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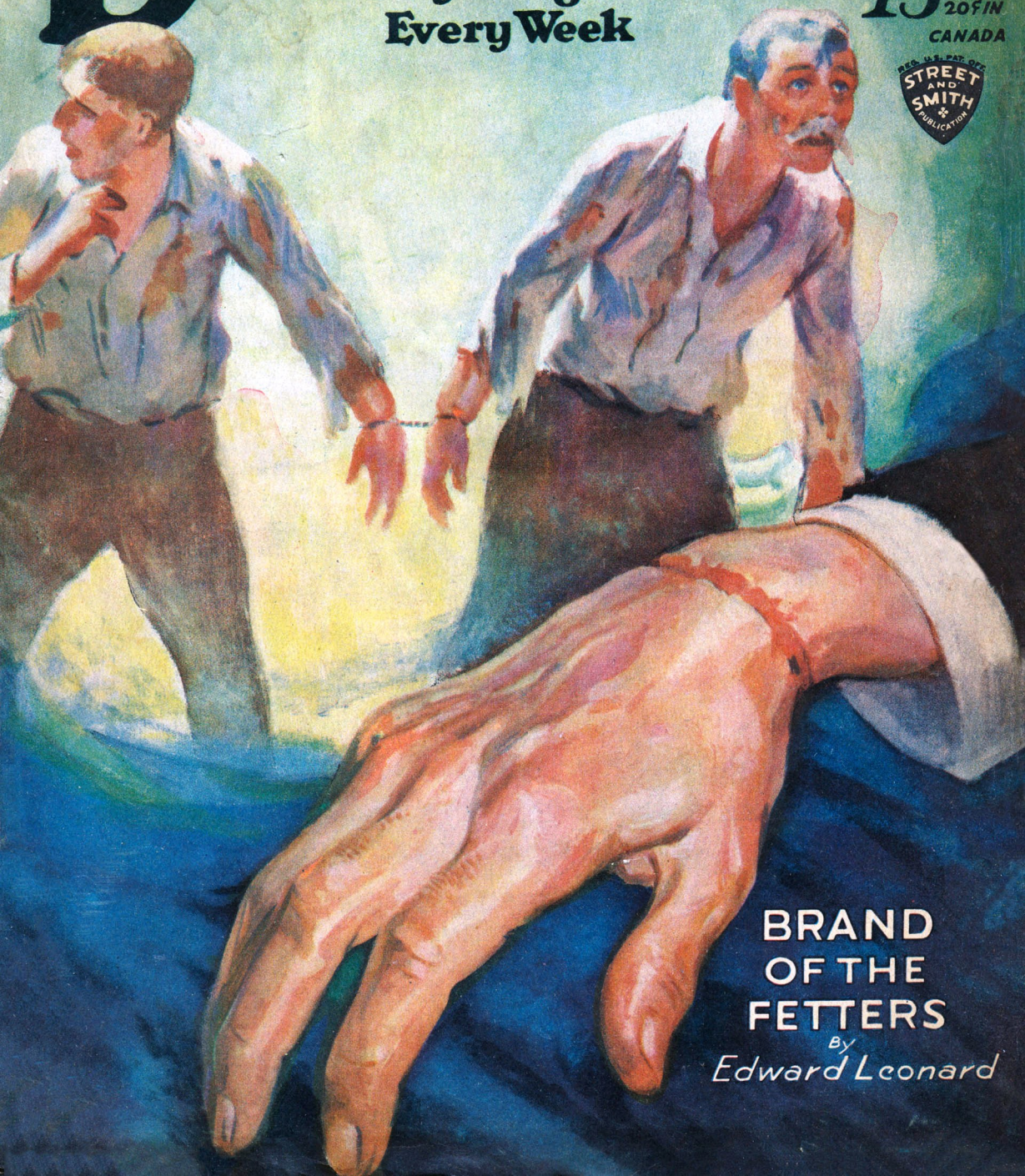
JUNE 14, 1930

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"DON'T! You'll make him the laughing stock of the place"

but when he started to play the piano . . .

WHAT a glorious night! Henri's quaint restaurant was crowded with joyful parties. Tonight, John Brent was giving a party for eight in honor of Helen Thompson's engagement. Dick Peters had recommended Henri's as a splendid place to dine and dance. And Dick was right.

"What's that in your pocket, Dick? Your will?" asked John. "No, that's just some sheet music I bought on the way over," returned Dick.

"What in Heaven's name are you doing with sheet music? Going to use it as wall-paper?" exclaimed John.

"Why, I'm learning to play the piano. Didn't you know?" "Oh boy! Listen to that! You couldn't learn to play in a thousand years."

Dick looked at John with an amused smile on his face.

"What would you give to hear me play?" he asked calmly.

"A ten dollar bill if you'll go up there right now and play that piano. What do you say?" exclaimed John with triumph in his voice.

"You're on," replied Dick, quick as a flash. "I'll take you up on that little dare. But not here—wait 'til we get home tonight."

"No, sir, you'll win or lose that bet right now. Come on, fellows, let's take him right up to the piano and we'll settle it here."

"Don't be foolish, boys, you'll only make us the laughing stock of the place," begged one of the girls.

Headless of Dick's pleading, they dragged him to the platform and placed him at the piano. By this time the unusual goings on had caught the attention of everyone in the restaurant. Now Dick realized that he had to go through with it. So summing up all his courage and with a sudden burst of confidence, he broke into the chorus of the latest Broadway hit.

John gasped. He couldn't believe his ears. Everyone at the table sat in open-mouthed amazement as Dick sat there playing one

snappy number after another. It wasn't until the regular orchestra returned that they allowed Dick to rise from the piano. Amid the din of applause, he went back to the table, only to be swamped with questions. But Dick refused to tell them the secret of his new-found musical ability, in spite of all their begging.

Going home that night Dick finally gave in.

"Well, John, I've put one over on you. I learned to play by myself, without a teacher."

"What? That's impossible! Tell me more."

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By Edward Leonard

Author of "In Confidence from the Dead," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THROUGH THE STORM.

BEHIND time and in a furious hurry the Royal Limited, crack train of the line, was flashing through a black night of heavy, wind-driven rain. Up from the river valleys to the south, it had fought its way over the long grades in the teeth of a howling gale, and now the thundering roar of its swift advance was reverberating through pine-clad

mountains. Those lonely heights were completely hidden in the dense darkness except now and then at bends of the road, when to the men in the cab of the locomotive the long, searching glare of the headlight illumined steep, storm-swept slopes.

The night was half gone. In the sleepers, the berths had been made up long ago and most of them were occupied. In the club smoker, which had been well filled earlier in the night, only three passengers remained. Presumably,

they were either fond of late hours or were not going through to Montreal, where the train was due early in the morning. One of the three, sprawled out in his leather-padded armchair, his pipe growing cold in his hand, had dropped into snoring slumber. The two others, still wide awake, were seated facing each other across the width of the cozy, brightly lighted car. They could hear the rain pounding on the iron roof and swishing madly against the windows. One of them, long-limbed, broad-shouldered, sun-browned, with a big sapphire in his tie, was placidly smoking a cigar. The other, smartly dressed, dark, slender, extremely handsome, was being served with mineral water by the Negro porter. As he raised a slim white hand and grasped the long glass, tinkling with ice, his cuff slipped back and revealed a gold watch fastened to his wrist with a broad, decorative, blue strap.

