mr. Phelan probably was more attractive than resuming his sweeping of the sidewalk.

"Yeah?" The Dude encouraged.

"Yes, sir!" said his vis-à-vis. "Me and him buddied together in the same outfit during the war. He was the best-looking soldier in the regiment. Well, you can see that right now, mister. Look at the way that uniform fits him.

"Look at the way he's got his shoes shined. You'll never see Tom Phelan without a crease in his trousers. He takes a pride in looking like a new pin, mister.

"The colonel picked him out for his orderly but that didn't last long."

Eddie Nott grinned. "Sort of laid down when his job got soft, eh?" he said.

"No, sir!" The man with the broom was indignant. "He cut such a swell figure that the general of the brigade took him away from the colonel to stand outside his door and look military. I guess if the war had gone on much longer different generals would have swiped Tommy till finally Pershing got him."

"You don't say!" The Dude said, not averse to drawing this garrulous admirer out.

"Yes, sir, and—— Look there, would you!"

The Dude followed the young man's pointing finger. He saw Patrolman Phelan, who had stepped gingerly out into the middle of the street to help to her feet a little girl who had slipped,

lose his own balance in the sticky clay of the torn-up street and fall to one knee.

The youth who had buddied with Tom Phelan nudged The Dude excitedly in the ribs. "Watch!" he said gleefully. "Just watch Tommy."

The policeman carried the little girl to the curb, brushed her off clumsily and, after she had scampered away, looked down at his uniform critically. He made a wry face, for the damp, sticky mud had left a nasty stain on one trouser leg.

"I'll betcha a dime to a doughnut, mister," offered the man who was supposed to sweep but didn't, "that the next thing Tommy does is go right in that shop across the street that says 'I. Schulberg' on the window and have Ike clean and press them trousers."

That's what Officer Phelan did. He stepped quickly inside the little cleaning and pressing shop, before any one else could see what a sorry figure he cut.

"That guy's a regular dude, mister," Eddie Nott's informant prattled on. "I've seen him look up and down the street lots of times and hop into Ike's for a quick pressing. He's nuts about keeping up appearances.

"But don't get the idea that he's a picture-book soldier that always looks nice. I've seen him under fire, mister, and he's as cool as a blizzard. I'll bet he shot more than one lump under a German's hide in the war. He was the best rifle and revolver shot in the regiment, mister, but a nut on neatness.

"Let me tell you about the time he ripped his trousers, mister, and was having Ike fix them—— Gee! here comes the prexy of the bank, mister. Have to finish that story some other time."

The story-teller began sweeping again as if his life depended upon it while an important-looking man emerged from the bank and entered an automobile.

Eddie Nott took his leave. The smile

he had had when first he came out of the bank was again on his face. He had an idea and that idea made him think again that the stick-up of the Pine Lawn Savings Bank after all would be a great, big, juicy, creamy cinch.

"So that guy's a dude, too, is he?" Eddie said to himself, almost smacking his lips over it.

Eddie, as you can guess, was a dude proper. He had a warm spot in his heart for dudes. He knew just how a dude felt and acted. Always worried that there'll be a bag at the knees of his trousers. Fearful ever that wrinkles will gather inside the elbows of his sleeves. Apprehensive lest the collar of his coat climb up over the collar of his shirt. Always hoping to present novel effects in his clothes, like those you see in the ready-to-wear advertisements. Forever having things pressed that didn't need pressing and using a whisk broom on clothes that required no brushing. That's how a dude was. Dudes are all alike. Eddie Nott knew that this was the way he behaved and thought it not unreasonable to suppose that Patrolman Tom Phelan did just as he did.

Eddie was smiling more broadly than ever when he arrived at home in the evening and confronted Mrs. Eddie Nott, who was something of a dude herself. That surprised Estelle Nott, for she and her husband had not been any too nice to each other when they parted that morning. Their disagreement had been over a new frock that Estelle wanted, which would be natural in a dude or "dudess," and which Eddie felt they could not afford, which would be natural in a husband. She had worn her worst one and pointed out all its defects, but Eddie had been firm.

"Would you still like that new outfit, honey?" asked The Dude, folding the dudess in his arms and kissing her.

"Certainly," she said, shortly and suspiciously.

"Then I can tell you an easy way to get it," Eddie told her.

"How?"

"Essie, I can't right now think of anything that an average man, but particularly one that always wanted to look well, would rather do than appear before a crowd of people dressed up in shoes, socks, shirt, vest, coat and hat but without any trousers."

"Say!" interrupted Mrs. Nott, "what's all this got to do with my new frock, I ask you?"

"Just this, Ess. I was out looking over the Pine Lawn Bank that Shorty and Joe and me are going to stick-up next week and it's duck soup except for one thing—the copper on that beat is always too near the bank.

"But I've got a scheme, honey, where we can make him count for nothing and you can help us and if you do as well as you done in those last three jobs that you helped on you're a 'lulu.'"

"What do I do?" demanded the wife, still suspicious.

The Dude thereupon outlined to her, the sartorial niceties of Patrolman Phelan.

"As soon as he gets a spot on his clothes he dashes into that cleaning fellow and has it sponged out and the suit pressed," said Eddie.

"I still don't see where I figure in the job," Mrs. Nott insisted.

"In this way, kid. We won't wait until this guy's at the end of his six-block beat. He's liable to come buzzing back. No, we'll wait until he's right across the street from the bank.

"That's where you dip your oar into the soup. He's a gallant guy. This afternoon I saw him dash bravely out into the mud to pick up a little girl that had fallen down. That gave me the hunch.

"You'll cross the street, see, which is torn up and muddy. Wear this old outfit of yours that you say ain't any good any more. When you're near a

puddle, fake a fall and plop right into the mud.

"If he don't come rushing out to help you up, I'm the King of Sweden. As he tries to hoist you up, pull his leg and pull him down in the mud, too. Then he'll have to duck into the tailor's and sit in a booth in his undies while his suit's being cleaned.

"I tell you, Essie, there's no man, bank hold-up or not, that would run out in front of a crowd with his naked knees showing, except a Scotchman, and this guy is Irish. That'll take him off our heels and then, seeing as your dress will be ruined, we'll get you a new one."

The Dude's wife thought that such a clever scheme that she kissed him.

It got the hearty indorsement of The Dude's two lieutenants, Shorty and Joe, besides. For several days they kept a watch by turns on Tommy Phelan and found that he was as fastidious as the bank's man of all work had told Eddie Nott he was. He was a frequent visitor in Schulberg's pressing shop, for the reason that he had shoe brushes and a whisk broom parked there for tidying-up purposes.

One Thursday, they decided that the hour had come. The pickings were bound to be good, because on Thursdays the bank made up pay-roll packets for a fire clay company and a steel wire corporation whose plants were in Pine Lawn.

Shorty drove an automobile up to the corner of the bank, The Dude and Joe had arrived previously and separately in order to excite no suspicion.

Patrolman Phelan, promptly in accord with the schedule of his movements that Eddie Nott had drawn, just had come to a halt on the corner.

Estelle, when the number of persons and traffic were reduced to a minimum on the street, began to cross and, as arranged, fell. The gallant Phelan, as expected, dashed to her assistance, only

to be tumbled into the mud, too. Tommy Phelan carried Estelle to the pavement, where she thanked him and said she would seek help in a woman's tailoring establishment a block distant. The policeman watched her trim figure move away and then hurried into I. Schulberg's shop.

Simultaneously, Eddie, The Dude, and Joe hurried into the Pine Lawn Savings Bank, where they quickly stuck up the bank employees and snatched a satchel. It was going to be a rich haul—the bag was crammed with currency.

Patrolman Phelan could not have been in Schulberg's shop more than three minutes when Eddie and Joe, moving backward with guns pointed, headed toward the door and Shorty's automobile grunting at the curb.

"Just as I said," The Dude told himself, "it's a great, big, juicy, creamy cinch—and all the time that guy's sitting in the tailor's shop in his undies."

That was what The Dude told himself a second or two after a teller, hands still aloft, had stepped on a push button in the floor that set burglar alarms to ringing in half a dozen stores near to the bank, among them Schulberg's. Officer Phelan, therefore, heard it. As The Dude and Joe stepped out of the bank door, Patrolman Phelan stepped out of the presser's door.

In his underwear and with bare knees showing? Trouserless? Coatless? Hatless?

No! Faultless!

Officer Phelan, the best rifle and revolver shot of his war-time regiment, was as spick and span as ever he had been. He was wearing spotless trousers and a coat pressed so marvelously that it seemed no one could have done it in those few minutes.

The Dude's astonishment was immense. He had seen great daubs of mud all over the man's uniform and yet here he was, spotless.

Officer Phelan snapped out his .45-40

revolver, which had pricked many a hole in the No. 5 ring of a twenty-yard target, and sent two 255-grain bullets and a cloud of black powder smoke whizzing toward The Dude. He didn't hit The Dude. He hadn't shot at him. He had shot at the satchel and he hit that neatly. In fact, he hit it so neatly that it clipped the bag off from the handle, so that it plumped to the pavement and left The Dude holding a handle that now was a handle to nothing at all.

The policeman thought he had impressed The Dude with his marksmanship sufficiently to make it unnecessary that he shoot him. Eddie Nott was impressed. His hands went up, high. So did Joe's. Shorty, taking no chances, climbed out of his automobile and lined up with his pals along the bank wall.

Before the three had time to collect their wits, they found themselves in the Eleventh District Station, where The Dude was tumbled into a cell.

He still was wondering how any mortal could have his uniform cleaned so quickly as Patrolman Phelan had done.

The occupant of the adjoining cell got up and pered through the bars.

"Well, well," he said. "What are you doing here?"

Eddie, The Dude, saw that it was the odd-job man of the bank to whom he had spoken some days before.

"I'm sobering up," the odd-job man volunteered. "Went on a tear last night and got myself caged up. What are you doing here—oh, say! I didn't get to finish my story the other day.

"Well, you see," he rambled along, "Tommy ripped his trousers and went into Ike's to have them repaired. While he was sitting in there in his unmentionables, mister, some gun held up a guy a few doors away from Ike's shop.

"Well, the board tried Tommy and fined him fifty dollars and gave him fifteen demerits. That taught him a

lesson. Do you know what he did then?"

"What?" asked The Dude breathlessly.

"He got Ike to keep a spare uniform for him so he could change in a half a minute any time he wanted. He's got another suit, all cleaned and pressed in the brewery or what used to be a brewery, down on Summit Avenue and would you believe it? A third suit kept with the plumber on Laurel Avenue.

"Tommy always said they'd never catch him like that again, and I guess they never will."

"No," said The Dude sadly, "I guess they never will."

"What are you here for, old man?" questioned Phelan's admirer.

"For being an amateur dude," said Eddie Nott.

The odd-job chap concluded that the prisoner in the next cell must have been brought in to sober up, too. Else, why would he talk so foolishly?



CRIPPLED POLICEMAN SUBDUES SUSPECT

FOR more than a year, Policeman Alvin Randall of the Boston police force has been crippled as a result of a taxicab accident, but this fact does not seem to interfere with his efficiency as an upholder of the law. One day recently he was hobbling along State Street on two canes, on his way to visit the doctor, when he noticed two men trying in vain to start a car which they had just entered. Randall's police instinct told him that something was wrong, and he summoned a brother officer and communicated his suspicions. The other policeman, Pennington by name, seized one of the suspects, and Randall, despite his injuries, grappled with the other. Both suspects put up a terrific battle and although handicapped by his injuries, Policeman Randall finally succeeded in overcoming his man and placing him under arrest.

Later, Superintendent Crowley personally complimented Officer Randall, saying: "You have shown that although out of harness for over a year, you are still the same alert policeman you were before you were injured. I congratulate you."



CREDIT CRIMINALS INCREASING

A DETERMINED effort to war on the type of criminals who defraud merchants out of large sums annually by the abuse of credit courtesies has recently been decided upon by the New York Credit Men's Association. A fund to be used in a nation-wide campaign to fight credit frauds, including fraudulent insolvencies and bogus bankruptcy cases will eventually total one million dollars. The national campaign will be in charge of the National Association of Credit Men, which has adopted as its slogan, "All commerce is imperiled when the credit crook goes free."

According to a report submitted by Charles E. Meek, assistant vice president of a large New York bank, two hundred and fifty million dollars is lost annually through credit frauds. Other reports were made showing that about seven per cent of all failures were attributable to fraud and that every year there are something like fifteen hundred criminal bankruptcies. These, it was said are managed by professional gangs of swindlers, who purchase large quantities of merchandise with an expectation of profiting through a receivership.

Into Thin Air

by Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Stones," etc.

THE warden of the Surgentville Prison had an extraordinarily keen interest in that morning's newspaper. At about six o'clock each morning, the paper was tossed onto the front porch of the warden's residence, which stood on the State reservation just down the slope from the front wall of the prison. Enoch Blanter's hour for rising was eight o'clock, and, being the first up in his household, he usually retrieved the paper himself—sometimes letting it lie there a half hour or more after he got up.

But on this particular morning, Warden Blanter was up and peering impatiently out of a front window fifteen or twenty minutes before the paper carrier came along. He was still clad in nightshirt and slippers. His thin, dun-colored hair was disheveled, and the one strand which he wore long in order to brush it up over the top of his bald head hung loosely now over one ear. He was a large, bloated man, with small, scowling eyes and the puffed face of one who drank too much. Prohibition had effected no alteration in the quantity of liquor absorbed by Enoch Blanter, although the quality and the price brought from him more than one curse against that particular constitutional amendment. The warden presented a disagreeable picture as he stood there at the front window, gnawing the ends of his mustache, scowling up the street, and muttering maledictions against the undersized paper carrier

Only when he gazed on the gray walls of the prison up the slope—high walls turreted and towered with guard stations—did anything like good nature stir within, but the reaction of even this emotion was not pleasant to contemplate. There was a quality of merciless gloating in the warden's satisfaction at being head of that institution. There were fourteen hundred or more convicts in that prison, and even now they were up and dressed, waiting for the cell doors to open at six o'clock. These fourteen hundred men, excepting a few trusties and those in hospital or punishment cells, would march forth to the mess hall with folded arms promptly at six o'clock; they would eat breakfast silently, without a word, or at least no more words than prisoners can exchange surreptitiously. After breakfast, they would march into the yard, and thence to the various prison shops and work places. They would toil all day, and at night they would march back to their cells. Promptly at nine o'clock the lights would be turned out, and rubber-heeled guards, patrolling the corridors, would see to it that every man lay in his bunk.

This scowling, bloated man standing at the front window of his house, had fourteen hundred and more men absolutely under his thumb. Their every movement was by a rule laid down by Enoch Blanter. He was an absolute czar over fourteen hundred men. He could make them get out of bed at a certain moment, fold their arms and

march with certain steps and along, almost, a line laid down by himself. He even set the time, twenty minutes, which they were allowed to spend in eating. They had to work, eat, sleep, walk, talk according to rules laid down by Enoch Blanter. It always gave Mr. Blanter a feeling of power to look on the prison—for the governor who appointed him had given him a free rein in the management, and the day of legislation limiting the authority of a warden and establishing a commission control of the prison had not yet dawned in that State. Enoch Blanter and the governor were warm political friends, and the governor on more than one occasion had refused to interfere with Warden Blanter in the slightest, even at the behest of certain individuals and societies of an unofficial standing who interested themselves in prison reform. Through a turn in the political fates, a mercenary political machine had control of the State government, and knowing they would be turned out at the next election, they proposed to make the most of their opportunity. Warden Blanter, a creature of the machine, a ward politician and a power among the gangster cliques in the largest city in the State, devoted his newly-acquired authority to squeezing out of the prison contracts the last penny of graft.