At that moment a wizened, gray-haired passenger with the brim of a soft hat pulled down over his eyes, came slowly and with uncertain steps from the narrow entrance passage beside the buffet kitchen. The man with the wrist watch cast the approaching figure an indifferent glance which suddenly developed into a wide-eyed, curious stare. The glass slipped from his fingers and crashed on the floor. The accident seemed to jar the nerves of the old fellow who had just entered. His feeble-looking eyes blinked nervously from behind steel-rimmed spectacles. Apparently, his sight was too poor to see just what had happened, and the crash, close to his feet, had confused him. As he drew back from the scattered pieces of glass, the speeding train gave a lurch that threw him off his balance. He fell forward, his head struck heavily against the arm of a chair and he crumpled unconscious on the floor.

The man with the sapphire pin sprang to his assistance. The snores of the

sleeper in the chair a few feet away ceased abruptly, and, opening his eyes, he looked at the prostrate figure with languid interest. The man with the wrist watch rose slowly to his feet with a bewildered frown.

On his knees on the floor, the man with the sapphire proceeded to examine the silent, motionless form beside him. "Nothing very serious," he announced at last. "His heart's pumping all right. He'll come out of his trance pretty soon. A mean little bump on his head, that's all. Porter, bring some ice."

As he waited for the porter to return, he noticed that one of the unconscious man's hands was scratched and bleeding. Little slivers of broken glass were sticking into the palm. Carefully, he picked them out, and, looking for more, rolled back the sleeve of his patient's undershirt, a sleeve so unusually long that it had come way down to the joint of the wounded hand. A startled expression came into his eyes, and he gave a prolonged stare of amazement at the wrist he had exposed. Completely encircling that wrist was an old, livid scar. For a long moment, it seemed to hold him spellbound. Then, slowly, he covered it with the sleeve as the porter came back with the ice.

Presently, while the ice was being rubbed over his forehead, the patient opened his eyes and looked up bewildered into the sun-browned face bending over him. After a moment, he made an effort to rise. "I'm all right," he whispered, breathing hard. "Dizzy, that's all."

"If you can walk, you'd better go to your berth," advised the man with the sapphire, helping him to his feet. "I'll help you to get back there if you say so."

The other sank into a chair. "No, I get out at the next stop," he explained, speaking with difficulty. "I—I came here thinking I'd just have time for a smoke. Don't have to go back. My

bag's on the platform." After pulling out his handkerchief and wrapping it around the scratches on his hand, he again closed his eyes. "Couple of minutes' rest and I'll be all right," he murmured.

The porter proceeded to pick up pieces of glass from the floor. The snoring passenger fell asleep again. The man with the sapphire and the man with the wrist watch strolled away toward the other end of the car and seated themselves together.

"Did you see that mark on his wrist?" the man with the sapphire inquired softly.

"Yes," was the low-voiced reply. "Strange, wasn't it?"

"You noticed, I suppose, that it ran completely around his wrist. What did you make of it?"

"Nothing. Did you?"

"I wondered," said the man with the sapphire slowly, "if it could be the mark of a handcuff."

From the corners of his eyes, his companion shot a furtive glance at him. "Would a handcuff bite so deep as to leave a scar like that?"

"It's possible. When I was a mine boss in Arizona, I heard of such a case. Two prisoners handcuffed together were on their way to serve their terms. One of them, middle-aged but with no previous criminal record, had been given twenty years for killing his former business partner, whom he accused of robbing and ruining him. The other prisoner, though only about half as old as his companion, was as smooth a swindler as ever drifted into the West. They were about to get into the car that was to take them to prison, when the younger one snatched with his free hand the revolver of the officer in charge of them and knocked him senseless.

"The unarmed driver was forced out and the prisoners escaped with the car. But the alarm had been spread so quickly that there had been no time to

search the officer for the key to the handcuffs. Far out on a hot, waterless desert, the car broke down. Abandoning the car and afraid of meeting some searching party on the road, they set out across trackless country. They carried not a drop of water, and perhaps you can imagine what happened."

The man with the wrist watch scowled. "I think I can," he muttered with a shrug.

"Three days later, they came to a shack, where an old prospector was living alone," the man with the sapphire continued. "They were raving in delirium, and crying out for water. For hours, they had been struggling in frenzy to free themselves from the galling fetters, which had grown as hot as the burning sands. In their insane efforts to drag off the tight bracelets, the steel had worn through the skin and then deep into the flesh as the tortured, inflamed wrists swelled. But in spite of the agony of it, they were continuing like maniacs to break loose.

"The prospector, after giving them water and bringing them back to their senses, managed to file off the handcuffs. Not to have done so, would have been inhuman cruelty. He did not discover until too late to get possession of it, that the younger one had a revolver in his pocket. They forced him to provide them with a burro, a food supply and canteens and to let them go free. But he knew they were marked men—marked for life where the rings of steel had bitten through the swollen, bleeding flesh to the bone."

"And what became of them?" inquired the man with the wrist watch.

"I don't know. They were never caught. I was told that the older one had a wife and a small child, a girl, who not long afterward disappeared from their home. I suppose they joined him somewhere."

The man with the wrist watch, glancing down the car, observed that the vic-

tim of the accident had twisted around in his chair and was peering through a rain-swept window. It seemed as if he must be watching for lights. Surely, he could have hoped to see nothing else in that black night.

"We must be getting pretty close to the old fellow's town," the man with the sapphire remarked.

The whistle of the Royal Limited sent a long-drawn screech into the storm. They heard the hiss of the air brakes.

"I've got to get my bag," the man with the wrist watch announced, rising from his chair. "I get off at the next stop."

His companion looked up at him with a puzzled frown. "I thought I heard you telling the conductor you were ticketed for Montreal."

"I've changed my mind."

Hurriedly, he made his way out of the car. Presently arriving at his berth, he took possession of a big Gladstone bag, a cane, a soft hat and a light summer raincoat. He put on the coat and hat, took a firm grip on the stick, which seemed like a futile appendage on such a night, and ordered the porter to carry the bag to the door. When a few moments later the train stopped at the station he got out, took the bag from the porter, tipped him generously, and, catching sight of the gray-haired victim of the accident, proceeded to follow him through the waiting room and out onto a platform in the rear. Here a stage was waiting. The driver, standing beside it, cast a friendly grin of recognition at the gray-haired arrival. "Right here waiting for you, Mr. Sherwood," he said, taking his bag and helping him into the car.

"Where do you go?" the man with the wrist watch sternly demanded of the driver.

"To Northboro."

"How far is that?"

"Ten miles."

"That's where I'm going."

"Plenty of room inside," the driver informed him.

A sudden gust of wind drove a deluge of rain into the covered platform. The man with the wrist watch, glad to find a refuge from it, stepped hurriedly into the car, where he found a seat among several passengers. The gray-haired man from the club smoker, seated facing him, showed no sign of recognition. His weak-looking eyes were blinking behind his spectacles. His handkerchief was still wound over his wounded hand, where the long sleeve of his undershirt peeped out under the cuff of his overcoat. The strange scar was completely hidden. It was his right hand that had been cut by the broken glass, therefore it was on his right wrist that the scar had been revealed. This was a detail which had not escaped the notice of the cold, steady eyes that were now studying him.