He also took advantage of his opportunity to reign as an absolute monarch. His idea of authority was pressure, and he certainly exercised it over the miserable wretches within those walls. He fed them poorly, he worked them twelve hours a day, and he applied cruel methods of discipline, just how cruel will presently appear.

So the grin of satisfaction on Warden Blanter's countenance as his eyes wandered now and then to the prison walls was not that of a man proud of his elevation to a high place and opportunity for public service. It was the grin of a despot, the grin of a cruel man with

a narrow mind who for a time had fourteen hundred and more men under the heel of his boot. He had them there, and day by day he was grinding them farther into the dirt. Warden Blanter's soul was a soul of the dark ages, and to him convicts were proper objects of oppression.

The warden shuffled into the kitchen and got another drink from a bottle he kept handy there. When he returned to the front window, the sun was just appearing above the walls atop the slope. It promised to be a hot day, and already the temper of Warden Blanter was at the simmering point. It would no doubt boil over numerous times during the day, for he was a creature of moods, Warden Blanter was—cruel, petulant moods into which he was swept by trivial occurrences. The fact that the paper carrier appeared to be late, though in fact he wasn't late, might result in floggings and "string-ups" inside those grim walls. The warden heard, dimly, the signal gongs striking for the breakfast march inside the prison—exactly six o'clock—just as the paper carrier came along.

Warden Blanter reached out the door and got the paper. It was folded tightly, just as the carrier tossed it from the sidewalk, and the warden opened it with eager fingers. Clear across the top of the first page, an eight-column stream headline, was the news the warden sought—and, to him, it was good news: "John Broadlin, Banker, Convicted."

That was the news that sent a thrill of gloating exultation into the heart of Enoch Blanter. The under headings developed that news. The jury had deliberated eight hours, returning its verdict about midnight. The trial had taken place in the big city across the State from the Surgentville prison, the city which was the home of Enoch Blanter, and the city in which he and John Broadlin had been deadly enemies. John

Broadlin, head of a bank, had been found guilty of embezzlement—and Enoch Blanter would soon have him in his power.

Enoch Blanter was a man who took a drink either because he was enraged at something or extremely pleased. So, still reading eagerly, he adjourned to the kitchen and his bottle. After he had read the entire story of the trial, he went upstairs and berated his wife for not being up, with never a thought that it was almost two hours earlier than their usual time for rising. The silent, mistreated woman got up without a word, and aroused the cook. Enoch Blanter couldn't sleep now—he was too full of joy for that—so why should he let any one else sleep? He did not discuss the Broadlin case with his wife—he never discussed anything except fancied grievances with her—and, having finished his early breakfast, he then went up slowly the slope to his office in the prison.

The prisoners, those who violated the rules, did not suffer more than usual that day. Enoch Blanter's early testiness of temper was supplanted by his inward rejoicing over the result of the Broadlin trial.

John Broadlin, gray-haired, but a strong, well-preserved man, and one who had about him an air of distinction and breeding, reached Sargentville Prison five days after his conviction, in company with five other prisoners convicted at that term of court. The deputy sheriffs in charge of the squad displayed a deferential attitude toward Broadlin, and it was his own choice that brought him there handcuffed to another prisoner. He had been told that he could go without handcuffs, but John Broadlin was not a man who would seek to profit in those things by his former station in life. He understood human nature well enough to know that his life among the prisoners would be hard if

he came to be looked on as a pet of sheriffs and officials.

The prisoner to whom he was handcuffed was a product of life at the other end of the scale from John Broadlin. Yet these two men, who had formed an acquaintance, friendship in fact, in the county jail seemed to be as companionable as two men who had moved a lifetime in identical circles. John Broadlin's handcuff mate was "Stony" Peters—called Stony by the police and his associates in the underworld because he was a prime specimen of the hardened criminal. He was a slouching man with an ill-humored face, dressed shabbily. His eyes were hard and piercing. He was a persistent, relentless crook of the thieving type, and though no murders were recorded against him, it was a subject of common agreement that he well deserved his sobriquet. And he was notorious too, known from one end of the State to the other because of the frequency in which his encounters with the law appeared in the newspapers. This was Stony Peters' third trip to Sargentville Prison. Less than a year had elapsed since the expiration of his last term.

What could account for the companionable attitude of John Broadlin, banker, and Stony Peters? It wasn't an attitude so striking as to attract undue attention, for both men took pains to conceal their feelings, yet there was an understanding between them. There were times when they could talk privately in undertones, on the train, and one chance when they were marching from the end of the car line to the prison gates.

"Now you'll follow my suggestion, will you?" Broadlin asked, in a voice hardly above a whisper.

"Yeh," Stony Peters replied likewise. "It's a bum hunch, but I'll stick by yuh."

"Good," the banker rejoined. "We'll win. It will take patience, and careful

work but we'll win. And in the long run, you'll be better off than if you followed your own scheme. Thanks, Stony, for your help."

"Don't menshun it," Stony returned, with the air of a man who had been won over to do something which he regarded as a sacrifice. "If yuh're gonta play that bum hunch, be wise, and play it right. And don't do nuthin' till——"

At that moment, a deputy sheriff got a little closer to them. Those were the last words the two prisoners exchanged on the outside.

Warden Enoch Blanter was on the lookout. In the newspapers, he read that John Broadlin had been sentenced to two years in Surgentville Prison, that Broadlin had decided not to appeal his case but to begin serving his sentence at once, and that he would start for the prison at a certain time. It was now about nine o'clock in the morning. The warden could see the end of the car line from his office windows, and he stood there watching. He had been wise enough not to gloat openly on the chance for sweet revenge that had come to him, for he didn't wish the public at large to take cognizance of the indignities and cruelties he intended to inflict, but he often, in moods of inward conversation, discussed the situation with himself.

"There he is," he muttered, as he recognized John Broadlin among the men who descended from the car and took up the march to the prison. "In about three minutes now I'll have him—have him for a year anyway. I won't be turned out o' this job for a year anyhow—and all them days I'll have that banker—have him right here under my boots, where I can tramp on him. Thought he knew sumpin about politics, he did—a reformer—that's the crowd he run with. I tried to be nice to him at political meetin's, and he snubbed me—made me feel like I was so much dirt. Gave interviews to the papers, callin'

me a menace to good gover'ment—that's how he said it. I'm a menace, eh—I ain't fit to 'sociate with the crowd he run with, eh? Well, he'll see if I'm a menace, and just how big a menace I can be—to him! Him talkin' about clean gover'ment, and givin' the machine the dickens. First thing you know he up and grabs about twenty thousand out o' his bank—depositors' dough. 'Course he just speculated—meant to put it back, I s'pose, bein' in a tight place 'count o' his business enemies—but it's stealin' just the same. And now——"

Enoch Blanter stared in delighted amazement.

"And if they ain't got him handcuffed to Stony Peters, toughest crook in the State! Ain't that swell! Couldn't 'a' done better if I figured that out myself. Say—that's a good idea—a peach!" The idea grew into a tremendous thing in just a moment, grew naturally out of the warden's desire to inflict every possible humiliation on Broadlin. "Now maybe," he mused, "I could make Stony Peters a convict-boss o' some gang—some dirty, hard-workin' gang—and put this soft-fingered banker under him. Ain't that grand!"

Just then the newcomers passed out of view, behind the corner of the administration offices. And in a moment, the noise of the big front gate opening came dimly to the ears of the warden. John Broadlin was inside, inside with the five other wretches who came with him. They were within the great inclosure of rock and steel, and under the heel of a petty but none the less cruel and unscrupulous tyrant. Outside the sun shone brightly and the birds sang cheerfully—as though a tragic chapter had not just been written in six human lives.

"He's mine!" was the thought that ran through the brain of Warden Enoch Blanter.

Outwardly Warden Blanter appeared to be oblivious of the presence of John

Broadlin. Subordinates attended to the details of inducting a man into prison, as they ordinarily would in assigning him to a job. Blanter feared that his subordinates, knowing nothing of their chief's hatred, might be lenient with Broadlin. On account of his abilities and education, they might think it to the advantage of the prison work to give Broadlin a "soft" job, a clerkship of some sort, a job that couldn't be filled by every prisoner. Something had to be done, and done quickly. Blanter summoned the deputy warden.

"Fred," he said, "I don't want 'o be too hard on this banker that comes in this mornin'. We won't put the rock-gang rule on him." There was a rule that every new prisoner should work at least a month on the back-breaking rock gang. "Don't let 'em put him on the rock gang. I happened to be lookin' out o' the window, and I saw him comin' up the walk—I knew him, y'know, back home. He looks played out. Guess this thing's hit him hard. Don't want 'o rub it in—understand."

The deputy warden had a feeling that Enoch Blanter for once in his life had a kindly impulse, and he was amazed. They were friends, personal and political, these two men, yet Blanter intended to handle John Broadlin alone—handle him deftly and cunningly, heaping on indignities and cruelties, but with a show of kindness.

"What'll I do with him?" the deputy warden inquired.

"I was just studyin' about that," the warden replied, musingly. "Don't want 'o be too nice to him, understand. He ain't no better'n the other convicts in here, and still— Well, we'll be a little easier on him. He's strong and his health's good, but he'd wilt on the rock gang, I'm afraid. That means we'll be easy on the men that come in with him. Don't want 'o make it appear we singled him out for favors. Now why can't we put all of 'em—I saw four con-

victs with Broadlin—why can't we put 'em all on the 'Three C's' gang—for a while anyway?"

"The Three C's——"

The deputy warden stared in still further amazement. He wasn't a brilliant man, the deputy warden—in fact, he'd been chosen by Blanter because of his doglike devotion to Blanter and his lack of brilliancy. He saw in the warden's interest in Broadlin only a kindly impulse, and though he thought the warden's suggestion a mistake, assuming that he did wish to be nice to Broadlin, he had no suspicion that the proposal was a cunningly conceived scheme to humiliate the banker to the limit. So the deputy warden offered no argument.

"We can do that," he said. "Three C's gang ain't hard work, but it's kind o'——"

"Yes, I know," Warden Blanter supplied; "it ain't the nicest work in here—but it's easy on a man's muscles. That's the main thing. Don't want 'o bear down on Broadlin—poor devil! Do that, Fred, will you? Put the crowd of 'em—them five—on the Three C's."

There was hardly a prisoner in Sargentville who wouldn't have preferred the rock gang—the grueling toil of the rock gang—to the Three C's. The Three C's gang had been given that name by prisoners, and the name had been accepted by the officials, because it was composed of the physically or mentally unfit—cripples, crazies and cranks. There are a number of such men in every prison, nervous wrecks, cripples and so on, incapable of other work. The Three C's were the slumgullions of the prison, taking care of the garbage from the mess hall, peeling the vast quantity of potatoes and other vegetables necessary to feed more than fourteen hundred men, brushing and cleaning the yard with rakes and wire brooms—the most menial and most unpleasant tasks in the prison, even if these tasks did not require much physical energy.

And it was through the Three C's gang—the cripples, crazies and cranks—that Enoch Blanter took his first crack at John Broadlin.

The work and the associations were enough to embitter the soul of almost any man, for most of the Three C's were the scrapings of the underworlds from which they had come—most of them with nerves shattered by a lifetime of dissipation and addiction to dope. They were the meanest of thieves and prowlers, and were as disagreeable and repulsive inside as they had been on the outside. Yet John Broadlin accepted his lot without a whimper—in fact, he accepted it with an equanimity that quickly earned him the respect of prisoners who were mentally capable of sizing up the situation. The clever crooks, who compose the aristocracy of a prison, took notice of John Broadlin, and liked him.

And as a further humiliation, Warden Blanter worked things so that John Broadlin had as a cellmate Stony Peters. Stony was such a hardened criminal, and so notorious, that he was regarded by the warden as a man who would naturally be hated by the banker. But the warden did not understand. He did not understand that even criminals sometimes have likable qualities. He failed to reflect on what might result from a combination of Stony Peters' craft and cunning and John Broadlin's intelligence.

John Broadlin knew exactly why he had been put on the Three C's gang, but he never talked of this to any one except Stony Peters. And he didn't talk about it much with Stony. They had other matters to discuss—weighty matters, and they talked of these things in undertones. There were quiet conferences between Stony Peters and John Broadlin, and soon a few others—capable, close-mouthed, crafty crooks—were admitted to the secret enterprise.

Warden Blanter remained content

and oblivious—content because he knew the Three C's gang irked John Broadlin more than hard work would have irked him; and oblivious because his understanding of human nature and his intelligence were not very deep.

Within a month, Stony Peters was made foreman of the Three C's gang. Stony and John Broadlin understood that this was a further attempt to humiliate Broadlin, and they "played up" to the warden. Stony simulated a contempt for the banker, and he gave him the most distasteful tasks. There were whisperings about this among the prisoners. The whisperings came to the attention of the warden through his "snitches." He was overjoyed, and made up his mind to reward Stony Peters at some future time.

About two months after John Broadlin entered Sargentville Prison, the attention of Warden Enoch Blanter was diverted by a distressing incident. A prisoner escaped—a lifer who had been inside less than a year, and a man whose crime was still comparatively fresh in the public mind. It made a big story for the newspapers all over the State, for the man was a murderer. Furthermore, the method of his escape was highly mysterious.

He simply was found missing one evening. He was not in the line that marched from the mess hall to the cell houses after supper. He had worked that day in a prison shop. He vanished some time between the moment he marched out of the shop and the time of the count at the door of his cell house. The line was one man short. A check-up revealed the identity of the missing prisoner.

The murderer had escaped in daylight. The prison was searched high and low, for the man might be a "hide-out." In fact, it was almost impossible to believe that he was outside the walls, for every guard had been at his post

and all gates had been locked. It was more than likely that he was hidden somewhere inside, and would make a dash to get over the walls after night-fall. But the missing convict was not found. The wall guards were doubled that night. In the morning, the man was still missing, as he was three days later. There seemed to be no question as to his complete escape by this time.

It was the first time during the administration of Warden Blanter that a prisoner had escaped. Blanter had often boasted of his record in this respect. Surgentville was a "tough joint to beat," as the prisoners expressed it. Escapes had always been at a comparative minimum there—and what hurt Blanter was the fact that one thing on which he had set his heart was an administration completely free of escapes, not because of any desire to uphold the laws of the State but on the grounds of vanity. His record was broken now.

The newspapers offered no criticism of the warden. Prisoners had escaped ever since prisons were first instituted, and one escape, or even two or three, was not a subject of fair criticism.

But a week later, another man escaped, and still another during the succeeding week. Three more followed at intervals of only two days. Six altogether—and track of them could not be found. And then the newspapers unfriendly to the State administration cracked down on Warden Enoch Blanter.

The warden was in despair. He frothed and raved about the prison. He personally led all searches within the walls. He held inquisitions almost incessantly. He inflicted tortures. He hurled men into pitch-dark cells, and held them there for hours and hours without food or water, held them almost to the point of death, and then, to save his own skin, brought them out and fed them. He strung men up to the bars by their wrists. In a deep, underground

cell, from which their cries could not penetrate, men were flogged. The warden's "snitches" worked constantly among the prisoners—but they got no profitable information.