For a few moments, the stage passed through dimly lighted streets. Then the black night closed in around it as it left the town. The man with the wrist watch became absorbed in his thoughts. He pondered the scrap of information that chance had given him about the gray-haired man since leaving the train. So his name was Sherwood, he mused, and he was not a stranger here. The rain beat furiously against the windows. They were traveling rough mountain roads, where sometimes the grades seemed perilously steep. Almost half an hour passed before he came out of his abstraction. Then he discovered that they were again in dimly lighted streets. He raised his left wrist, looked at his watch and frowned. It was very late.

Apparently, they had arrived in Northboro. At short intervals, the car stopped to let passengers off at their homes. The victim of the accident in the club smoker, apparently almost himself again, got out in front of a cozy, isolated little house, raised a big um-

brella, and, lugging his bag, fought his way through wind and rain up the garden path. Before long, the man with the wrist watch was the only remaining passenger.

"Where do you go, brother?" the driver inquired.

"To the best hotel I can find," was the sharp reply.

"That'll be the Pine Tree Tavern. A pretty classy place."

"Then take me there. By the way, there was a man named Sherwood who came up on the train with me. Do you know him?"

"Know him well. He's the proprietor of the biggest store in this village. He goes down to Boston two or three times a year to buy stock. That's where he's come from now, I guess."

"A storekeeper, eh? Is he making a good living at it?"

"You can bet your life he is! Why, stranger, I happen to know he's got twenty thousand dollars out on mortgages right here in Northboro, and they say he's the biggest depositor the Northboro bank's got."

A smile lit the handsome face of the lone passenger. It lingered faintly on his lips until he arrived at his destination.

As the stranger stepped into the lobby of the Pine Tree Tavern, the sleepy, round, red face of Rufus Bagley, the proprietor, who had been sitting up for the stage, appeared behind the office desk.

"Can I get a room and bath here?" the stranger inquired, stepping up to the open register and selecting a pen from the rack.

"Several of 'em," Bagley informed him, and quoted the prices.

"The best you've got," said the stranger, and he wrote on the register, "Archibald Ely Nash, New York."

Bagley, carrying the bag, led him upstairs to the next floor and to a room which the new arrival looked over with

sharply appraising eyes. "This will do," he decided presently. And then, pleasantly aware of the fact that he had not been asked for a payment, he added. "I'm likely to be here for some time."

As soon as he was alone, Archibald Ely Nash proceeded to prepare himself for bed. After a few moments, he paused in his shirt sleeves in front of the bureau and studied himself in the mirror. It always pleased him to note how well he had kept his youth. So far as his appearance was concerned, the years had been good to him. He could have passed as no more than thirty, though he was several years older than that.

Slowly, he unfastened the broad strap of his watch from his left wrist. For a moment, he paused and listened to the storm beating at the windows. Then, as if with sudden bitter recollections, he stared with brooding eyes at the place which the strap had covered. Completely encircling that exposed wrist was a scar—such a scar as he had seen on the right wrist of the unconscious man in the club smoker of the Royal Limited.

CHAPTER II.

BENEATH THE MASK.

THE handsome stranger who had registered at the Pine Tree Tavern the night before as Archibald Ely Nash of New York stepped out from the lobby into the cool, brisk air of a September day. The storm had passed and the sun was shining. Pausing, he cast a keenly observant glance at a group of young women seated on the broad veranda. For an instant, an almost imperceptible smile flickered on his lips, as if he were fully conscious of the fact that every one of them was regarding him with critical and absorbing interest. The season was drawing to an end at Northboro, and most of the young men at the summer colony had gone.

At such a time, when the tavern was

inhabited mostly by mothers and their daughters and a few old fellows no longer hampered by business ties, the arrival of Archibald Ely Nash, who to feminine eyes was as alluring as a movie hero, had naturally produced a mild sensation. There was a general impression that he must be a person of social position and of means. Not only his appearance and his manner but even his name was impressive. It is surprising what a difference it makes when a man uses all three of his names, if he happens to have that number, instead of being content with just two and a middle initial.

Archibald Ely Nash had discovered that Shakespeare was wrong when he scoffingly asked, "What's in a name?" and that there could be magic in names sometimes. And, at present, he needed all the magic he could conjure to offset the grim fact, known only to himself, that the five-dollar bill nesting in a pocket of his vest was all the money he had in the world.

For a time, he had felt that fortune might have something in store for him in New York, but his adventures there had been unfortunate, particularly with the police, and he had decided that Canada offered him more safety. Then on the Royal Limited, he had caught sight of a face that had startled him. He had stared at it doubtfully. If it was the face of a man who had suddenly risen out of his memory, it had changed so much as to make recognition uncertain. And then he saw the strange scar on the man's wrist. After that, he no longer doubted.

As he stood lingering on the veranda of the Pine Tree Tavern, he betrayed not the least indication of his straitened circumstances. His natty blue suit, immaculate white spats over brand-new shoes, pearl-gray hat of expensive velour with its brim turned down rakishly over his left eye, fine linen, modish tie and a yellow Malacca cane with an am-

ber crook were certainly not the accessories of destitution. The young women in the porch chairs stared at him fascinated. This gorgeous stranger with his slender, beautifully proportioned figure, finely modeled features, clear, white skin and carefully groomed dark hair was the most pleasing sight that had appeared before their eyes all that summer.

But as befitted a man with only five dollars to his name and a growing hotel bill, he turned his back upon them presently and passed on down the veranda steps and along the path that led to the tree-lined main street of the village. His handsome face showed not a care. Desperate circumstances he had faced before many a time. Behind him was an adventurous career that had been long enough to teach him many ways of wriggling out of trouble. It would have taken something a good deal more serious than mere shortage of money to disturb the magnificent poise of Archibald Ely Nash.

A short walk brought him into the business district of the village. Here were a few small stores, a post office and a bank. Northboro, tucked in a fold of the hills, was a thriving little place. Farmers came in from all over the township to buy their supplies, and in summer the high, dry air and the beauty of near-by mountains filled the tavern with prosperous visitors. Across the street from the bank the big show windows of a two-story frame building exhibited a wide variety of goods. Over the doorway was a conspicuous sign, "Sherwood's General Store." Archibald Ely Nash stopped in front of the sign and looked in through the windows. It was a slack hour, and the place seemed to be deserted. Jauntily swinging his cane, he stepped inside.

For a moment, he believed he was alone, and looking about he studied the place with keen interest. Here, crowded into one big room, it seemed as if there

must be everything a customer could possibly want, everything from millinery to farm tools. Presently, a soft voice broke the silence. "Is there something I can show you?" A girl had come into view from behind stacks of dry goods and was addressing him from one of the counters. She was attractive enough to draw his most engaging smile as he stepped over to her. On closer observation, he thought he detected in her comely face a faint resemblance to the man he had come to see.

"Something tells me you are Seth Sherwood's daughter," he remarked.

His familiar advances met with no encouragement. "Then something tells you the truth," she returned brusquely.

But he had stirred her curiosity, and she was studying him with sharp interest. He was of a type that had never attracted her. For her years, she was a keen judge of character, and she decided there was something about this stranger that she did not like. It seemed to her that that handsome, beguiling face was like a mask for something evil and menacing. For a moment, his cold gray eyes held her spellbound. Never before had she seen a man with eyes so utterly lacking in human feeling. They were as soulless as the eyes of a cat.

With sudden resentment of her unfriendly attitude, his manner stiffened. "I came here to see your father," he announced grimly.

The girl pointed to an open door in the rear. "You'll find him back there in the office."

The caller made his way into the little rear room, and, finding Seth Sherwood alone there at his desk, closed the door. The storekeeper, who, to judge from the closeness with which he had been holding his spectacled eyes to the open pages of a ledger, was very near-sighted, swung around in his swivel chair and stared up at the intruder reproachfully. "Who told you to close that door?" he demanded.

He seemed to be very little the worse because of the accident of the night before. There was a slight bruise on his forehead, and strips of court-plaster covered the few slight cuts on his right hand.

"So you don't remember me?" said the caller with a smile. "The last time we saw each other until last night we were a good two thousand miles from here. That was twelve years ago."

The storekeeper's eyes widened. "You've made a mistake," he gasped. "I never saw you before. I was never two thousand miles from here in my life."

"You can't fool me, Sherwin," the dapper visitor persisted. "You've changed your name a trifle and you've grown pretty old, but you're the same bird all right." The visitor drew nearer, and his voice sank to a whisper. "We separated on the edge of a desert. We were hunted men, you and I. For you, twenty years in prison was waiting. I've made no mistake about you. Last night in the club car of the train, I saw plainly the mark of the nippers on your wrist."

For several tense seconds, the storekeeper did not speak. Suddenly, he rose from his chair, stepped close to his visitor, and peered into his face with a long, searching look. "Dupree!" he muttered under his breath. "Joe Dupree!"

"Right. But while I am in Northboro my name is Nash."

There was a prolonged silence while Seth Sherwood stood staring at his visitor dubiously. The years rolled back. With the eyes of his imagination, the gray-haired man saw again the glaring desert sands and the blistering sun flaring red in a brazen sky. Once more, he felt fettering steel burning into his swollen flesh. He shuddered as he tried to draw his thoughts away from a chapter of his life he had been trying for twelve years to forget. "I never

expected to see you again, Joe," he said at last.

The visitor's gaze wandered around the little office. "I hear the world's been pretty good to you since we left each other twelve years ago," he said sullenly.

"I don't know that it has," the storekeeper returned with a touch of bitterness. "My wife died the year after we came here. I don't get much out of life except worry. For all those twelve years, I've been living in fear, Dupree—fear!"

"I never let fear bother me," said the visitor with a shrug. "If I were as well fixed as you are, Sherwin, I'd never worry about anything at all. But luck don't seem to like me. Through all those years, I've been stepping out of one trouble into another. In fact I'm in trouble right now."

"What kind of trouble this time, Joe?"

"Oh, nothing very serious. Broke, that's all. I thought that perhaps you could oblige me with a loan."

The storekeeper screwed up his wizened face as if in sudden pain. "I'm pretty hard up myself, Joe," he parried after a moment of deep thought. "I have to watch the pennies pretty close to make both ends meet. How much do you want?"

"A thousand dollars," was the prompt reply.

"A thousand dollars!" Seth Sherwood cried. "Why, Joe, how could I ever raise a thousand dollars, a poor country storekeeper like me?"

"Your check would be good for that much at any time across the street at the bank," Archibald Ely Nash insisted. "I hear this store of yours is a gold mine and that you own mortgages all over the village. I've learned a good deal about your affairs since I drifted into Northboro."

"You've been hearing a lot of fool gossip," Sherwood protested. "To let

you have a thousand dollars would start me on the road to bankruptcy."

Joe Dupree, alias Archibald Ely Nash, gazed reflectively at the amber crook of his cane. "Oh, well," he sighed after a moment. "I suppose I'll have to raise the ducats somewhere else." And, moving slowly toward the door, he added: "I guess I'll go out and have a chat with your daughter. Maybe she'll be interested to hear me talk about the old times in the West."

"Wait!" cried the storekeeper, his voice shrill with excitement. "You're not going to mention that old trouble of mine to Lorna?"

"Lorna?" queried Nash. "Is that your daughter's name? You mean she doesn't know?"

"She was too young to know. She was only eight years old at the time of the trouble. She's never found out about it."

Nash, who had been a little doubtful on that point, pondered the information silently. He had heard at the tavern that Seth Sherwood, though an influential citizen of the village, was generally regarded as a misery skinflint with a heart for nobody in the world but his daughter. Presently, he turned away from the door and fastened on the storekeeper a look that made the dried-up old man tremble. The evil that lurked beneath the handsome, alluring mask was revealing itself clearly now. The cold gray eyes of Joe Dupree were merciless. "Do I get the thousand, Seth Sherwood?" he inquired softly. "Or do you want me to talk to your daughter about the old days and then send the tip out to a certain place in the West that a runaway prisoner wanted there to serve a twenty-year sentence for homicide is one of the leading citizens of Northboro?"

The old man, feeling himself becoming enmeshed in that dreadful, torturing thing, the net of a blackmailer, was desperately trying to save himself. He

was almost beaten, but there was still a little fight left in him. "You're a wanted man yourself," he cried. "If they take me back there you go, too."

"I don't think so," the other returned calmly. "I'm foot-loose. I could drop out of sight pretty quick. It wouldn't be from Northboro that I'd send the tip out there. I'd wait until I was in a safer place. But you can't drop out of sight, Seth Sherwood—not unless you give up your home and your daughter and your business."

The storekeeper pressed a quivering hand to his perspiring forehead. He realized at last that he was trapped, helpless. To save himself, he would have been willing to part with a good deal more than a thousand dollars, but he knew what blackmail meant. Neither a thousand dollars nor twice that much was going to get him out of the net. This man would come again and again, always asking for more, and eventually would ruin him. "I—I'll try to raise the money for you, Joe," he stammered at last.

"When do I get it?" the visitor demanded sharply.

"I can't just say. In a few days perhaps. It's going to be hard work raising it."

"I want it now. Go over to the bank and draw it. I'll wait here."

"But I haven't got that much there," the storekeeper protested. "You've got to give me time."

"Not an hour. And the bank will be closing pretty soon. Get a move on yourself, Sherwood."

Archibald Ely Nash had felt almost certain that Seth Sherwood's bank account was more than enough to meet his demand, and that he was not mistaken, became evident when the storekeeper, realizing the futility of further protests, picked up a check book from his desk and went out of the office. A moment later, as he passed through the store, Lorna Sherwood was startled by the

haunted look in his eyes and his agitated manner.

"Why, father, what's the matter?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing—nothing at all, Lorna," he answered hoarsely. "Everything's all right."

But Lorna knew that everything was not all right, and she was convinced that the handsome stranger in the office had brought bad news. Deeply puzzled, she looked out through one of the show windows and watched her father cross the street and enter the bank. Soon he was back, hurrying past her without a word and returning to his office, where immediately he closed the door. It was very seldom the office door was closed, and she felt sure that something of a particularly secretive nature must be going on there. A few minutes passed. Then the stranger came out alone. He was swinging his cane jauntily and he was smiling. It was strange, she mused, that a bearer of bad news should look so self-satisfied and cheerful.

CHAPTER III.

A POOR MAN AND HEIRESS.

LATE in the afternoon of the following day, Archibald Ely Nash, no longer facing destitution but with a thousand dollars added to the five-dollar bill which had been the extent of his financial resources twenty-four hours earlier, was sunning himself on the veranda of the Pine Tree Tavern, when a particularly smart runabout carrying a young man and a girl drew up at the end of the lawn.