The State had tolerated Enoch Blanter more because of indifference than anything else. The need of prison reform is not always apparent to the public at large until the situation is dramatized in some way or other. The escapes, following rapidly on one another, did that. The escapes provided concrete evidence of the fact that something was wrong at Surgentville. Public attention was focused, and no man of the mental caliber and inherent cruelty and unfitness of Enoch Blanter could long withstand the light of public attention. Starting with the escapes, the newspapers delved into the whole system at Surgentville. The warden's cruelties were exposed—stories appeared in print.

When things were at a boiling point, John Broadlin, the convicted banker, escaped from Surgentville—how or just when no one could say. John Broadlin, like his six predecessors, simply vanished into thin air.

And that finished Warden Enoch Blanter. When that news was brought to him, he sank weakly into his office chair. He was weaker than ever after the appearance of next morning's newspapers, for they landed on him with renewed vigor. He raged and fumed, and almost sobbed. He whined in his telephone conversation with the governor. The governor could stand it no longer. An investigation of possible graft at Surgentville was threatened—and Enoch Blanter knew what that meant. A thorough investigation along those lines and a rigid prosecution would land Enoch Blanter in Surgentville as a prisoner.

The governor demanded Enoch Blanter's resignation, and got it.

A "new deal," as the prisoners termed

it, had been given to Surgentville Prison. A new warden, sponsored by a society advocating prison reform, had taken charge that morning. He was a pleasant-faced man with humane and progressive ideas.

"There's a prisoner who wishes to see you, sir," a clerk informed the warden shortly before noon. "His name is Peters—he's a prisoner-boss of one of the gangs, and says he has important information for you."

"Bring him in, please."

Stony Peters was alone and face to face with the new warden.

"Mr. Warden," Stony said, "I got some news fer yuh. There's seven fellas what run off from this joint, and now they wanta come back, if yuh'll give 'em a clean record. They don't wanta lose nuthin' 'cause they escaped, sir. There's one lifer in the crowd, and he ain't got much tuh lose nohow—but them others, they want their good time, sir."

The warden looked on Stony in amazement. He knew that this proposal, astounding as it was, was quite sincere. He smiled.

"You mean, I suppose, the seven men who escaped during the last few weeks?" he said.

"Uh huh—yes, sir. I mean them seven."

"Ah—one of them is John Broadlin, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

The warden searched Stony's face. It was a startling problem for him to face on his first day on the job.

"Why, of course, I want those men back," he said. "They will be restored to all privileges of the prison, if they come back voluntarily. I will give them clean records. Ah—I've heard of what you call 'underground routes' for prisoners communicating with friends outside. I suppose you've received word from them in some such way as that, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Stony assured him; "I heard from 'em by the underground route."

"Where are these men?"

"They git clean records, eh—if I tell yuh, sir?"

"You have my promise."

"I'll go tell 'em, sir."

"Go tell—What do you mean?"

Stony Peters grinned.

"In three minutes yuh'll see 'em—all seven of 'em," he promised.

And that's what happened. Seven bedraggled convicts, a sorry-looking lot with their faces long unshaven, appeared at the head of a stairway which led down to a series of corridors and cells under the east cell house. They blinked, for the glint of the sunlight on the gravel of the yard was hard on their unaccustomed eyes.

The warden, acceding to a request of Stony Peters, waited at the top of the stairway until the men came up. He looked them over, and understanding of the situation dawned in his mind. He was witnessing the finish of a conspiracy to get rid of Enoch Blanter. The new warden smiled, and signed to the men to follow him into his office.

The news spread about the prison. Despite the rule against whispering, the whole place buzzed. Guards, sensing that there would be a relaxation in the rigidity of things there, and succumbing themselves to the excitement of the occasion, let the buzzing go on.

John Broadlin, in the warden's office, acted as spokesman.

"Mr. Warden," he said, "I think you're a man to whom a bunch of fellows like us can confess freely, and without fear of the consequences. You probably know who I am, and why I'm here—I'm Broadlin." The warden nodded, and Broadlin went on: "When I was arrested, I was almost certain that sooner or later I'd land in this place. I was guilty, and felt that there was no escape from it. But I made a fight,

and lost—just as I felt I would—but I think myself lucky at getting only two years. I had no desire to escape—to be hunted indefinitely as an escaped convict, and probably captured eventually, when all I had to do was to stay here about twenty months, and end the thing. But while I was in the county jail back home, I met Mr. Peters here—they call him Stony—and he confided in me that he knew the inside of this place, having been here before. He said that he had a scheme to get away from here, and that if I got a long sentence it might be worth my while to go with him. He had an excellent place in which to hide. It's in one of the old punishment cells under the east cell house. That corridor and cell haven't been in use for ten years or more, and it was shut off from the rest of the prison by a heavy steel door. He figured that we could make a key to fit the lock in that door, hide out there for a week or so, and then creep out some night and drop ourselves over the walls. That's how I came to know of the cell.

“I don't need to say much about your predecessor here. He was a hard man on the prisoners, as we all know—and in every county jail in the State his name was dreaded by prisoners who were likely to come here. I merely saw a chance to—well, frame up a job on him—and I think the frame-up was justified. We disappeared one by one, usually late in the afternoon, by dropping out of the mess line at the turn out there, and skipping down that stairway. Stony and some of his expert friends had made a key to the steel door. We had friends looking out for us up here. Stony, as boss of the Three C's gang, had to go down in those corridors from time to time, with a few men, to clean the place up. Our friends stole bread and meat and two boxes of dried fruit

for us. They kept us supplied with water. We suffered neither from hunger nor thirst. I was the last man who disappeared, and it wasn't so hard on me as the others—but it was mighty unpleasant for all of us, just loafing down there, in pitch darkness at night and a dull gray light all day, from a little window at the end of the old corridor. But it was worth it, as things turned out—and nothing at all compared with what prisoners have gone through here for the last few years. It's a remote place down there, and looks so inaccessible with that big steel door locked—as you'll see for yourself if you care to look—that we were perfectly safe from discovery, so long as we kept quiet.” He paused, drawing a long, tired breath, for the experience, despite plenty of food and water, had weakened every man of the seven. They were heavy-headed from lack of exercise and altogether too much sleep. “That,” he added, “is about all there is to it, sir.”

The warden looked from one to the other, nodding quietly—it seemed with satisfaction, although of course he couldn't express satisfaction over any conspiracy among prisoners against a prison official. He said simply:

“I'm glad you're back. I'll issue orders for baths and the barber shop. There will be no penalties exacted—for you returned voluntarily.”

And they filed out of the room. John Broadlin did not return to the Three C's gang. He was made a clerk in the storekeeper's office.

The return of the seven prisoners to their regular places in Sargentville got into the papers of course. It was a big story. Enoch Blanter read it, and cursed anew.

“Broadlin framed that up, I know,” he muttered; and that was as bitter a dose as Enoch Blanter ever swallowed.

The Snake in the Grass

by
Lee Thayer

Author of "The Mystery of the Thirteenth Floor," "The Unlatched Door,"
"The Key," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

PETER CLANCY, a member of the secret service, goes to Somerset, New Jersey, for a rest. His friend, Larry Druse, lives near by with his father, Doctor Winstead Druse. Peter meets the inhabitants of Craighurst—Mary Craig Brown, called "Major Mary;" Stockton Brown, her son, who has been in the Orient; Gifford Craig, her brother; Ilsa, Gifford Craig's second wife; Helen Field, Gifford's granddaughter. Gifford Craig has recently become a millionaire through the discovery of oil wells.

One night, Gifford Craig is taken seriously ill and Doctor "Win" is called. He is unable to get a nurse, but is helped in his fight by Swartz, the night clerk at Kelly's drug store. Major Mary and Peter believe that Craig has been poisoned, and Peter finds atropine concealed in a cabinet. Later he learns that Doctor Win has obtained a number of grains of pilocarpine, which Clancy thinks is a deadly poison, at Kelly's store.

At the library he learns that the poison, pilocarpine, is an antidote for belladonna or atropine poisoning.

Peter takes Helen Field to Craighurst in his car. He learns from Major Mary that Helen, who is a trained nurse and has a patient, Mrs. Lansing, in Essexton, has been coming every afternoon to give some special French medicine to her grandfather. Also, her grandfather has added a codicil to his will leaving her a large sum of money.

Another angle is added to the case when Peter comes upon the sick man's young wife, Ilsa, standing on a balcony with Stockton Brown. He seems to be threatening her. Later she confesses to Peter that she thinks Stockton has poisoned Gifford by giving them mah-jong tiles wrapped in rice paper which has been treated with a germ culture of Asiatic cholera.

Peter goes to Kelly's drug store and finds from a prescription chart that both Doctor Druse and Doctor Rice—whose patients Doctor Druse has been tending—have ordered large doses of pilocarpine. Swartz's suspicions are also aroused.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

IT was still early in the evening, not much after eight o'clock, but as soon as Swartz had unburdened his mind to Peter, he insisted that they should turn back.

It was obvious that Swartz was deeply concerned in holding his job and perhaps was already regretting his confidence to Peter. He warned Peter again and again that there could be no hope of action from Kelly, even if it were advisable, and that it would be unwise to let him suspect that Swartz had consulted Peter.

"And I don't see now, just what you think I can do in the matter," Peter said, as they rolled swiftly back toward the village. "I'm only a rank outsider in any case——"

"Ah, Mr. Clancy, that's just what it is. It is because you are just that," Swartz interrupted eagerly. "It is what the old gentleman, Mr. Craig, felt, is it not? You are outside. You have no—what is it you say—ax to sharpen. For what it is worth I tell you the fact, see? I place myself upon the record. If anything comes, I can say, 'I counsel Mr. Kelly to be above the table.' Yes, me, that is my advice. When he will not, I tell one man." He leaned across to Peter and held up one finger. "One man.

See? An American. One familiar with the custom of the country. There I rest. I tell no one else. What comes after is bound upon the wheel of fortune. It will turn as it will turn." A shrug, and a fluent spreading of the hands followed his speech.

"But it's a little hard, the way you put it up to me, Swartz. Can't you see that?" said Peter argumentatively. "If this thing you've sprung is anything but a coincidence, seems as if some one ought to get busy." He spoke diffidently, uncertainly, without a trace of professional manner.

The little chemist again shrugged his shoulders, assuming an air of utter detachment. Peter went on: "You seem a pretty wise little guy to me, Swartz, and I want to know, honestly, exactly, what you think. In spite of everything it doesn't seem possible that a fine girl like Miss Field——"

"No. She is very beautiful," said Swartz calmly, "and the crime, to her, most unnatural. Considering the closeness of relationship—to the old gentleman—if she is indeed his granddaughter, of which, I suppose there can be no doubt." The words came slowly, as if he were thinking aloud.

Peter spoke quickly. "No doubt? Of course there's no doubt. Why should there be?" And then Peter wondered within himself, with a startled sense of the uncertainty of all things, whether they did know, absolutely, that Helen Field was, in very truth, Gifford Craig's grandchild. He remembered what Major Mary had told him of the long sojourn abroad of Helen's parents; of the circumstances connected with her final decision to come to her grandfather's house. After all the newspaper talk of Gifford Craig's sudden and enormous increase of fortune—not till after that, Mrs. Brown had said, had Helen come to Craig's, though her father had died a year or more before,

and her mother long before that, in Paris.

What proof of identity had been given? What asked for? What proof would one ask for, if a beautiful girl presented herself with a clear and touching story, and claimed to be one's grandchild? Would one probe very deep? A thorough knowledge of the old story of the elopement, a few photographs and letters—— "Major Mary won't ask her for more than that," Peter said to himself. But Gifford Craig? Surely that hard-headed, worldly old man would have investigated, would have made sure, before he left large sums to her in his will.

Swartz broke the momentary silence. He spoke slowly with the air of a man who goes over again a weighty problem many times considered.

"There were the two of them—the doctor as well as the nurse——"

"But the doctor needn't be in it," said Peter, his mind switching quickly. "He certainly, could have no motive——"

"No?" said Swartz, looking sidewise at Peter. "No?"—more decidedly. "It could be nothing but village gossip. I will not repeat it. If it has died away so that you have not heard, I will say no more."

"What do you mean, Swartz?" asked Peter. "Good Lord! man, you can't let me down like that. What are you driving at?"

"It is you, not I, that is doing the driving, Mr. Clancy," said the little Belgian with a gentle smile. "For me, I am through with ugly things for the night. What happens in the place where I work, where I am to some extent, responsible, is my concern. Is it not so? What happens outside is nothing to me. I am not one to gossip. Loves and hates and rivalries—what are they to me, an outlander, a mere looker-on at these so strange comedies—and tragedies." The last word was spoken on a deep note. In spite of the quaint-

ness of his appearance there was something dramatic, something of the Old World dignity, in his manner. Also there was finality, Peter found, for try as he would, he could not make Swartz explain further.

Peter was soon forced to give up the attempt, for they had arrived at the outskirts of the village. At Swartz's request, Peter set him down at a shadowy corner not far from Kelly's drug store. After watching the short, alert figure pass in and out of the patches of illumination made by scattered lights of Main Street, and finally disappear in the glory of red and blue which marked the little chemist's destination, Peter turned his car and drifted slowly back into the open country again. So much had happened during that momentous day that even Peter's trained mind felt the need of solitude. There was an eerie feeling of loneliness in the thought of his silent, empty cottage, which made the open road seem companionable by contrast.

"And besides," thought Peter, "I want to stop at Craighurst on my way home, for the news, but I must think things out at bit before I face—whoever is there."

Step by step he went back over the facts which had come into his possession. He started with the fact which he did not know, but which, by hook or crook, he would find out. What was the gossip about Doctor Druse? Peter had heard a little, a very little, but it was almost entirely based on the doctor's unorthodoxy. He remembered to have heard some one explain that Winstead Druse was "an atheist or some other kind of a mystic," and had laughed a little to himself at the characterization, thinking how well it placed the value of the gossip's criticism.

Swartz, obviously, was not referring to anything of the sort. What had he said? "Loves, hates and rivalries." What could that mean, in this connec-

tion, but one thing? Had Doctor Druse known Mrs. Craig before——

"Loves and hates and rivalries——"

Doctor Druse could hardly be over fifty-five, and was young, vital and enthusiastic for any age. She had married her elderly husband less than a year ago, and Ilsa Craig's beauty was enough to make any man—— Peter paused and bit his lip. Then his mind turned to something else. Was there anything to be done about Ilsa's horrible theory, in regard to her husband's illness? Instinctively Peter had refrained from mentioning it to Swartz. After all he was only a chemist and would probably have nothing authoritative to offer. A doctor would be the person to consult. And Doctor Druse? Why not refer the frightful thing to him? It would be unnecessary, probably, to explain Ilsa's idea as to the manner in which cholera germs might have been introduced, unless the doctor thought the suggestion of cholera a possible solution. Though he had a very poor opinion of Stockton Brown, Peter shrank from making any disclosure which would affect Major Mary's son.

Supposing Doctor Druse knew more of the real state of the case than he was willing to tell? Supposing——Peter faced the ugly thing squarely——supposing the doctor had criminal knowledge as to his patient's present illness? What then? Would not the introduction of an entirely unlooked-for theory be rather upsetting to his mental equilibrium? And might not an astute observer learn something from that? Peter fairly hated himself as he turned his car back toward Somerset. But he shut his teeth together.

"If he's innocent, the old boy has nothing to fear from me," said Peter, half aloud. "And if he's guilty——" He did not finish the sentence, but added in a moment: "Come on, Pete, darn you! We'll put it to the touch, since you won't let me alone!" This

argument between the two sides of his brain was as natural as breathing to Peter. He carried it on at length as he drove, rapidly, now, toward home.

So concentrated was he that he had no realization of the swiftness of his pace and did not notice that a motor cycle had slipped unostentatiously out of a side road and was overhauling him by leaps and bounds.

"Hey! You there! Where's the fire?"

The peremptory voice, almost at his elbow startled Peter so, coming at it did from what had been empty darkness a moment before, that he instinctively put on his brakes. His car swerved slightly, and then slowed to a reasonable pace. Peter then saw that a man in the smart uniform of the State constabulary was bowling quietly along side on a motor cycle.

"Where's the fire?" the trooper repeated. "I'd like to go along."

"Was I speeding?" asked Peter with such an air of surprised innocence that it roused the trooper to graphic speech. He drew a long breath.

"Oh, no! You weren't speeding!" he said. "I had to sight you by the telegraph poles to see if you were moving at all. It's for obstructing the traffic that I'm about to hand you this card. Oh, no! Nothing like speeding was in your mind. 'This guy's got the original tortoise engine,' I says to myself, 'and I'd like to look it over. He's doing so well with it, maybe he could tell me where to get a crab engine that would go backwards or sideways.'" Suddenly he dropped his bantering tone. "Pull off to the side, till I hand you yours," he said crisply. "'Was I speeding?' says you. Ye gods! 'Was I speeding?' I've had a good many handed to me, but for plain cheek— Oh, I say! I beg your pardon. I didn't recognize you, Mr. Clancy, or I'd never have gone on. I hope you'll excuse—"

They had drawn off to the side of the road and in dismounting the trooper had brought his headlight to bear full on Peter, who was still sitting in his car. The man's embarrassment and chagrin were so out of proportion to the apparent cause that Peter peered at his face with curiosity.

"Who is it?" he asked. "Ought I to know? Oh, I've seen you before. At Kelly's pharmacy, wasn't it? But I don't know your name, do I? Or *do* I? Somehow there's something familiar—"

"No, you don't know my name, Mr. Clancy," said the trooper controlling some strong emotion. "Or, if you've chanced to hear it, it wouldn't mean anything to you maybe. Nor the names of the other four of us—Tom Conklin, Bert Strong, Bill Williams and Ben Dawes. Ben Dawes is me, you understand." The trooper touched his breast with his gloved hand and looked earnestly into Peter's face. "Those names mean anything to you?" he asked.

Slowly a light dawned in Peter's eyes, and he held out his hand.

"Sure, I remember," he cried. "The four of you young devils! A swell mess you got into! To be shot at dawn was the order, wasn't it? I remember that shell-busted old French wall as if it was yesterday. By the living jingo, it was a near thing. Funny as a goat, now it's over, isn't it?" Peter roared with laughter.

Dawes joined in, though there was a little break in his voice, and his hand gripped Peter's hard.

"But how in the world did you know that I had anything to do with that?" asked Peter. "It was strictly against regulations."

"I know," Dawes replied, "but we all four rubbered and sleuthed around to find out who it was that got in the information that saved us, and got it in just in the nick of time. Say, Mr. Clancy, I'll tell you there's some kick

to spending the night under sentence to be shot, away off on the other side of the world, to being routed out in the cold, gray light, before the sun comes up, to being lined up against a hard, white wall. They say you don't mind if you're conscious of being innocent, but it don't help much, you can take it from me, when you're conscious of having been a plain fool. And when you hear the shout at the gate and hear the butts of the guns that have been pointed at you grind on the old broken pavement—well, maybe you ain't grateful to the man that sent that little corporal running and yelling across the courtyard." The trooper cleared his throat.

Peter laughed quietly, but said nothing. In a second the trooper went on.

"We got the whole story out of little old Fenwick. Remember him?"

Peter nodded.

"Later, when the show was over, Fenwick happened to be at the port of embarkation at the same time as me. And you were there, too, Mr. Clancy. He pointed you out to me. I wanted to speak to you then, but you were with a lot of kind of high-hat-looking people, and I didn't have the nerve. You sailed that same afternoon I think."

"But I remember now, I saw you in the telephone booth at Kelly's drug store some little time ago," said Peter. "It's a wonder you would have——"

"You'd gone out before I got my connection," said Dawes. "You don't remember, of course. I was sure it was you, and I asked Kelly, and he told me your name."

Peter started, but his voice was quiet.

"Did you happen to mention to Kelly that I was in the secret service during the war?" he asked.

"No, sir," Dawes replied promptly. "I said nothing to anybody. My present job is such that I don't need an adding machine to figure out that in your job it doesn't pay to advertise."

Peter laughed, and leaning over, slapped Dawes heartily on the shoulder.

"You're all right, old man," he said. "Not that it matters such a devil of a lot. But I'm taking the whole summer off, and for a vacation to be a vacation—— Well, you understand."

"I sure do, Mr. Clancy. I can just imagine how you'd be stared at, and how surprised these country boobs would be if they knew."

"That's just it, Dawes," said Peter hastily. "I'm much obliged to you for keeping this under your hat. And now how about that summons?" Again Peter's voice was filled with startled innocence. "Was I speeding, officer?"

"Speeding, sir?" the trooper laughed. "Speeding? Didn't I tell you, you were obstructing traffic? Good luck to you, sir, and good night. And if ever I can do anything—anything——"

The trooper's voice was drowned in the roar of starting motors. With a wave of his hand Dawes vanished into the night.

CHAPTER XII.

"WE'VE LEFT NO STONE UNTURNED."

BEFORE the steady hum of the trooper's motor had died away on the night wind, Peter's mind had snapped back to its earlier preoccupation. Though he took care to drive more cautiously, his determination to see and interview Doctor Druse at once did not waver, and he made good speed through the village of Somerset and up the long hill.

On the open road there was a little, faint starlight, punctuated by the wide-set arc lights of Highland Avenue, but when he had turned into the driveway of Craighurst, and cut out his motor to coast down the long slope to the entrance, there was nothing save his own lights to relieve the heavy gloom of the weeping hemlocks. As he neared the house he could see, through hang-

ing branches, that many of the windows were illuminated, though but dimly, since all the shades were closely drawn.

Doctor Druse's coupé was still standing near the front door, and for the third time that day, Peter alighted close behind it and passed into the house. He entered without knocking or ringing, for scarcely any one in Somerset ever locked a door until the last of the family had retired, and friends were expected to come in without formality. Peter was accustomed to this and had no ulterior motive in entering quietly. In a house of illness it is natural to open and close doors with the least possible noise. Peter stopped short just inside the door. There was no one in sight in the well-lighted hall, but from a small reception room at his right there came the sound of low voices. There was no light in the room. So low were the voices that the words were indistinguishable, but a man spoke and a woman answered. Of that much Peter was sure in the short moment in which his professional instinct overcame everything else. Then the other half of his mind revolted at the thought of eavesdropping in the house of his friends, and he reached back, tapping lightly on the inner panel of the door.

"Anybody about?" he called softly. "It's only Peter," he added, stepping forward. "I just stopped in——"

There was a quick movement in the darkness of the little reception room, and Doctor Druse appeared in the doorway. His face was terribly worn and haggard, and he threw up one hand to shade his eyes from the brilliant overhead light.

"Oh, Clancy," he said a little blankly. "It's you, is it? Well——"

"I just called on my way home to see if there was any news," said Peter advancing quietly until he was on a line with the reception-room door.

Doctor Druse did not move from his place. He shook his head slowly.

"No news, except that the periods of coma are of longer duration," he said wearily. "We've tried everything."

"Mrs. Brown spoke of a consultation," ventured Peter, watching the doctor narrowly.

Druse spoke almost angrily. "It would do no good. Not the least in the world. I've tried everything. The symptoms are sufficiently marked, Heaven knows. If the heads of all the hospitals in the world were here they could do nothing that we haven't done. I've told Mary Brown so, and she is satisfied. I told her to get any one she wanted——" The doctor stopped short and seemed to be listening to the sound from the upper floor. After a moment he added, "I thought I heard—but I guess it's all right."

"Is there any hope?" asked Peter anxiously.

The doctor shook his head.

"Except for a miracle, I should say, there isn't," he said in a low voice.

"Has he been conscious?"

"Not since you were here, if he was actually conscious then."

The two men looked at each other gravely, then Peter said: "Are you too tired, Doctor Druse? Could I talk with you for a moment? Something has occurred to me. It may be ridiculous. But I'll sleep much better if a physician tells me that it is impossible."

Doctor Druse had never seen quite that expression in the odd, quaint face of his son's friend. He moved forward from the door and took Peter's arm.

"Come into the library where we can sit down," he said. "I'm pretty much all in but I can still listen. If you can throw any light on the subject——"

As they turned, Peter shot a swift, covert glance into the reception room. As has already been stated, the room was small, and there was a bright light in the hall, therefore the far side of the room was only in semidarkness. Sit-

ting very still on a couch over near the window was a slim, girlish figure clothed in the crisp white of a graduate nurse. Peter could not see the face distinctly, but there was no doubt in his mind as to the girl's identity. It was Helen Field. Well, what of it? A doctor and nurse in consultation. What of that? Nothing. Peter gave not the smallest indication that he was aware of the presence of another person in the vicinity. In silence he followed Doctor Druse to the other end of the house, and did not speak until they were comfortably seated in the library, a green-shaded light between them on an old walnut table. Then Peter leaned forward, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Doctor Druse," he said slowly, "you may think I'm mad, but a possibility has occurred to me in connection with Mr. Craig's desperate condition." Peter was not watching the doctor's face. He knew a trick worth two of that when dealing with a man who might be on guard. Peter's eyes were fixed on the physician's slender hands which lay outstretched on the broad arms of his chair. As Peter spoke he saw the fingers of the right hand draw slowly in, and before that hand was entirely closed, the other was as deliberately clenched. The two fists still rested on the chair arm. There was no other movement. Peter glanced at the set face. It was quite calm.

"Anything that will throw any light anywhere will be welcome," said Doctor Druse with every appearance of sincerity. "Fire away. What's your theory?"

"I'm perfectly sure you'll think I'm mad," said Peter with a slight, apologetic laugh, "but I once had described to me, most graphically, the symptoms of Asiatic cholera."

Slowly the hands on the chair arm opened, and the fingers were spread wide. The muscles of the arms relaxed. Peter's voice went on smoothly. "I got to thinking about it after I left here

to-day, and the more I thought the worse scared I became. So I looked up some books on the subject, and I say, Doctor Druse, you know, it does sound awfully near——"

The doctor's thin right hand was raised to his face now, covering his mouth. His eyes looked earnestly into Peter's.

"By Jove!" he said slowly. "That's something that never occurred to me."

"But now that it has," urged Peter, "is there the least chance——"

"Darned if I know," said the doctor with deliberation. "I never had any experience of it, thank God! But of course, I know in a general way. Any sort of cholera would have some of the symptoms. But, heavens!" he said, sitting bolt upright, "Asiatic cholera's dangerous as the dickens. Contagious, I mean. Of course, you know that."

"Yes," said Peter hurriedly. "That's why I——"

"Oh," cried Doctor Druse with another quick change of tone, "how absurd we are! There has never been a case of cholera anywhere in these hills within the memory of man. How could Craig get it, when he hasn't been outside this village even, for weeks?"

"But, put that question aside, Doctor Druse," said Peter eagerly. "Just for an instant, for argument, suppose that there was a way he might have come in contact with the germs. Do you think, from the appearance of the disease, there could be the slightest possibility——"

The doctor regarded Peter steadily for a moment from under frowning brows. Then he rose, crossed the room with long, even strides, switched on all the lights and went over to one of the tall, old-fashioned walnut bookcases. In a moment he came back to the table with a large volume in his hand. Peter watched the face bending over swiftly turning pages. What power there was in it! What physical endurance the

man had! On duty for nearly twenty-four hours. And such duty! And now, with the quiet air of a student, calmly reading up to see if there could be a possibility that they were all alike in the most deadly danger. It was obvious to Peter either that the doctor admitted the possibility, or that he wanted Peter to think he admitted it.

"No," said the doctor at last. "No, Clancy, I think there could be nothing to your theory in any case. Let alone the utter impossibility of Craig's coming in contact with the germs, there's nothing in this encyclopedia, though the article is a very full one, to account for some of the worst symptoms. And besides he could never have lasted so long. He would either have been much better or dead. Think of the hours it's been. Then, too, by this time, with all who have come in contact with him, some one would be affected in all probability. I don't believe you can realize the virulence of the contagion, nor the swiftness of the action. Read this for yourself," he said, swinging the book around to Peter's side of the table. Leaning over, he laid his hand with a warm, reassuring gesture, on Peter's shoulder. "Poor lad," he said gently, "that was a rotten jolt, wasn't it? We're all in the same boat, but we'll ride the storm. Don't worry. As for poor Craig, he's had about everything he's wanted in this life. He's going out by a terrible road. But we've done what we could to smooth the way. We've left no stone unturned."

Somehow there was a haunting echo in those last words of Doctor Druse. Peter thought them over as he drove on his homeward way.

Peter had noticed, as he left the house, that the little reception room was empty, and he wondered now, with growing uneasiness, what those two had been talking about in that darkened room. Of course Helen Field was probably acting as head nurse, and there

could be nothing unusual in her holding a consultation with the physician in charge, at a distance from the sick room, where there would be little chance of interruption. But why had the doctor so carefully avoided bringing her presence to Peter's attention? Doctor Druse knew that Peter was on very friendly terms with Helen, and yet it was obvious to Peter that he had taken considerable pains to keep him from knowing that she was so near at hand. "Why? Why?" thought Peter, and then with his usual acumen he began to set forth to himself the pros and cons of the situation. Forcing himself, relentlessly, to set aside every consideration of friendship, every preconceived idea of character, he made an impartial mental tabulation of the actual facts as they had come under his observation, and forced himself to draw the natural inference.

Starting with the assumption that there actually was a guilty relationship between the doctor and Helen Field, a consultation at the earliest opportunity would be imperative. It would be absolutely necessary for Druse to tell Helen that both he, Peter, and Karl Swartz had made a shrewd guess as to the drug which had been employed in the murder. Peter would not quibble with himself on the word, though the man was not yet dead—the murder of Gifford Craig—

Pilocarpine! Yes, Helen Field had had in her possession forty one-eighth-grain tablets. That was an incontrovertible fact. It would probably take a good many one-eighth-grain tablets to constitute a fatal dose, and some question was bound to be raised either by the physician in charge or by the patient for whom they had been prescribed, or by both, if a considerable number were missing. Hence the clever ruse—if ruse it were—of spilling the first lot of tablets into running water. Peter could imagine how easy it would

be to make the patient believe that this had happened. The sound of running water in an adjoining bathroom, an exclamation of distress, a quick entrance to the bedroom with well-simulated consternation. The patient would, perhaps, be angry; the nurse certainly would be contrite—and the absence of a fatal dose of the drug would be convincingly accounted for, even to the doctor, in case he were not in on the game.