The car could be easily recognized as one of the most expensive makes in the market, and this evidence of wealth stirred Nash's interest at once. The young couple stepped out and made their way up to the hotel. The girl was a tall, slender, stylish blonde, her companion a rugged, athletic type, square-jawed, rough-featured. As they came

up the steps, the girl caught sight of Nash, and, observing that he was watching her admiringly and that he was the handsomest man she had seen all summer, she gave him a smile, which he was quick to return.

As she and her companion entered the hotel, Nash rose from his chair and followed them. Ignoring the office, where on the counter the register lay open for new arrivals, the couple passed on through the lobby and into the tea room. The entrancing smile the girl had bestowed upon him had quickened Nash's interest. From behind the office desk appeared the round, red face of Rufus Bagley, the tavern's proprietor, and Nash strolled over to him in quest of information.

"Do you happen to know who the girl is who passed through here just now?" he inquired.

"That's Andrew J. Marland's daughter," Bagley informed him.

"Marland?" The name was unfamiliar to Nash.

"You never heard of Andrew J. Marland?" said Bagley with a look of surprise. "Why, he's the woolen king. Owns a whole manufacturing town down near Boston. He was born up here in Northboro in the same house where he spends his summers now. You must have noticed the place. Big white house up on the hill half a mile east of here. A good many acres of private estate with a brick-and-cement wall running round them. He's fixed the old house over considerably since he made his pile, and he's added a couple of wings to it. I understand the daughter finds Northboro too slow for her, but she can't get the old man to go anywhere else."

"And the man who's with her?" Nash persisted. "Not her husband, is he?"

Bagley grinned. "Not so lucky. He's only the man who wants to be her husband. They're supposed to be engaged, but that don't mean much to Jane Mar-

land. She's been engaged two or three times before. 'Lefty' Burke won't be sure of her till they're married, which isn't liable to happen, the old man being dead set against it. He's so sore he won't even let Lefty come to the house. That's why they drift in here for tea every day or two."

Turning his eyes to the doorway of the tea room through which he caught a glimpse of the young couple, who had seated themselves at one of the tables, Nash began to ruminate deeply over what he had just learned.

"Nice car out there," he remarked after a moment. "That Burke's?"

"Lefty's? Gosh, no! That's Jane Marland's. Lefty couldn't afford a car like that. He had to scratch around pretty lively to raise the cash for a secondhand flivver. I ain't saying he isn't all right, but he's not in the Marland class. Old Marland's ambitious for his daughter; wants her to marry somebody high up in the world. Lefty came from poor folks, and he's had a hard row to hoe. Nice enough young fellow; lots of push to him. Went to college. Pitched for the college team. That's where he got his name. A left-handed twirler. Between you and me, I don't believe Jane Marland cares much about him, but attractive young men happened to be scarce around here this summer and Lefty made the best of his opportunities."

"And what does this bird do for a living?" said Nash.

"Oh, he's got a little office up the road. Sells village lots, farms and insurance—or tries to. He's got a cheap room here at the tavern."

Stroking his chin with his soft, manicured fingers, Nash gave an ironic smile. "It would be quite a rise in the world for this Lefty Burke if he married Jane Marland, eh? Especially when the old man died. How many millions will she get?"

"Quite a number," returned Bagley

vaguely. "She's the only child and her mother's dead."

Suddenly, in Nash's agile mind, ambition began to stir as never before. Jane Marland, heiress to millions, had smiled at him. At least, to that extent he had attracted her. He was fully aware of his own charms. He knew the flutter of excitement he had stirred among the girls at the tavern. They were calling him Adonis, as he had learned from overhearing scraps of conversation not intended for his ears, and a library dictionary had informed him that Adonis was a youth so beautiful and alluring that the goddesses fought over him.

"It would be an easy game," he mused to himself. "A game that would be safe, win or lose. And something tells me I wouldn't lose."

But a disturbing thought brought a little pucker into his forehead. There would be Andrew J. Marland to be reckoned with. If the old man objected so strenuously to Lefty Burke, what would he do if he discovered the unknown, mysterious Archibald Ely Nash suing for his daughter's hand? Here was a serious difficulty indeed; yet there might be some way of overcoming it. With this perplexing problem in his resourceful mind, he began to stroll slowly up and down the lobby, his head bowed in thought. He was still there when half an hour later Jane Marland and Lefty Burke came out of the tea room. The girl noticed Nash at once, and again she smiled at him, even more graciously than before. The interchange of flirtatious glances between the two was so obvious that it failed to escape Burke's attention. His eyes flashed wrathfully.

"See here, Jane," he growled loudly enough for Nash to overhear, "I noticed what passed between you and that cheap Romeo out on the veranda. And now you're at it again. Haven't you any sense at all? You don't know anything

about the fellow. He may be a bad one."

"Jealous, Lefty?" she teased.

Burke was too angry to trust his voice. He turned a truculent glare to the handsome stranger, and with the girl beside him passed on. The incident left Nash unruffled. With a self-satisfied smile, he turned to a window and watched the pair get into the runabout and drive away.

"What a chance!" he mused. "Millions of dollars waiting for the guy that gets that girl. And nobody in the way except that poor stiff, Lefty Burke."

But for the moment he had forgotten Andrew J. Marland.

"I'll play the game," he decided. "I've got a strong hunch that some day Jane Marland is going to become Mrs. Archibald Ely Nash."

CHAPTER IV.

RIVALS.

BEING in no need of money at present, Nash remained away from the victim who had so reluctantly parted with a thousand dollars. But now and then, he cast a reflective eye on the general store across the way from the bank. He felt a sense of ownership in the place. Its usually brisk business pleased him. He was confident that he could go in there and collect the profits whenever he might choose. Once he spoke to Lorna Sherwood on the street, and she cut him dead. The incident made him wonder whether she had discovered what he had done to her father. It seemed improbable that she knew, but she had made her dislike for Nash very plain.

That, however, did not worry him in the least. Lorna Sherwood occupied only a small place in his thoughts. There was only one girl in Northboro he was thinking much about at present. That was Jane Marland. He strolled out to the hill east of the village and took a

look at the Marland house and its well-kept acres. The idea that he himself might some time own or at least share in that fine estate gave him a thrill. But again and again, Andrew J. Marland had come into his mind as a formidable obstacle to his ambition. Marland had been pointed out to him on the street, and Nash had observed with a good deal of satisfaction that the woolen king, a grim, sharp-eyed man, was getting old and feeble. What a stroke of fortune his death, if it did not come too late, would be to the crooked adventurer who was after his daughter.

On the fickle, susceptible Jane Marland, the Adonis of the tavern had made on their first sight of each other even more of an impression than he suspected. She was fond of Lefty and had been taking her engagement to him rather seriously. In fact, her father's stern opposition to the match had helped Burke's cause instead of hurting it, for Jane was a girl who chafed under restraint, and she might marry Lefty just to show that she was her own boss, if for no other reason. But the idea of carrying on a flirtation with the handsome stranger at the tavern was appealing and stirred all her romantic impulses. She decided to give him an opportunity of making her acquaintance, and, two days after the incident that had aroused Lefty's jealousy, she went to the tavern alone, choosing a time when usually Lefty was away at business.

It was there in the spacious lounge room that Nash discovered her. She was seated at the big center table looking over the magazines. As he came strolling slowly toward her, she looked up at him and smiled charmingly.