How about that, now? Was Doctor Druse necessarily involved even if Helen Field had found it impossible to wait—years perhaps—for her inheritance? Had she not dared to trust to the continuance of her grandfather's favor—if he were actually her grandfather? And, if he were not related to her, what dangers of discovery might there not be in the continuance of his existence? Helen Field's motives might easily be construed to be overwhelming. But Doctor Druse? With his spotless reputation, his years of unselfish service, his unworldliness, could such a motive as the advantage it would be to his son, Larry, to marry an heiress be entertained for an instant? And even supposing that there was rivalry and hatred between the doctor and Gifford Craig, was it possible to believe it could be of such a nature as to make so hideous a crime possible? To kill a man under stress of fury, even to commit murder in some comparatively painless way, with morphine, or some such drug, was conceivable, but pilocarpine! It was impossible. And yet, why had the doctor's fine, thin hands clenched in dread when Peter had stated that he had something more in his mind which might account for Gifford Craig's condition? Why had those hands relaxed when the theory of cholera was stated? And again, why the appearance of secrecy in the interrupted talk with Helen Field, in the shadowy reception room?

Well, on the other hand, why not? Supposing Helen's statement to Kelly as to the loss of the greater part of twenty one-eighth-grain tablets of pilocarpine were quite true? Doctor Druse would have obviously known about it, since it was he who had issued the second prescription. Quite as certainly he would have known, since he was the attending physician, that Helen Field gave her grandfather a hypodermic every afternoon. The doctor's mind was quick and keen. What more natural than that it should leap to a possibility of trouble when Karl Swartz said Craig's symptoms looked to him like those of pilocarpine poisoning. And when, later, Peter had made the same statement, it would have given the good doctor an additional shock, and he would have embraced the first opportunity to put Helen on her guard. Quite possibly, Helen, worn out by the stress of the day, had not been able to withstand the shock, and it was merely to give her time to recover that Doctor Druse had endeavored to hide her near proximity from Peter.

Peter breathed a long sigh of relief as he ran his car into the tiny garage behind his cottage. He felt more and more reassured as he prepared for bed, and by the time he had blown out his candle his mind was almost at peace. It was quite possible that Helen Field and Doctor Druse were as innocent as he. Life was full of strange coincidences. Truth is stranger than fiction. A bromide, that. Bromide—what did that make him think of? Oh, yes, Doctor Druse had prescribed a bromide for Ilsa Craig. No wonder, after what she'd seen, and the horrible idea it had put into her lovely head. Too bad. Peter wished he had seen her again, to tell her that Doctor Druse was sure it could not be cholera. Well, he'd see her in the morning.

With a long quiet sigh, Peter fell fast asleep.

It was full day when he woke with the sense of having escaped some peril. To make a false diagnosis was, for a man in his position, almost, if not quite as serious, as it would be for a physician, and he was thankful that he could honestly feel that the bets were more than even, that they were in favor of Doctor Druse, and probably of Helen Field. Who but a cynical criminologist could even suspect evil of a girl so lovely, spirited, generous, and young? She could not be much over twenty, Peter thought. Her glance was as open as the day. All her faults were on the surface. Larry Druse knew her well. He could hardly be deceived.

Peter whistled an odd little tune as he shaved, and it was with a fairly light heart, a little later, that he drove over to Craighurst. Doctor Druse's coupé was still at the door. Peter's glance traveled swiftly from it to the door handle. No. There was no emblem of grief floating from it, although the house seemed very still.

Quietly Peter tried the door handle. It yielded, and he passed inside. The house was ominously silent. No one was in sight. Once there was a faint rustle from Gifford Craig's room overhead, but there was no more of the swift, ceaseless movement there. Peter glanced at his watch. It was after nine o'clock. Just then he thought he heard the faint click of glass from the direction of the dining room. "Any one about?" he inquired in a low tone as he advanced along the hall.

"Who is it? Oh, Peter!"

Mary Brown was seated alone at the head of the breakfast table. She motioned Peter to a seat beside her, and held his hand a second longer than usual. Her strong, old face was very pale, but her voice was steady as she answered Peter's inquiry.

"He is still alive," she said. "Just that. But he suffers no more. He is in a stupor. Nothing rouses him.

Nothing will ever arouse him again, Peter. The last words he spoke were to you, yesterday morning. Those were the last words he ever will speak."

She looked at Peter with deep solemnity. The eyes of the old can be very tragic. "You would know that, if you could see him," she went on, shivering, in spite of the strength of her self-control. "It's terrible. Frightful. Win Druse is still here. He's resting on a couch in the next room. I made him lie down for a little. Helen is resting, too. The other nurse is there. There is nothing to do now, but wait. I think they are still giving stimulants, but——"

"Is there nothing I can do for you?" asked Peter, gently taking the old hand in his. "I have my car here."

She shook her head, drawing a sharp little breath through her nose.

"No, there's nothing. Thank you, Peter. You're a rather nice boy. I would tell you if there was anything."

Peter felt that he was dismissed, and stood up.

"Mrs. Craig," he said with slight hesitation, "is she about by any chance? Do you think I might see her for a moment?"

Major Mary's eyes questioned his.

"Something important?" she asked with a slightly puzzled expression. "She is still in her room, and I don't believe she is up yet. There was no sound when I came past her door, but if it's necessary——"

"No," said Peter promptly. "It isn't a bit, but I'll leave a note for her, if you don't mind. It's just something that she asked me to find out for her, yesterday. I'll write it in the library, and give it to John. Thank you. And let me know if there's the least thing I can do?"

Peter went into the library, wrote a hurried note of reassurance, and left it for Ilsa. In view of his talk with Doctor Druse, and the absence of any indi-

cation of contagion, he felt entirely justified in dismissing all thought of a possibility of cholera. But he sealed the note carefully.

Peter then got into his car and drove slowly toward the village. It was a beautiful day. The kind to be found nowhere in the world perhaps, save in the northeastern States in the beginning of the fall. The air was thin and clear with the fine scent of burning leaves. In the valley the wood smoke drifted like a blue scarf along the highways where tidy people were already disposing of the first fluttering cast-off garments of the trees. The distant hills seemed near at hand. Peter filled his lungs with the bright air. After all it was good to be alive; to lay aside his old, cool, detached analytical nature and be like other people. He held no brief for that unfortunate rich, selfish old man. Gifford Craig had no claim on him, Peter assured himself, and then winced a little, remembering what Major Mary had said but a few minutes before. "The last words he spoke were to you, Peter. Those are the last words he will ever speak." And those words were: "Justice. You'll see it done. Poison, Clancy. Do you understand?" And again, "Hypodermic."

Peter tried to shake off the recollection as he stepped out of his car at the post-office door. He presented himself at the window and asked for his mail.

"A special delivery just came in for you, Mr. Clancy," said the pleasant postmistress, "and I was wondering how'n earth I could get it way out to you. It's right there on top. Would you mind signing here, please?"

With a swift glance, Peter recognized upon the blue stamped envelope the characteristic handwriting of his partner, Captain James O'Malley. Peter knew at once, by instinct, that this was the reply to the note he had dispatched the day before.

"Quick work, by George," thought

Peter, "and special delivery. The old boy must have thought there was something——"

Frowning, he glanced about. There were several people in the post office. Peter caught up his mail, and almost ran to his car. Jumping in, he drove rapidly down a village cross street which emerged almost at once into the open country. Peter pulled off to the side of the road, and tore open O'Malley's letter. He drew out two pieces of paper. On one, in O'Malley's strong legible hand, hastily written, were the words: "Queer. Thought you'd better know at once. Or is somebody kidding you?"

With a strange clutch at his heart Peter turned to the other paper.

It was a neat document, headed by the card of Van Dorn & Sawyer, probably the best—and quickest—analytical chemists in New York. Below were a very few words. Peter read them and his face turned white. "Sugar of milk—and nothing else! That vial marked 'atropine' that Doctor Druse made such a play of using as an antidote was sugar of milk!"

That night, at nine o'clock, without having spoken again, Gifford Craig died.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SEALED LETTER.

AFTER Peter opened O'Malley's letter that morning, he sat in his car by the roadside for a long time, thinking. One or two remote possibilities presented themselves, and with a determination to test their value without delay, he drove to Kelly's pharmacy, parked his car and went inside. It was early in the morning for a soda, and Peter could think of nothing in the world he desired less, but to order one, and to drink it in the little back room which he knew Kelly had fitted up in the summer as an ice-cream parlor, was

the best excuse he could give for getting back of the prescription counter again.

Consequently, Peter ordered the most elaborate drink he knew of, one which took the longest to concoct. He passed a few bantering words with Kelly, explaining that he wanted to write a note, and would take his "medicine" in the back room where there was a table.

There was no one in the shop except Kelly and a flapper, who wanted a lipstick, and as soon as the partition hid Peter from sight, he stepped noiselessly over to the locked poison cabinet. The chart was in its place, and Peter, without removing it from the hook, examined it with meticulous care. He went back over it item, by item, and found that Doctor Druse had not had from that shop any atropine within the last ten days or more. There was an entry under date of September twenty-eighth calling for morphine tablets. That, undoubtedly, was the prescription which had taken Swartz posthaste up the hill that night. Peter remembered seeing the vial on the glass shelf in Craig's bathroom; remembered noting the bit of the Harrison Act seal, which was floating in a drop of water on the wash stand; remembered thinking that it was obviously a fresh bottle of morphine which had just been opened. Yes. That was that, undoubtedly.

If Peter needed a further confirmation, he found it an instant later. For as he finished with the chart, he happened to look down at the counter on which his left hand rested. Here he discovered that he had evidently just interrupted Kelly as he was pasting prescriptions in a blank book. The book lay open on the counter. Beside it was a tube of photographer's paste and one or two original prescriptions, weighed with a small pestle and mortar.

Secure in the sound of voices and Kelly's irrepressible laughter in the front of the shop, Peter examined the

prescriptions. Yes, here was Doctor Druse's for morphine, September twenty-eighth, for Gifford Craig. Also the original of Doctor Druse's prescription of September twenty-fifth for Mrs. Lansing in Essexton—twenty one-eighth-grain pilocarpine. Also that of Doctor Rice, on the previous day—the same drug and the same amount. All perfectly correct and according to the poison chart. But search as he would, Peter could find no prescription for atropine. Peter went back as far as August first. All the prescriptions were on Kelly's blanks. Nearly all of them were signed by Doctor Rice or Doctor Druse. But seemingly neither the one nor the other had had any need of atropine in that time.

Peter's heart was heavy. There would seem to be no doubt that Doctor Druse had supplied the atropine from his own medicine case. He would have had a stock of that and other drugs in his office as physicians often do.

Well then, either he knew that the injections he was giving Gifford Craig could give no possible relief, or Druse was the victim of a horrible mistake on the part of the chemist who had compounded the tablets. Peter remembered the label on the vial from which he had taken the telltale pellet. It was one of the best-known firms in the country. What chance was there for them to make a mistake? Perhaps Kelly would know.

So, a few moments later, when Kelly entered the back room with Peter's frosted chocolate, Peter, busily engaged in writing at a small table by the window, asked him to sit down and have a little chat.

Peter craftily led Kelly to talk of his business, and of his knowledge of chemistry, of which he was quite justly proud. Cautiously, in a roundabout way, Peter got at the information that he needed. He learned that it was better and cheaper for a druggist to use

prepared products than to compound tablets for himself. Also, it was usual for a physician to have on hand plenty of sugar-of-milk tablets, to use for hypochondriacs. Kelly called them "fussers" with nothing the matter. Then Peter got Kelly to describe the way a good firm safeguarded its products.

"We all use prepared stuff here," Kelly volunteered. "Doctor Rice, Doctor Porter, and Doctor Druse—and myself, of course. I've seen one of the factories. They've got nothing but expert chemists. Careful? Say! Just supposing—supposing they were making up a batch of heroin, for instance. One of their experts would do the mixing, see? And when the tablets were made, some other expert would pick out one and analyze it. Then when the batch was passed as O. K., it would get what they call a control number, which would be on every bottle sent out, and if any complaint was ever made about one of their tablets, they could tell exactly whose fault it was. In that way they never have mistakes, see? So if your friend thinks he ought to go on making up his own dope and stuff, he's a nut, and you can tell him so for me. There's ten times the chance for a mistake if you do the work yourself. Of course there are unusual combinations you have to put up. But where it's just one drug or an ordinary combination——"

Peter had found out what he wanted—and dreaded—to know. He had hoped that one "blank" tablet might have slipped into the atropine vial by mistake, or that a whole bottle might have gone out with the wrong label. But how was that possible? Was he in any way justified in supposing that it might have happened in the present instance? Hardly. And yet the alternative seemed too horrible to face. If it had only proved to be some other drug, then a mistake in the labels might have been conceivable. But no concern

would be sending out "sugar pills" in a tiny vial such as had contained the so-called "atropine." Peter knew that the "blanks" were sold in bulk. Only a physician would, perhaps, put them in a small vial for the purpose of deceiving a patient.

"But supposing Doctor Druse had done just that!" The idea had come to Peter some time after he had left Kelly, and while he was driving about the country. "Supposing Doctor Druse had done just that," he repeated. "Wouldn't it have been possible that he might have put some sugar pills in a small bottle—any old bottle—just to make them look more real, when he gave them to the fussy patient who had really nothing the matter, and then had forgotten and left them in his case? And when he had needed atropine, might he not quite unconsciously have used them because the vial had happened to have on it a registered atropine label? Couldn't that be the explanation?"

This thought cheered Peter up for several miles. It was about this time, while he was cruising around somewhere between Bernard Ridge and Morrisville that he encountered the trooper, Ben Dawes, again. They both stopped and passed the time of day. Seen in daylight, the trooper looked a most engaging fellow. He had very bright gray-blue eyes in a dark, bronzed face. His features were clean cut. His long limbs looked graceful, set off by the smart uniform of blue and tan. A merry light was in his eyes; a gay, confident note in his voice. It had increased the cheerfulness of Peter's mood to meet him, and on an impulse Peter said: "Say, Dawes, why don't you drop around at my joint when you're off duty some night, and let's talk a little over old times? My evenings have been most restful all summer, but I'm getting fed up with 'em."

Dawes was frankly delighted with the

invitation. He was quite familiar with the location of Peter's little cottage. So, promising themselves the pleasure of another meeting—though they did not use those words—they parted.

For some time after Peter's spirits remained reasonably buoyant. But somehow he dreaded going back to Somerset. When he reached his cottage, he was plunged again into the maze of questions which had been bothering him, and when, at about ten o'clock, his telephone rang, it startled him like a summons from another world.

It was Major Mary herself, who told him of her brother's death. She made the announcement simply, and in her usual steady voice. Quite quietly she asked Peter to come up as soon as he could in the morning. There might be something important that she would like to consult with him about—a favor that she might ask of him.

Peter assured her that he would do anything she wished. And then she surprised him by saying, in a very low, guarded voice: "Would it be possible for you to leave Somerset for a day, Peter? Or maybe two? Could you come up in the morning prepared to go—somewhere at once?"

Peter answered promptly, "Yes."

She thanked him and rang off.

Peter tossed and turned throughout a sleepless night. Sober consideration made it necessary for him to admit that it was at least extremely unlikely that a clever physician, in regular practice, could make a careless mistake between a bottle of sugar pills and a deadly drug—such a mistake as Peter had been happy in attributing to Doctor Druse. Peter could think of no new possibilities which could serve adequately to explain the situation.

Even so, Peter could not bring himself to make a move. Better, far better, to let a criminal escape man's punishment, than to blight, with the breath

of suspicion, the reputation of an innocent person. And as the dawn of a wet, gray day came weeping over the hills, Peter took an oath.

He swore to himself that until he had a case that would convince the Recording Angel, himself, he would proceed against nobody in regard to the death of Gifford Craig. Having embellished this oath with a number of picturesque words, Peter felt better, and arose.