"I feel as if we were already old friends," said Nash with cool self-assurance. "You remember perhaps that we have seen each other before, though not under such agreeable circumstances."

"But I don't even know your name," she protested.

He proceeded to introduce himself. "I have been hoping for this opportunity," he told her softly, "but I was afraid I was never going to find it. Now that it has come, it seems too good to be true."

Jane Marland laughed at him. "It seems to me you are a little sudden," she said. "Do you say such nice things to every girl you meet for the first time?"

"You may not believe it, but girls have seldom interested me," he answered solemnly. "Until I saw you here the other day, I was heart free and glad of it. But the whole world has changed for me since then."

"Really?" she said with a twinkle of amusement in her eyes. "How nice of you to say so! I don't suppose you mean a word of it, but it's a relief to find in this dull town a man who knows how to talk."

"It is dull, isn't it?" he admitted. "I don't know why I came here. I was going to get out after the first day. And then I saw you."

"Oh! So you've been staying on just on my account?"

"For no other reason."

Jane Marland leaned back in her chair and laughed softly. The Adonis of the tavern was surpassing all her expectations of him. But though she seemed to be merely amused by him, she would have been glad to discover that she could take his words seriously. She could not recall that she had ever met quite such a charming man. If she should find he was really in earnest in his apparent devotion, she was beginning to feel already that Lefty Burke would have a formidable rival for her affections.

"It's tea time, isn't it?" he remarked a few minutes later. "Suppose we go and see what the tavern has to offer."

They went into the tea room and seated themselves at one of the little tables. They had been there only a short time when Lefty Burke appeared in the lobby and looked in at them. Lefty

was a picture of suppressed fury. He could hardly restrain himself. He had seen enough to know that the handsome stranger was making a strong impression upon Jane Marland. But he did not go into the tea room, and, presently, finding the hotel unendurable under the circumstances, he went out and made his way to his office. There, alone with bitter thoughts, he remained for an hour.

"I guess it's about time I had an interview with that bird," he decided at last, and, seething with anger, he returned to the tavern. Jane Marland had gone, and out on the veranda Nash was sitting alone. Lefty stepped up to him with menace in his eyes.

"Nash, I want you to keep away from Miss Marland," he announced abruptly. "You're a stranger here, she knows nothing about you, you've never even been introduced to her as far as I can learn. You had an unholy nerve to even speak to her. If she wasn't just a spoiled child, she wouldn't have had anything to do with you."

Nash rose to his feet. "I don't think I need any advice from you," he said scornfully. "It seems to me you're acting like a fool. Miss Marland is old enough to take care of herself without your interference."

"Are you going to keep away from her or not?" Lefty persisted.

"Emphatically not, if she wants to see me."

"I happen to be engaged to marry Miss Marland," Lefty explained.

"Then I'm sorry for her," said Nash with a shrug.

Suddenly losing control of himself, Lefty swung a fist at him savagely. Staggering back from a heavy blow on the jaw, Archibald Ely Nash saw stars. He barely saved himself from falling. Regaining his balance, he stood staring at Lefty with venomous hatred. "It's lucky for you I'm not packing a gun," he hissed between his teeth.

"So you're a gun fighter, eh," Lefty growled at him. "I knew you were some kind of a crook. It shows all over you. I guess I'll have to watch out for myself, or I'll feel a knife in my back some dark night."

Turning away, he left Nash to nurse his hate. And Nash was a man whose hate was dangerous. There was an evil, inhuman glare in his eyes now that would have been terrible to see.

CHAPTER V.

STRUCK DOWN IN THE DARK.

WHEN at last Nash regained his composure, he began to realize that he was in a very awkward situation. Jane Marland had promised to call on the afternoon of the next day to take him out in her car and show him some of the mountain scenery. If Burke should see them together again, there would almost certainly be more trouble, perhaps another blow on the jaw. Nash knew that in a fist fight he would not have the slightest chance against Lefty, and he dreaded another encounter with him. How was he going to continue his attentions to Jane and at the same time avoid Burke's vengeance? It was a problem for which he could find no immediate solution. However, he was quite certain he was not going to surrender to Burke's demand. He fully intended to see the heiress to Marland's millions whenever the opportunity might offer itself.

But Fate was bringing an answer to his problem more quickly than he could have imagined. Fate was on the telegraph wire the next morning sending a message to Marland. The woolen king learned that business made his presence at a certain directors' meeting in San Francisco of pressing necessity. To get there in time, he would have to leave Northboro early the following morning. To provide himself with money for the trip, Marland went

to the bank soon after receiving the message. He drew out fifteen hundred dollars in fifty-dollar bills fresh from the treasury. He was slipping the money into a pocketbook as he came out of the bank.

At that moment, Nash happened to pass by. He noticed Marland on the bank's step with the money in his hands. He was able to see that it was quite a sizable wad of large denominations. More than once in his varied career, such a display of money had tempted Nash to theft, but there was no such temptation now when without any risk he could provide for all his needs merely by calling on Seth Sherwood. But Marland was always of interest to him, and he watched the old man cross the street and enter Sherwood's store. Then Nash continued on his way to the tavern.

When Marland came into the store, he found Lorna Sherwood ready to wait upon him. "You carry most everything here, don't you?" he said. "I want a small traveling bag that's easy to carry. The only small ones I've got are in my house in Boston, and I've got to start for the West coast first thing in the morning."

Presently, Lorna found a bag that satisfied him, and, as he never cared to run accounts in the local stores, he offered one of his new fifty-dollar bills in payment. "Sorry, but it's the smallest I've got," he explained. "A nice fresh one. Just drew it out of the bank. Knew they wouldn't be open over there at the hour I've got to leave in the morning."

Lorna slipped the bill into the cash register, and counted out the change, and Marland, carrying his new bag, returned to his home on the hill.

In the middle of the afternoon, his daughter drove in her smart runabout to the tavern, where she found Nash waiting for her. His handsome face was unmarked by the blow Lefty had

given him the day before, and it was not until they were out of the village and on a road where the mountains stretched out before them in a magnificent panorama that he made any mention of her indignant fiancé's call upon him.

"Your friend Burke seems to think I have no right to your acquaintance," he informed her. "He came to see me yesterday and spoke his mind rather freely."

"What!" she exclaimed. "He came to see you about me? Why, he must be crazy!"

"He was. One of the craziest men I ever saw. He told me he was engaged to marry you, and that I, being a stranger not entirely above suspicion, must have nothing more to do with you."

"What business is it of his?" she cried angrily. "I thought he had more sense. I'll have to have a talk with Lefty about this. He's got to understand that I'm my own boss."

"So you're really engaged to marry that man?" Nash sighed dismally.

"Oh, I suppose so," she returned. "In spite of his faults, I'm fond of Lefty."

For Nash, the scenery had no interest. He almost ignored it, so busy were his thoughts with the problem of how to get rid of Lefty Burke. And then there was that other problem presented by Marland. Not only Burke, but the old man, too, stood in his way of winning this girl. To steal her from Burke, he felt might not be so difficult, but what would be the use of winning a girl whose father might disinherit her or tie up her money so that her husband would never be able to lay hands on a dollar of it?

"Dad starts for California to-morrow morning," she informed him when at last they had exhausted the subject of Burke's interference.

"I hope that doesn't mean you are going back to Boston," he said anxiously.

"No, I'll stay here. It's going to be a hurried trip, and he'll be back in a

very short while. We always keep the Northboro house open till the snow begins to fly."

Nash, who for a moment had felt that his chance of winning the Marland millions was slipping away from him, heaved a sigh of relief.

"When he's gone, I'll invite you to the house," she said. "If Lefty objects, we'll just tell him to go and jump on himself."

"He's more likely to jump on me," Nash remarked with a frown.

"Well, you have as much right there as he has," she returned with a toss of her head. "He's been forbidden to come, and, as dad sits up until all hours of the night, poor Lefty has to stay away."

"So your father is a night owl," muttered Nash thoughtfully.

"Always has been. He never goes to bed until midnight no matter how early he gets up."

Nash tucked this scrap of information away in his mind as something that might be worth remembering, and, presently, his thoughts returned to his perplexing problems. During the remainder of the ride, he was unusually silent; a vague idea had taken possession of him and was slowly growing clearer and developing. It was an idea so sinister and desperate that it frightened him at first, but he refused to let it alone. By the time they returned to the tavern, he had considered it so carefully in every detail and had found it so flawless that his fear of it was gone, and he was convinced that he had found a way out of his difficulties.

Half an hour after parting from Jane Marland, he stepped into the public phone booth in the drug store and called the office of Lefty Burke. The drug-store booth was used so frequently and by so many strangers on their way through the village that he knew the call would never be traced to himself. It was Burke who answered him. The

young real-estate dealer when in his office was usually alone, for he had neither stenographer nor clerk and few visitors.

"My name is Johnson," said Nash, disguising his voice. "I want to buy a farm, and I understand you've got some for sale. But I can't get over to see you until nine o'clock to-night. Can you meet me at that time at your office? It may be too late to see the properties, but I can look over your lists and maps, and maybe I can get a pretty good idea from you of what you've got to offer."

Lefty, who had scarcely ever kept his little office open so late as nine o'clock, was under the impression that the stranger, Johnson, was calling from some distant town. "I'll be there," he agreed, elated at the prospect of making a sale.

At a few minutes before nine, Lefty strolled down the road to the isolated little shanty where he conducted his business. It was late for Northboro, and the streets were deserted. The office was dark and silent. He pulled out his key and opened the door. He was groping for the light switch, when there was a sudden stir in the darkness and a blow from something blunt and heavy knocked him senseless.

When at last he returned to consciousness, he discovered that his hands and feet were securely bound and there was a gag in his mouth. He could not even move his arms, which were fastened tightly to his sides with ropes wound around his body. His limbs were numb, almost without feeling, so tight were his bonds. The office was pitch dark, and there was not a sound. He was too weak and dazed even to attempt to free himself.

After what seemed like a long time, he heard the door open, and somebody came in. He caught glimpses of the indistinct figure of a man, who presently bent over him. The man's face seemed to be masked, but it was so dark that to Lefty, he was no more than a shadow. Suddenly, he caught the nauseating odor

of chloroform. A cloth saturated with the drug was being pressed to his nose, and, in a few moments, he slipped again into unconsciousness.

Then, once more, his senses returned. The night had not passed, for there was not even a glimmer of light, but he had no idea of the hour. To his surprise, he discovered that he was free. The gag and the ropes had been removed. Dizzily, he staggered up to his feet. After a moment, he found the electric button, and flooded the place with light. He was alone, and the ropes and the gag had disappeared completely. Not the slightest evidence remained of what had happened to him. The windows were closed and locked. There was no sign of burglary. The lock of the door, however, was a simple one, and he knew that anybody with experience at that sort of thing could have picked it easily.

If it were not for a splitting headache and the lingering odor of chloroform, he would almost have believed the whole affair had been only a dream. It was hard to convince himself even now that it had really happened, it was so inexplicable, so preposterous. When presently he discovered that neither his watch nor his money had been taken and that the papers on his desk had not been disturbed, his perplexity grew. It seemed as if the attack upon him must have been the act of a maniac.

"I guess I'd better keep my mouth shut about this," he decided, "or the whole village will be laughing at me. They'll say I dreamed it. I haven't got a darned thing to prove it except a bump on my head, which may be gone by morning."

He looked at his watch. It was almost one o'clock. He turned out the light, and, finding his key in the pocket where he had placed it after letting himself in, locked the place up. With his thoughts in wild confusion, he made his way back to the Pine Tree Tavern. Entering the lobby, he saw Rufus Bagley drowsing in the office as he waited

for the arrival of the stage from the railroad.

"You're keeping pretty bad hours," Rufus observed sleepily as he opened one eye at Lefty.

"It looks that way, don't it?" Lefty returned, and passed on to the stairs and up to his room. He was so dizzy that he could scarcely pull off his clothes, but, at last after much effort, he got into his pajamas and crept into bed.

CHAPTER VI.

A LEFT-HANDED MURDER.

THOUGH the night was more than half gone when Lefty Burke fell asleep in his room in the tavern after the inexplicable attack upon him in his office, a light was still shining in the home of Andrew J. Marland. It was the little lamp on the desk in the library. At that desk, Marland had been sitting all through the evening, and now, in the early hours of the morning, he was still there. And there he remained while the night dragged on into gray dawn. The sun rose, but he did not stir, and the lamp was still burning:

At last a housemaid, intent on setting the house in order for the day, stepped into the room, and, startled at she caught sight of the motionless figure at the desk, stopped abruptly just inside the door. "Mr. Marland?" she called. "Are you awake?"

There was no answer. The woolen king had fallen into a sleep from which no human voice was ever going to rouse him. Timidly, the maid drew nearer. Hours ago, Marland had been writing business letters, but now his pen had rolled to the floor, and the hand that had been guiding it lay white and still on a sheet of paper, which was slightly spattered with ink. The desk stood close against both walls of a corner of the room. Near it was a wide-open window, which looked out upon neatly kept lawns and gardens in the rear of the

house. The weather was warm for so late in the season in the mountains, and the maid knew that Marland had opened the window himself early in the evening. The back of his chair almost touched a curtain of a wide doorway which gave a view of an adjoining room, where there was another open window. The maid had discovered that Marland was dead, but that he had been murdered did not occur to her until presently she caught sight of the long hilt of a knife sticking out of his back. That discovery was too much for her nerves, and she screamed and ran away.

Quickly, the news of the tragedy spread over the village. Deputy Sheriff Jim Wade heard it just after his breakfast and at once telephoned to his chief, Sheriff Luther Hawley, in his office in Millsburg, the county seat, twenty miles away. He knew Hawley would be coming over just as fast as he could drive his car over bad roads. The deputy got to the Marland house in less than half an hour after the maid's gruesome discovery. He had not been there many moments before he found a clew that startled him. He was quite sure it would startle his chief, too.

Wade had found out everything that servants seemed able to tell, when the sheriff, a big, long-limbed, powerful-looking man with an air of authority, made his way past the little crowd of villagers and farmers who, drawn there by curiosity, had gathered in front of the house. Hawley came hurrying up the steps, and at the door found his deputy waiting for him.

"Tell me all you know, Jim!" the sheriff demanded. "I was so anxious to beat it over here quick that I couldn't wait to get the details from you on the phone."

Wade led his chief into the room where Marland's body remained in the chair at the desk just as the maid had found it. The little lamp was still burning; the window was still wide open;

the pen was still lying at the dead man's feet. Apparently, nothing had been disturbed since the finding of the body.