As he dressed and breakfasted he thought anxiously of his message from Major Mary, and wondered at how early an hour it would be seemly to comply with it. Remembering the hint of secrecy in her voice, he wanted to avoid attracting attention, and yet, if the thing which troubled her was pressing— Suddenly he decided that now was always the best time, and to be prepared for any emergency, he hastily threw a few necessaries into a small bag, pulled on a mackintosh and a cap, and went out to the garage. He looked at his gas and oil and decided that he had better tank up if Major Mary's quest seemed likely to call for more than fifty miles. Then he slipped his bag under the rug, which hung on the back of the front seat, and was on his way.

It was not yet half past eight when Peter ran quietly through the dark trees which guarded the driveway at Craighurst. The long, gray façade of the house looked blank and lifeless. All the shades were drawn. The doctor's coupé was no longer there to give a touch of hope to the chill day, and from the handle of the door the crape already hung.

Peter shivered a little as he stepped out into the mist. A natural instinct made him avoid the front door where the black-and-purple ribbons securing a long sheaf of white roses and violets, fluttered in the damp breeze. Those flowers of purity and hope seemed somehow cynical to Peter, and he wondered a little who had ordered them, as

he made his way around to the garden door.

He met John, the colored butler, in the hall, and found to his relief, that Mrs. Brown was already at breakfast, and that there was no one else in the old-fashioned dining room. The greeting that passed between Peter and Major Mary was very quiet, but despite the difference in age and experience, it was the greeting of equality, friendship, and an understanding which required no unnecessary words.

Again, she motioned Peter to a chair at her right, and moving the silver urn slightly, she turned sidewise to face him, one slender old hand gripping a corner of the table. There was a moment's silence, which Peter did not break. He could see that Major Mary was wrestling with some strong emotion. The keen old eyes probed his, then she took a long breath and spoke.

"I don't know why I should ask favors of you, Peter Clancy," she said. "I don't know why it seems perfectly natural to do so, but it does."

Peter nodded but said nothing.

"I don't know either, why I'm sure you can help me, but I am."

Again Peter nodded, this time with a little smile of assurance.

Then she added, with a faint quiver in her quiet voice: "Peter, I want you to find my son."

Peter's hand closed tightly on hers.

"What!" he exclaimed softly. "Stockton——"

"Went away some time Monday afternoon," she supplied, steadily, now that the plunge had been made. "No one seems to know just when. He was here at lunch time——"

"I saw him as late as five o'clock," said Peter, and then stopped abruptly, remembering where, and how he had last seen Stockton Brown. Major Mary appeared not to notice any peculiarity in his tone.

"That's the latest so far," she said.

"I can't find that any one has seen him since. Where was he, Peter?"

"In the grounds over there." Peter pointed vaguely in the general direction of the southwest. "I'd come up through the woods——"

Mary Brown evidently was not concerned with an explanation of Peter's movements. "Did Stockton seem to be going anywhere in particular, Peter?" she interrupted eagerly.

Peter shook his head.

"I think he went back to the house," he answered, "but I can't be sure. But, Mrs. Brown, surely he left word with somebody. Do you mean that he's been gone, let's see, that would be a day and two nights—and with his uncle——"

"Desperately ill. Dying. Dead," finished Mary Brown, in three sentences. "Yes, Peter, no one knows when or where he went. So far as I can tell, he took nothing with him. No clothes. No toilet things. Not even an overcoat, and it's grown so cold and damp." She shivered and Peter could see that only her indomitable will kept her quiet, and steady. After a few seconds' pause she went on: "And that isn't all, Peter. Heaven help me. I've suspected for a long time, but I wouldn't let myself believe—I suppose it was a terrible temptation out there in China. He was ill there, too, and—oh, Peter, I'm sure there were excuses. Peter, for quite a while I've suspected that Stockton might be—might have formed the habit——"

"Of taking morphine," said Peter quietly. "Yes, dear. Don't think it's such a disgrace. Many people—most people I think, start it quite accidentally. And remember, we only suspect. We don't really know."

The tender sympathy in Peter's voice was almost too much for the strong old woman's self-control. But she spoke again, almost at once.

"Don't let's try to deceive ourselves any more, Peter," she said shaking her

head. "I've faced things all my life. I'm not going to dodge now." She waited a second, then she said firmly, "In looking through Stockton's things last evening, to see what he had taken with him, I found these."

Swiftly she thrust into Peter's hand something which had been concealed in her lap, something wrapped in a man's handkerchief. Peter pushed back a very little way from the table, and made his examination under the shelter of the tablecloth, in case John should return unexpectedly.

The handkerchief—in all probability Stockton's—contained two objects. One was a small empty vial labeled "morphine." It had been sealed in the regulation way. Stockton must have found some doctor or chemist more open to persuasion than Karl Swartz. The other object was a hypodermic syringe.

Peter raised his eyes, and looked straight into Major Mary's.

"Where?" was all he said.

"In the back of the top drawer of his chiffonier. Hidden, but not very carefully."

"Have you said anything to any one?"

"No."

"Not even to Doctor Druse?"

She shook her head. "What could Win do? His hands were full. And he was worn out. I didn't need any professional advice as to what these things meant." Peter had handed them back to her. "I'm not a fool. What I need is some one who will find my son."

"And that's me," said Peter, rising with the snap of a soldier who has received an order. He leaned over, holding her hand strongly in his. "You're not to worry," he said. "And you're certain no one here has any idea where Stockton went?"

"No one," she answered definitely.

"You're sure that Mrs. Craig——" Peter ventured. He thought the old lady's eyes sharpened, but he could not

be sure. Mrs. Brown answered the unfinished question with conviction.

"She has no idea why, or when, or how Stockton went, nor where he has gone. I asked her."

Peter was forced to be content with this, and he reasoned that it was undoubtedly a fact. Still holding her hand in his, he said, "All right then, I'm on my way. Don't get up. Please. And promise me you won't worry. I'll find Stockton. I'm sure of it. And it'll be all right, see? You won't worry any more, will you, now?"

"No, Peter, I won't," Major Mary replied with a lift of her little gray head. "It's absurd to feel such confidence in an untried boy like you, but I do. Maybe it's your unconquerable-looking red hair."

"An untried boy," repeated Peter, his mind flashing back swiftly over spent years. "And me over thirty! There'll soon be gray in my sun-kissed locks! But I'm glad the color gives you confidence, because I'm going to find Stockton, and he's going to be all right. It may take a little time, since we haven't much to go on. Also, remember that he may come back at any moment. He's sure to come back by himself if we give him time," Peter spoke with conviction. "Still, I agree with you, that it would be just as well for him to be here for the funeral. So I'm going after him and I'll bring him back in time. You'll see. And I'll keep in touch with you by phone, in case he comes back before I find him. So good-by—and you might wish me luck." Peter smiled down into the strong little face, which was raised to his, and before Major Mary realized the impudence of his intention, he had kissed her and was out of the room.

Hastily, but quietly, closing the dining-room door, he passed swiftly along the hall and entered the library. There was no hesitation in his movements. He crossed the room directly, picked up a

framed photograph, turned the photograph face down, and with sure fingers twisted the small oval pieces of thin brass, which held the back of the frame in place. The picture dropped into his hand. Rapidly he reassembled the frame, and thrust it out of sight in a table drawer. Then he slipped the portrait into an inner pocket, buttoned his coat over it, and left the house.

"Lucky to be able to lay my hands on such a good likeness without having to bother any one," thought Peter as he jumped into his car.

Peter's thoughts were much occupied, but nevertheless he remembered to glance up at the windows of Ilsa Craig's room as he made the circle of the turn in front of the house. The blinds were still down. In fact, there had been no one about the house but John, and Major Mary, and Peter had concluded naturally that the remainder of the family were asleep, since it was still early. He was, therefore, considerably surprised to see the flutter of a dark cloak among the trees just past the turn of the road. It was no sort of morning for a walk, and his curiosity aroused, Peter regarded the moving figure with interest. Some one, a girl or woman, in a long dark cape was moving swiftly from the house in a direction which would intersect the drive some little distance ahead of the point where Peter then was.

Instinctively Peter's foot pressed on the gas, and he quickened his pace so as to arrive at the point of intersection at the same time as——

"Helen Field!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Now what in the world is——"

"Peter!" She had stepped into the road and stopped.

Peter brought the car to a standstill, close beside her. He saw that her beautiful face bore evidence of the terrible strain of the previous days and nights,

but she was looking straight up into his eyes and she spoke with confidence.

"You're going to try and find Stockton, aren't you?" she said. It was a statement, and she scarcely waited for Peter's nod. "It's dreadful, terrible for him to be away just now. People will be sure to talk if he isn't here for the funeral. Try to get him here for that, Peter. Coffee, you know. Strong coffee, and lots of it. Poor Aunt Mary! Does she know, Peter?"

Peter understood that she referred to the drug habit and nodded.

"Has she any idea where he is?"

"No," said Peter.

"Have you?"

"I think I can find him," he said confidently.

"Are you only saying that to be kind? Or have you some idea?"

"I have a notion where he'll probably be found," said Peter. "I happen to have a friend who——"

Helen cut him short. "It's bully of you, Peter. Larry always said you were a brick. I wish I could help. Everything's so dreadful, somehow. Everything. Poor Stockton! I can't help feeling somehow that it's my fault."

Something in her tone startled Peter, and he frowned slightly as he continued to look at her face.

"You know," she went on hesitatingly, "Stockton's my cousin but— Peter, I've written him a little note that I want you to give him the minute you find him. I think, I hope, it will help— will make it a little easier for you. And bring him back, Peter! His place is here, for his own sake, and his mother's. I don't want her to suspect that we all know of Stockton's trouble. I must get back. God bless you, Peter. I don't know what we'd do——"

She had thrust a letter into Peter's hand, and was gone. Peter looked somewhat ruefully at the letter.

It was tightly sealed.

Sauce for the Fixer

by Alan Macdonald

Author of "Set for Six-thirty," etc.

VERY pleased with himself, Jerry, the fixer, stared for a brief second at the five thousand dollars in crisp bills just drawn from the bank. Then his eyes narrowed and he looked out the single window of the small dust-grained room he dignified, as a sop to his own pride of personage, by calling his office. He gazed out over the nondescript chimney pots of a very old section of the great city. The flat, tarred roofs of aged brick tenements, with tumbling chimneys and gaunt stairway kiosks, stretched before him like an ugly desert. The time his cold, gray eyes were withdrawn from the money was not quite a minute, but it was enough. In that time, he decided that with all possible speed he would, by all seemingly proper conduct and procedure, make most of the sum his own.

He turned back to the suppliant who, thus early on a gray, rainy spring day—that had held only the dullest of prospects—had brought this financial opportunity within his grasp. The slim, blue-eyed girl was looking at him with a steady watchfulness that expressed a terrifying fear that she could not buy his efforts on behalf of her unfortunate brother. For a moment, even the heart of Jerry threatened to turn soft. He gasped and covered the involuntary expletive with a little cough. He glanced down at his desk and shuffled some papers in nervous fingers. Why was it

that he should, just at this juncture, have to notice that the girl's plain blue serge was mended and frayed at the cuffs and collar, and that at the elbows and pockets was almost as shiny as a mirror? However—

"Well, Mrs. Melrose, I'll go right up there and get your brother out of 'stir,' I mean prison," Jerry said, his voice smooth and his manner very suave, his fat, manicured hand extending toward the five thousand dollars with an easy, insinuating motion such as one might use to snare a wary cat.

But he needed no such caution. The five thousand dollars did not run away, or elude him. Instead, Eric Gurling's married sister, pale and possessed of a fading prettiness that seemed to say, "I might have been a beauty, if there wasn't so much work to be done for the family," slipped to her feet and with both hands pressed the money into Jerry's outstretched palm. Her eyes glowed and color flooded her cheeks. She looked like one relieved of a great burden.

"Oh, I'm so glad, Mr. Wheeler," she exclaimed. "Eric said—he wrote—that if I could get you to go up there where he is, you could get him free. He said you could fix anything, and that for me to gather all the money I could and bring it to you. Eric isn't a bad boy, just wild, you know, and young, and he says he may get ten years in prison, unless you—unless things are fixed. I do

wish I'd brought the letter, but I forgot it—there's so much to do for the baby. Still, I mustn't take up more of your time; but I do want to tell you I'm as happy as can be, and I know everything will come out all right. Eric has such confidence in you."

Jerry arose and regarded her with an embarrassment that brought an almost boyish blush to his cheeks, and made Mrs. Melrose think he was as nice as could be—to be so bashful before praise.

"I'll go up to Smethport to-day, Mrs. —," he hastened to say, "and I'll keep you in touch with everything by letter. I haven't any doubt it will turn out well. Now, you go right home and don't worry any more. Just leave everything to me. There, now, good-by. I've a few things to clear up here, and then—well, you see, don't you? Good-by, and again, don't worry."

He thought the grateful young woman was coming back when she turned at the door and smiled at him a last time. Indeed, she opened her lips as though to speak, and paused; something in his manner seemed to warn her that he was a very busy man, as well as a very powerful one, and that she had best not stay longer lest he retract his offer to aid her prisoned brother. She nodded brightly and went silently and softly out, closing the door quite soundlessly behind her—as becomes a mouse momentarily in the abode of the lion.

"Whew," breathed Jerry, running a fat finger around in his collar, "it's going to be hard to explain to her later, I can see that. These good women are difficult. Oh, well, five thousand dollars is five thousand dollars, and of course *she* can't hurt me."

II.

It was like Jerry, the fixer, that he went about the show of earning, as he would have expressed it, this five thousand dollars quite ponderously and quite

seriously. This may have been due in great measure to the fact that in the world where Jerry lived a man who double crosses an old pal and is found out sometimes comes to a sure and silent end. For many, many years now, Jerry had made his living by using his subtle and active mind; and if there was a man of his kind and class who could think up more and better alibis than Jerry, who could lie more convincingly to lawyers, judges—that worthy never had met him. He had kept many an evildoer out of jail, and always had collected his price. Under other circumstances of birth and training, Jerry undoubtedly would have become a great criminal lawyer.

At noon, he was on a train on the Ontario and Western, bound north. Outside, the day was raw and chill, but there was a comfortable warmth in the day coach, and Jerry felt content. The five thousand dollars in an inside vest pocket made a pleasant pressure against his heart. The small but efficient automatic he always carried in the especially designed pocket in his waistcoat, just at the turn of his chest on the left side gave him a sense of security and confidence. Watching the passing scenery of the countryside through the window, Jerry began to think about the plight of young Eric Gurling, whom he knew more by repute than by intimacy, as he knew hundreds of other youths who dabbled more or less in what the law calls crime. Many of these were his clients.

He had Eric catalogued: Good dresser, no steady job, always plenty of money, accustomed to keep his mouth closed about his own affairs, and to take little trips now and then to some mysterious place, on more mysterious errands.

The story Mrs. Melrose had told him was a simple one. He had drawn the details from her with considerable skill of cross-examination, and believed he

had it all straight. Eric, driving a truck of furniture down from the Canadian border, had been arrested on the road south of Smethport. A constable had searched the truck for bootleg whisky, and had found instead about one hundred thousand dollars' worth of dope in a suit case. Eric had expressed volumes of surprise that it was there, had done what he could to stave off arrest and prosecution; but he had been indicted by the grand jury, and he was to be arraigned before Federal Judge Mitchell within the next two or three days.

"He hired a lawyer," Mrs. Melrose had said, "but the man hasn't done a thing for him."

Jerry laughed a little, thinking of Mrs. Melrose, and the belligerent condemnation that had come in her eyes when she spoke of her brother's "mouthpiece." Good women, he chuckled to himself, how little they knew! Here was a boy carting one hundred thousand dollars' worth of dope into the country, and his sister could only remember, apparently, that he wasn't a bad boy, and had always been kind to her. Jerry shrugged. Well, no matter, he'd do what he could for the boy. He'd even spend a bit of the five thousand dollars in the young man's behalf, if there was no other way. But not too much. Sometimes, Jerry had wonderful things done in the courts and the government offices—for nothing.

"Now, then, what are the key facts in the case, and what can be done with them?"

Jerry slumped in his seat, and his eyes grew vague and dreamy. A frown contracted his brows, and the faint cleft that struck up across his forehead from the top of his nose grew deep and distinct. Jerry, the fixer, had become for the time Jerry, the inventor.

Two hours after he arrived in Smethport, Jerry was closeted in the private

office of James Wesley Kendall, of the esteemed law firm of Kendall, Rankin & Smart. Needless to say, Mr. Kendall was not the "mouthpiece," who had been hired by Eric Gurling. Tall and dark, with a long, lean neck and very keen black eyes, Mr. Kendall was feared by many and loved by numbers of his fellow townsmen. Some said of him, "Don't trust the old skinflint with a nickle," and others, "Good man, Kendall, and honest as most, I guess." He sat in his battered swivel chair, his long legs stretched out, his ankles crossed on the corner of his desk; his chin resting on his black string tie and "boiled" white shirt, and the tips of his upraised fingers joined before him, making a little church steeple. He listened attentively to Jerry the fixer, who sat on the edge of a chair, his hat in his hands.

Jerry had gone first to the young lawyer Eric Gurling had engaged that day in the police station. He had been able to deal summarily with the man, being years and years older, at least in experience and guile.

"This boy's mother is very ill," he had said. "If the youngster goes to jail for a stretch, she'll go somewhere, you see, forever. And she's a good, respectable woman, with a fine family of other children, and great pride in them.

"Now, I'm going to be frank with you—show you all the cards, and for the sake of this mother and her peace of mind at the end I want you to be with me. The boy's brothers and sisters have put into my hands a little money—all they've got, mortgages, jewelry, and all, to keep him from being put away.

"The amount isn't enough to pay for long litigation, and there's no more where it comes from. But it is enough, if properly placed, about the court and so on, to—ah—make things much easier for him, at least. If, for instance, we could get some one who knew the judge and the district attorney interested in him, we might get him off.

"Oh, don't misunderstand me. I don't suggest bribery, but there is such a thing as friendship, even in courts. Now, do you think you are the man for us. Somewhere, there is such a man—and, of course, you may be he."

And here he bent his stern and, when he chose, intensely human survey, upon the young man before him. He made his voice tremble—a trick he had studied.

"It's a mighty serious thing," he had said, "to have a man's liberty—at least all he's got into the world to fight for liberty with, in your hand. And on top of that to know that his mother's life hangs in the balance—the balance of whether you act wisely, do all that you can, with his chance and hers. There isn't any other resort for him—if I fail now he'll go to jail. Somewhere, there is a man who can save him. Think of your own mother and answer me—as man to man. Are you the one for this responsibility?"

The clean-run youngster before him—out of college scarce two years—had shivered a little, and his eyes had gone rather blank.

"There's old Wes Kendall," he had said finally. "He's known Judge Mitchell since they were boys. If any one can influence the judge, it is Kendall; but don't quote me, and please don't say I sent you to him. I do hope you can do something—Eric didn't tell me about his mother."

So the fixer had come to old Kendall, with the story he had rigged up there on the train. He was saying:

"Well, Mr. Kendall, the boy doesn't really own the truck. The man who owned and operated the vehicle, for whom Eric, the boy in jail, merely worked, left the truck at some town north of here and was to meet Eric at a point south. He did not say what he intended to do in that time, or where he was going. It was just Eric's bad luck to be picked up while his employer was away.

"Now Eric didn't know a thing about the dope, Mr. Kendall. He thought he was actually driving only a load of furniture. I admit that Eric has brought rum in from Canada over this same route, but, of course, he's not held on a charge of rum running now. Still, that would count heavily against him with a trial jury."

"Who and where is the man you say owns the truck?" asked Kendall.

"That's just the trouble," Jerry answered readily enough—he had not done all that thinking on the train for nothing—"no one we know, knows him. He's a dope runner and, of course, keeps his identity, address, and all that secret. Even Eric only knew his name, and that may have been an alias. But we can produce garage receipts proving his ownership of the truck."

A little smile played about Kendall's mouth.

"And they might be forgeries," he observed.

"I don't think so," Jerry lied suavely, looking his man in the eye. "I can show you the garage receipts."

"A plausible story," Kendall allowed. "And you say this boy's sister intrusted you with five thousand dollars—all she and her family could raise—to buy, or secure his freedom. You say his mother is dying. How much of this money are you willing to give me, if I take the case?"

"All of it," Jerry told him, promptly enough, then added: "But here's the point—it's yours only if you can assure me that the district attorney and the judge, through your offices, will prevent the case going to trial, and assure the boy a light sentence, at least, after permitting him to plead guilty.

"We don't want to risk the freedom of this innocent, betrayed young man before a jury just now."

"Will you provide a retainer now? You know, sir, I do not know you."

With a touch of theatricalism, Jerry,

the fixer, drew the five thousand dollars from his pockets, and laid it on the desk.

"Let's put all the cards on the table," he said. "This is yours if you can promise and prove to me that you are able to fix the judge so the boy may plead guilty, if necessary, and be given suspended sentence. Let me state this plainly to you: There's always some man who can get to a judge—some lawyer. The question is: Are you the man?"

Kendall's eyes narrowed; his fingers pressed each other so tightly that they lost all semblance to a church steeple. Five thousand dollars was a bigger fee than he had received in many months.

"I went to school with Judge Mitchell," he said slowly. "I am, I think, the man. But I must make a condition. You must trust me, or a neutral party, with the money. You see," he hastened to add, "you come to me as the unknown emissary of a crook, well, at least a rum runner. I never engaged in criminal law, save in one or two unavoidable instances. Yet, I think I can do more with Judge Mitchell than any one else. I must, however, be assured of payment before going into such a compact."

Jerry smiled blandly.

"Mr. Kendall, that's as broad as it is long," he pointed out. "If I give the money to you now, I'll have no unimpeachable assurance that you'll carry out your part of the bargain, and no redress if you don't. And the agreement is a thing I don't think either of us would want to write down—the buying, is it not, of a judge's friendship, at least. You trust me, and I'll trust you. You do your part and I'll do mine—both like honorable men."

Mr. Kendall looked thoughtful; Jerry watchful.

"I see you carry a gun there, saw it when you took out the money," the lawyer observed irrelevantly.

"Yes, but I have a permit," Jerry lied easily. "My business requires that I carry, on occasion, huge sums."

Mr. Kendall bowed.

"I accept your proposition," he announced evenly. "Where can I find you during the next few days?"

"Oh, the principal hotel," said Jerry. "I think it's the Lambertin."

Mr. Kendall watched Jerry until he had closed the door. Then he ambled across the room and looked out the window. When enough time had elapsed to permit Jerry to have left the offices of the firm, he called to his stenographer, and when the girl entered, said: "Get that old villain, Waukeshaw Peters, up here for me, will you? Tell him I've got some special business for him."

Jerry, the fixer, proceeded in leisurely fashion to the Hotel Lambertin. He felt quite content and successful, like a man who had done what he could in a good cause. He rather liked Kendall, and considered the man "not exactly a fool." He was reasonably certain Kendall would get his friend the judge to give Eric a suspended sentence, and once the boy was out he was just as sure that he himself would be far away from Smethport—with the five thousand dollars. He did not of course intend to pay the money over to Kendall, and he did not see how the lawyer could openly collect the money. He did not even believe that Kendall would ever try to collect, or in any way risk Jerry telling the world what he, Kendall, had agreed to do. Jerry chuckled.

"Funny fellows, these country lawyers—shrewd but not shrewd enough," he observed.

Still, he felt that he had better not carry the five thousand dollars around him, especially after having shown it to Kendall. You never could tell, and it always paid to play safe. At the desk in the hotel, he arranged with the clerk

that the money be kept in the hotel vault until called for. The clerk gave him a receipt for the package, and he went to his room.

III.

Some minutes after ten o'clock the next morning, Jerry walked down through the town to the county jail, and there, through bars with a fine screen over them, was permitted to talk with Eric Gurling. Even through the screen, designed to prevent visitors passing files and such to prisoners, Jerry could see that Eric was greatly encouraged by the fact that he had interested himself in the case. The boy had blue eyes like his sister, and was, if anything, even better looking. His collar was open at the throat, and his chestnut hair touseled, but he appeared somehow sturdy and reliable, and Jerry formed a quick opinion that the youngster never would be a great success in his chosen path outside the law.

"Did sis get enough money so you can get me out on bail, Mr. Wheeler?" he asked. "They fixed the amount at five thousand dollars, though I guess they'd raise it if they thought I had money. They're pretty tough up here."

Jerry frowned.

"Better lay off that idea, Gurling," he advised. "I'm trying to make 'em believe you're poor as a church mouse—too poor even to get bail. Just trust me and lay low. I guess I can turn the trick all right."

"Well, I am poor as a mouse," Eric whispered gloomily. "I ought to have known better than to let them use my truck for packing dope. Now, I lose the truck and all."

The fixer left the jail, and retraced his steps to the hotel. Typical small town, he thought as he wandered along the main street, from which, over and beyond the three and four-story buildings, nondescript as to structure and color, he could see rising hills, covered

with scrubby, second-growth timber. The bright morning sun made the place look sleepy and somehow soiled and tawdry. He couldn't figure out why people elected to live in such places, so different from the bustle and turmoil, the excitement of his own big town. Some day, when he was too old to keep up in the real city, he thought indulgently, he would come up to Smethport and live "at half speed."

He turned on the porch of the Lambertin, lighted a cigarette, and stood there smiling in gentle derision. Some of the people even wore overalls, and a farmer drove by with a buckboard, on which were two big shining containers that had carried his day's milk to the cheese factory.

Some one jostled him rudely from behind, and threw him against the nearest pillar at the edge of the narrow veranda. He strove to regain his equilibrium, throwing his hands out wildly; and he was jostled again, and only saved from falling when the jostler grabbed him.

"Help, help, police," he heard some lunatic shouting in his ear. "Thieves, robbers, pickpockets. Help, help!"

Jerry steadied himself and by main force managed to swing around, only to find himself grappling with a man much bigger and stronger than himself. This individual was shouting for help.

"Let me go, you fool," cried Jerry. "You don't need any help. What ails you?"

But the stranger continued to hang on to him, and yell, and Jerry had all he could do to keep from drawing his automatic; still, a crowd had gathered, and he knew he was in the right, that the man who attacked him must be crazy. The police would soon attend to him. Jerry tried to explain. The big man accused him of picking his pockets, and Jerry protested with considerable heat that he didn't "do any such thing." He was still protesting

when a policeman came up and grabbed him by the collar.

"What's the matter, Mr. Peters?" the policeman demanded of the other man. "What's he done to you?"

"He tried to pick my pockets," cried the "crazy" Mr. Peters, whom Jerry now perceived was really quite a sane-looking, well-dressed man of about forty-five. "My pocketbook, my money is gone."

"Officer, the man is plainly insane," protested Jerry. "He pushed me. I never saw him before, and I haven't his pocketbook. You can search me."

The policeman proceeded to search him, and Jerry paled. What sort of insanity ruled the place? He tried to pull away from the patrolman, he looked wildly around at the crowd of townspeople that had gathered to hem him in. The patrolman shook him, and held him still, warning him: "Stand still, if you don't want trouble, young man." And presently he pulled out Jerry's automatic.

"Got a permit to carry this?"

"Why, certainly, but I left it home."

"Officer, wait a minute," cried Mr. Peters. "There's my purse on the floor. He just dropped it. There, right under his feet."

The patrolman picked up the pocketbook, inspected the automatic, and decided:

"Better come along to the station house, both of you. You can tell the whole thing to the sergeant."

And about fifteen minutes later, because the headquarters cells were full that day, Jerry, the fixer, was in the county jail waiting while the jailer called his lawyer, Mr. Wes Kendall, to arrange bail. He was charged with violating the Sullivan law.

"For Heaven's sake, go up to the Lambertin and get some of my money out of the safe," he instructed Mr. Kendall, when the latter came down. "Here, I've written out an order. Get the

money and get me out. This town's full of loons."

"A lot of loons come here," the old lawyer commented as he went out. "What sort of an impression do you think you made—lying about having a permit to carry a revolver?"

Mr. Kendall put four thousand five hundred dollars of the money he had obtained at the Lambertin in his office safe, and twirled the combination knob. He lumbered over to his desk and sat down. Jerry, the fixer, watched him narrowly.

"I think I had better keep the money until our bargain is settled, don't you?" he stated. "It will be safe here. Of course, we'll get the five hundred I had to put up as bail for you back later. If I fail to keep my part of our bargain, I'll return the money to you."

"Possession is nine points of the law, eh?"

Jerry laughed pleasantly enough. He was too shrewd, under the conditions, to argue; besides, he knew that Mr. Kendall's safe was very old, and suspected it of fatal weakness. Also, he knew a very good cracksman who would open it on order. He would send a wire that very hour.

He went back to the hotel. He was not particularly puzzled by what had happened, and he felt positive he had been framed by Kendall. It was astounding and disgusting, but true. He proceeded to send a code wire to his favorite yeggman in the greater city. It wouldn't do, he concluded, to play so close a game with this "lawyer bird" any more. Young Eric's fate suddenly became of very small importance to him. To-night, unless the cracksman failed him, they'd open the Kendall safe, and get away. And considering again the incidents of the last few hours, he decided to go back and watch Kendall's office in the meantime.

But though he lounged around the

place all that afternoon, he did not see Kendall once. His partner, Rankin, a weezened little office lawyer, said he thought Mr. Kendall had suddenly been called out of town. Jerry wisely believed this was pure bunk, as he expressed it, and devoted himself to figuring out how to make a safe entrance and exit that night.

Shortly after midnight, Jerry and a yegg called Miller, at that time, and by any one of half a dozen aliases at others, stood before the cleverly opened safe in the offices of Kendall, Rankin & Smart. Rugs stripped from the floor had been hung over the windows. Jerry pawed in the safe and hurled the papers and books out behind him, much like a dog digging for rabbit. At last, he got disgustedly to his feet, and kicked savagely at the papers.

"The old fox must have suspected something," he muttered. "There's not a jitney in the place."

VI.

None of the hate that Jerry Wheeler felt for the senior member of the Kendall law firm showed in his bland poker face as he sprawled comfortably on one of the spectators' benches in Judge Mtichell's courtroom the morning they arraigned Eric Gurling for sentence. On Kendall's advice, after they had had several heart-to-heart talks in the county jail, the boy had pleaded guilty. Pale and nervous, he now sat on the bench reserved for prisoners on sentence day, seeking always to meet the eyes of Jerry, as if he sought some sign of encouragement. Now and then he regarded the calm, rather severe, dry-as-dust Mr. Kendall. But Jerry did not look at Eric once. He was engrossed in a puzzle. Could it be possible that this lawyer would deliberately let both Eric and himself be sent to jail, in order to secure for himself, without threat of further difficulty, the money raised by Mrs. Melrose?

Kendall busied himself with papers at the lawyer's table, apparently without the slightest interest in his two clients. His string tie dragged down over the front of his "boiled" shirt, to the edges of his black waistcoat. His Stygian-hued clothing hung on him like many bags. His shoulders slumped, his neck seemed preternaturally long, his nose hawklike, his forehead full with the suggestion of intelligence and power—and schemes. Jerry shuddered, and gradually convinced himself that the old lawyer was a very devil out of the nether regions—a fiend. He forgot his own schemes in hatred for this man who apparently had outwitted him.

The blue-clad court attendant haled Eric to the bar finally, and Mr. Kendall arose with much clearing of the throat. Then, as he faced the judge, he seemed to Jerry suddenly a different man. His quiet face became mobile, kindly, scornful, pleading by turns. He told Jerry's own story to the court—the one Jerry thought out there on the train—only told it a thousand times better than Jerry had conceived it. Eric listened with amazement, scarcely recognizing himself in the picture of the poor boy whose mother was dying, who had been hired as a furniture mover, and betrayed unwittingly into carrying drugs for the debauchment of his fellow man—who had been left alone to hold the bag when trouble came.

A rum runner, true, in a time when rum running in all classes of society was virtually a recognized profession—but a dope carrier only by betrayal. Eric learned that he had pleaded guilty out of sincere repentance and a desire to "go and sin no more." The lawyer knew his family, his sister, and would vouch for his future good conduct if only the court could see fit, in view of all the extenuating circumstances now spread upon the records of the county, to give this youth who had erred one more chance.

Jerry's jaw fell, and his eyes widened, as the court bent forward over the desk, and called the district attorney and the lawyer to the bar. He saw the district attorney nod affirmatively when Kendall, apparently, said they had reviewed the evidence together. He saw Kendall smile and thank the court; saw the lawyer and the prosecutor step aside. He heard the judge's voice, speaking the name of Eric Gurling.

"It is the sentence of the court, Eric Gurling, that you be confined to the State penitentiary at Auburn for a period of two years, and that you pay a fine of five hundred dollars, or one day in jail for every dollar of the fine unpaid——"

Jerry's rage and resentment rose within him and nearly choked him. He had been betrayed, too; this lawyer, this soft-spoken, deceitful "mouthpiece" had sold him out; had made a bargain, and then never done a single thing to carry it out; had sought only to get Eric and himself out of the way.

"Yet it is also the decision of the court that, in view of all the circumstances cited by the learned counsel, the penitentiary part of this sentence be suspended, upon payment of the fine, during the good behavior of the defendant."

Jerry put his head in his hands to avoid letting any one see the shame and disgust on his face.

He stood up, and Eric came running up to him, and grasped his hand.

"Oh, I knew you'd help me, Mr. Wheeler, I knew it," he cried. "I'll never forget it."

V.

Jerry sat again in the office of Mr. Kendall, a half hour later.

"Well, you win the money," Jerry surrendered. "Now to my case. Suppose you get me off, and include that little job in the big fee. It ought to be easy. You can do just what you like with that judge. Say, what was his divvy, anyway?"

Kendall frowned.

"I never talked to Judge Mitchell about Eric Gurling's case except in court to-day," he said. "It was an interesting case, that's why I listened to you, and took it.

"Furthermore, young man, I haven't a cent of the money I took from you. I restored it to Eric's sister, when I went down there to see just who you were, and whether the boy was worth saving, and just what you were up to. Eric has promised to pay me my fee of one hundred dollars in installments. And if he doesn't stick to the straight and narrow, I'll see that he goes down to Atlanta myself."

Jerry gulped. "But about me?"

"I'll take your case for one thousand dollars cash, and not a cent less, on condition that the five-hundred-dollar bail put up for you is returned at once to Eric Gurling's sister."

Jerry, the fixer, bounded to his feet.

"You craven skunk," he burst out. "You framed my arrest, and you know it, and now you try to bleed me. Well, take it from me, I'll never wait around here for trial, and some day you'll pay."

Mr. Kendall drew a neat automatic from his desk.

"Sit down," he said smoothly. "Now, young man, you will stand trial for carrying concealed weapons, or you'll plead guilty, Mrs. Melrose can have that five hundred dollars' bail. Otherwise, you'll be arrested for robbing my safe.

"You left some finger prints. I took them myself and sent my partner to a certain rogue's gallery. Your pretty face is still there."

Jerry sat down.

"You win," he said.

The lawyer got to his feet.

"Now you're coming down and give yourself up so I can get that five hundred dollars," he announced. "I don't know when I've been as sorry for any one as I was for that little woman—that boy's faithful little sister."

Headquarters Chat

WHICH type of story is the most popular, the one where the detective is the principal character, or the one where the center of the stage is held by the criminal?

McCulley, Booth, and a half dozen other authors were here the other afternoon and we were discussing this subject. We said that while there was a large following of the detective story, that is the one in which the detective played the central rôle, we thought that the most popular stories that we ran had been those where the criminal was given most space and attention.

Take among the long stories, for instance. The most popular ones that we ever published were: "The Avenging Twins," by McCulley; "Black Star," by McCulley; "The Kidnaping Syndicate," by Booth; the Sanderson stories now running, by Booth, and the immensely popular stories which Mr. Apple is writing about that cold-blooded villain of villains, Mr. Chang.

Our most popular short stories have criminals for the central characters. We have Simon Trapp, Mr. Clackworthy, Thubway Tham stories.

We suggested what we thought was a very plausible and probable reason as to why the crook story was more popular than the detective story. When we were children, to be "it" was nowhere near as exciting as to be "free."

There is an old saying that when a dog chases a rabbit, he is running for the rabbit, but the rabbit is running for his life. Thus, the greater excitement is with the person who is being sought. We see the dog running along after the rabbit. He is fairly excited. He stops to bark once in a while, perhaps to take

a drink of water at a cool stream. Not so the rabbit! With ears laid low, he is running for every living thing's dearest possession, his life. Therefore, if the spectator, or in other words, the reader, is with the pursued, he is where the greatest excitement lies.

So, with the case of John Doe, who is sitting beside us. The moment he leaves our office and reaches the street we will be summoned by our employer and assigned to capture Doe, who is a criminal. We are informed by our employer to spare no time nor expense. In other words, we have a new job, that of running John Doe to earth. We look at our watch and know that it is about supper time, so calmly and without excitement, we wander into a restaurant and get our supper before starting off on a stalking expedition after John Doe. But how does John Doe feel? His heart is going like a trip hammer. His brain is working for all it is worth. His inventive powers are strained to the utmost. Will he attempt to get out of town? Will he visit an old secondhand clothing store to change his clothes? Will he go to a large fashionable hotel, or will he get a room in a cheap lodging house? Will he let his beard grow? Will he attempt to disguise his face in any way?

Thus, if the reader follows our movements, they will not be of as much excitement as if he were to follow the movements of John Doe, for wherever Doe is, sleeping or waking, be it day or night, the fear of arrest, a long time behind prison bars, perhaps death, is ever present.

We do not want you to think, of course, that a magazine entirely filled

with stories where the criminal played the principal rôle would be more interesting than a magazine such as we are conducting, with stories of both kinds, those which contain criminal heroes and those which contain detective heroes.

Please write and give us your views on this important and interesting subject.

We knew perfectly well that Mr. Chang was, perhaps, one of the most interesting characters that has ever appeared in this magazine. He just inspired this writer, who doesn't give his name:

"DEAR EDITOR: 'Mr. Chang, Hangman,' is the inspiration of this, my first letter to any magazine, though I have been reading them constantly since I was ten years old. Though I have no sympathy for the rascal, to let him hang would be killing off a source of pleasure and excitement. I heartily disagree with F. M. Berry about Max Brand's 'The Crime by the River,' as I found it very interesting. When you run out of Mr. Chang I always welcome such

authors as Dawson, Wallace, and Bemis."

My, my, but we wish each and every one of you would start a club such as Norman Mills, of Baltimore, Maryland, describes. This would be a boost all around. Mr. Mills says:

"DEAR EDITOR: I've been reading the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for eight years, and I am very much pleased with your stories. This is the first I have ever written to a magazine. I am president of a club with over seventy-five members. Over forty-five of them read the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, and all of the members who read this magazine would like to have more of Mr. Chang stories, and they all send their regards to Mr. Apple."

Come on, now, each one of you organize, among your friends, a club, and get forty-five of the members to go to the news stand every week and get a copy of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE. Wowie! It makes our heads swim to think how the circulation would climb.

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

Blue Jean Billy and the Lone Survivor

A NOVEL

By CHARLES W. TYLER

The outlaw of the sea was true blue when it came to the test.

The Candy Baby

By EDWARD LEONARD

The sweet little thing found that there were some tracks that her conscience would not let her cover.

The Other Side of the Shade

By JOHN BAER

Here's a crime that's unraveled as quickly as a shade is lowered.

AND OTHER STORIES

ORDER YOUR COPY NOW

The Magic of Print

THE old patent-medicine fakir knew well the magic of print. And the army of quacks who followed him have made use of the same magic. Most men and women accept without question printed statements which they might discredit were the same words spoken.

You will find quacks trailing along in the wake of every announcement of important medical research, with false claims of their "discoveries", their fake mechanical appliances and special treatments, their "health institutes" and their offers of free diagnosis and treatment by mail.

Millions for Fake "Cures"

Fake-medicine labels are more cautious than they used to be. The U. S. Government, through the Federal Food and Drugs Act, forbids false or misleading statements on the trade package. But this Act does not prohibit lying statements in advertisements, circulars, or window displays.

The vultures who prey on the sick advertise various remedies each guaranteed to cure a specific disease—tuberculosis, cancer, diabetes, kidney trouble, blood diseases, skin eruptions, epilepsy and almost every other serious ailment.



"Read the Label"

"DON'T take my word for it that this medicine will cure you! Don't take anybody's word! Read the label and see for yourself," the street corner patent-medicine fakir urged as he held up a bottle containing some colored liquid guaranteed to cure a long list of ailments and diseases. His confederate in the crowd asked to see a bottle—and then the sales began.

Sick folk are pitifully easy victims. They experiment and hope—tragically—until it is too late. Waiting even a few weeks to try out a new patent medicine or a course of treatments at some dubious "health institute", may mean death which might have been prevented by the right medical care.

Cancer and Consumption "Cures"

Of late there has been a renewed wave of advertising of specific cancer and tuberculosis "cures". No medicine has ever been found that can be depended upon to cure these diseases—despite seemingly substantiated claims of manufacturers. Testimonials count for little. Many quacks are still using testimonials signed by people who died years ago from the very diseases of which

they claimed they had been cured.

When a cure for tuberculosis or cancer is found magazines and newspapers will shout the glorious news.

Do not be deceived by the magic of print. Avoid advertised "cures". If you are sick see your doctor.



Although no specific remedy for the cure of tuberculosis has been found at the time this is written and scientists are working constantly on the problem—there are literally hundreds of nostrums offered to the public as guaranteed cures.

Against this cruel exploitation of the sick, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company invites the cooperation of editors and publishers everywhere.

It is true that the tuberculosis death rate has been reduced about 50% during the past 10 years and each year shows an improvement. This great

battle is being won by a campaign of education through which people are being taught that although tuberculosis cannot be cured by medicine it can be prevented and even checked in its early stages and perhaps be permanently arrested—by fresh air, sunshine, rest and the right kind of nourishing food.

Booklets giving recent and authoritative information concerning Tuberculosis and Cancer will be mailed free upon request.

HALEY FISKE, President.

Published by

METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY—NEW YORK

Biggest in the World, More Assets, More Policyholders, More Insurance in force, More new Insurance each year

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements



FRL this 8 Piece Suite

Your Choice of two finishes, Nut Brown Fumed Oak or Highly Glossed Golden. Be sure to state your choice.



HERE is the suite that will make your living room more inviting, more comfortable; a pleasanter, a more home-like place for family and friends. You will take great pride in the dignified design of these 8 big pieces. The high-quality construction will serve you for many years. Just

\$1.00 with order brings the entire suite, and the Free Scarf right to your door. The monthly payment is so small that you will never feel the outlay. My money-back bond protects you to the limit. You will make a big mistake if you don't take advantage of this offer NOW!

8 Solid Oak Pieces On \$30 Days' Free Trial

It will look with the background of your draperies and rugs. If you are not perfectly satisfied after a month's trial you may return it. I will refund your first payment and all transportation costs. The trial will not cost you a penny. You cannot be disappointed.

Use this suite for 30 days at my risk. See how stunning



Home Furnishing Guide FREE

My New Catalog is a treasure house of Home Furnishing Ideas; a delightful guide to happy home making. It shows Thousands of Bargains in Furniture, Carpets, Rugs, Stoves, etc. Write for it Today. My Prices are the Lowest. I Give the Longest Time to Pay. Everything sent on 30 Days' Free Trial.



ink well receptacle and ink well. The lid is removable; writing supplies can be kept in the drawer. This special feature makes the table serve the double purpose of library table and desk.

You have your choice of two finishes: Nut Brown Fumed Oak or Highly Glossed Golden Oak. Be very careful to State Your Choice of Finish in Ordering. Complete 8-piece Suite, order No. SA625, Price \$39.95. Terms: \$1 with order, balance \$3 monthly.

NATHANIEL SPEAR, Pres.
Dept. S-202

➔ SPEAR & CO. ⬅ Pittsburgh, Pa.
Home Furnishers for the People of America

FORMER PRICE } \$55 } **Sale Price \$39.95**
EASY MONTHLY PAYMENTS

Consider these outstanding points of excellence: (1) Kiln-dried and air-seasoned Solid Oak throughout; (2) Strong Construction, Upholstered Full Length Backs and Seats covered with Rich, Brown Spanish Artificial Leather, and very well padded with rest-giving, upholstery materials; (3) Wide, roll arms on Arm Chair and Rocker; Sturdy Posts on all pieces; (4) Every piece of large, full size: The Library Table 24 x 36 inches with Writing Desk Drawer, and big lower shelf, a table of striking beauty, Rocker and Arm Chair are both 37 ins. high and 25 ins. wide, with seats measuring 19 x 19 inches. Sewing Rocker is 34 inches high and 17 inches wide; Side Chair is the same size. The Tabetorte is 16 inches high. The Waste Basket is 14 inches high. The 2 Book Ends give a desirable and artistic touch. **Writing Desk Drawer, An Exclusive Spear Feature:** The Library table is equipped with a

FREE! Velour Scarf with Tapestry Ends absolutely free a Handsome, rich blue Table Scarf, it is made of a good velvety quality Velour with floral tapestry ends, and silky tassels. It is 12 inches wide and 55 inches long, just the right size for the table. This Scarf is absolutely free if you send promptly Your Free Trial Order for the library suite.

SPEAR & CO., Dept. S-202, Pittsburgh, Pa.
 Send me at once 8 piece Library Suite and Free Velour Scarf as described above. Enclosed is \$1 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I decide to keep it, I will send you \$3.00 monthly. Order No. SA625, Price \$39.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. Send me your Big Free Catalog also.
 If you want Nut Brown Fumed Oak put an X in this
 If you want Golden Oak put an X in this
Name..... Occupation.....
R. F. D., Box No. or Street and No.....
Post Office..... State.....
 If your shipping point is different from your post office fill in line below
Send Shipment to.....
 FREE Catalog and write your name and address plainly on the above lines.