"I haven't had a chance to talk with Miss Marland yet," said Wade, "but I found out from the butler that, just before she went to bed last night, her father was sitting here writing and that he said good night to her. That was about ten o'clock. It was about eight this morning when the maid found him. Everything's just the way it was then. I've got a couple of men outside keeping folks away from some footprints. Lucky I got here quick enough to save those tracks from being walked over."

"Footprints, eh?" exclaimed Hawley, raising his shaggy eyebrows.

"Shoe prints, to be exact," said Wade. "Step over there to that window and see for yourself."

The sheriff went to the open window near the desk and looked out. Showing clearly in the moist earth of a flower bed, which extended along the wall of the house, were the prints of rubber soles with fancy designs. The window was not too far above the ground for a man outside to climb in without a great deal of effort. But there was no indication here that a man had climbed in—only that he had climbed out.

"Those prints all lead one way, Jim," the sheriff observed; "away from the window. How did the cuss get in?"

"Through the open window in the next room, chief," replied Wade. "The same kind of shoe prints are down below it in that garden, only they lead to the house. From outside, the man could see Marland at the desk, but he didn't want to be seen himself, so he went to that other window, sneaked through that room without a sound on his rubber soles, and, the instant he stepped from behind the door curtain, he was near enough to Marland's back to strike the blow."

Luther Hawley stroked his square chin thoughtfully. "Find any shoe

prints on the floor of that next room?" he asked.

"Only some little spots of earth. A rug covers most of that floor. He didn't track any earth into this room because, by the time he got here, the rug had wiped it off of his shoes."

Slowly, the sheriff turned to look around the room. Marland's library was not impressive. Books covered only a small part of the wall space. The room was small and simply furnished. Against the bright sunshine pouring in through the open window, the light of the little lamp looked wan and feeble. "I'm afraid we're a long way from finding out who did this job, Jim," he remarked gloomily.

"I've got a feeling that we're a whole lot nearer to it than you think, chief," his deputy returned. "We can have plaster casts of those shoe prints, and there's evidence that the man was left-handed. Take a look at that hilt sticking out of Marland's back, and you'll see what I mean. The blade's driven in two inches to the left of his spine and down near his heart. The hilt slants out toward the left. And close against the left side of the chair is the wall. A right-handed man would have struck on the other side of the spine and the hilt would have a slant toward the right."

"Toward the right and also upward," Hawley amended.

"Not necessarily," said Wade. "Marland was probably leaning far forward over his work. In that case a killer, instead of reaching far over the tall back of the chair and striking from above, would have found it easier to bend his knees a little and strike around the back of the chair from his hip. In that case, the hilt would be almost horizontal with the floor, just as it is now. It was certainly a left-handed blow, chief. You can't reason that fact away."

Sheriff Hawley nodded his approval. "You can step to the head of the class, Jim. You're a bright young fella."

The deputy had been holding back a surprise to reveal at some moment when it would be most effective. He felt that that moment had now arrived. "And I can show you something else to prove that the killer was left-handed," he announced, narrowing his eyes at Hawley. "Something that's going to give you a jolt, chief."

As Hawley was staring at him with a puzzled frown, Wade produced a small pocket memorandum book with the name "Samuel E. Burke" printed in gilt letters on its morocco cover. "That's Lefty's," he whispered. "I found it lying on the floor up against this open window."

"Lefty Burke!" exclaimed Hawley with a start. "Oh, no, Jim! I can't believe he's guilty of this job."

"I'm not accusing him—not yet," said Wade. "But that book is his all right. It's full of scribbled memoranda, and I recognized the handwriting. Maybe he'll be able to offer some explanation plausible enough to make things look less black for him, but all the same I think we'd better take a look at Lefty's shoes. It's certainly strange that that book should be found here under that window only a few steps from the body, when Marland, as everybody around here knows, has forbidden him the house."

"It would take considerable to make me believe Lefty Burke did this," the sheriff declared, shaking his head sadly. "It was probably the work of a sneak thief, Jim."

Wade gave a nod of assent. "It certainly was, chief, for Marland has been robbed."

"Of what?" the sheriff demanded with a little upward jerk of his head.

"Money. Ferguson, the cashier of the bank, came around here cross lots a little while ago from his home on the other side of the hill. He thought I'd be interested to learn that Marland drew fifteen hundred dollars from the bank

yesterday. There isn't any safe in this house. Marland always kept his money in his pocketbook in an inside pocket of his coat. That pocketbook has disappeared. It's hard to believe Lefty would commit murder merely to steal fifteen hundred dollars, but, chief, I've got to remind you that Marland's death may bring Burke's reach nearer fifteen millions than fifteen hundreds. Remember he's engaged to Marland's daughter, and the old man has threatened that, if she married him, he'd cut her off without a cent. He can't cut her off now. The millions are already hers. She can marry Lefty Burke whenever she wants to."

Hawley gave a shrug of his heavy shoulders. "Jim, I hope you're not hinting that Jane Marland might have had something to do with this job."

"Not hinting anything against anybody," his deputy assured him bluntly. "Just stating facts, that's all."

"Would a man aiming at millions waste time looking for a pocketbook?" said Hawley.

"He might," Wade insisted, "if he was in desperate need of a little money. It's common talk that Lefty's up against it hard, that he's in debt, that sometimes he can't even pay his hotel bill."

Though Luther Hawley knew most of the people of Northboro, he lived too far away to hear much of the latest gossip about their private affairs, and this information seemed to surprise him. "I didn't know that," he muttered gravely. And after a moment he added: "I think we ought to have a talk with Jane Marland."

"Well, I wanted to," returned Wade, "but she's naturally all broken up over this, and the butler said she ought not to be disturbed. What's happened to your finger-print man, chief, with his camera?"

Hawley was proud of his finger-print outfit which he had recently persuaded parsimonious county supervisors to buy

for him, and, in his haste to get away to Northboro, he hadn't forgotten about it. "He'll be over pretty soon, I guess," he answered. "I couldn't wait for him. But we won't find any prints on the hilt of that knife. It's rough bone. There's not a smooth spot on it. After he's hunted for finger prints, he can photograph those shoe prints outside, and then we'll make plaster casts of them. But I'm going to see Jane Marland right now, Jim, no matter how bad she feels."

With a look of fierce determination, the sheriff started off to look for the butler. Wade followed him. As they stepped into the big square entrance hall in front of the house, Hawley stopped abruptly, for to his surprise he had caught sight of Jane Marland, whom he was so eager to interview, coming down the broad staircase. As might have been expected, she still showed signs of the shock her father's death must have been to her, but, though she was very pale and her eyes were swollen and tear stained, she seemed to have herself under firm control.

As she reached the foot of the stairs, Hawley stepped forward to intercept her. "I don't like to trouble you at such a time, Miss Marland," he explained softly, "but, before I go any further with this case, there are some questions I've got to ask you."

There were but few people in the county who did not know Luther Hawley, at least by sight, and the girl recognized him. For a moment, she studied his face anxiously and seemed uncertain what answer to make. "What is it you want to ask me?" she said at last.

"I want to know whether you saw Lefty Burke here last night," he replied grimly.

The girl, quick to sense the suspicion in his mind, gave a slight start. His sharp, searching look seemed to shake her nerves. "I—I don't understand what you mean, sheriff," she stammered

after a moment. "Surely you don't think——"

The sentence remained unfinished, and she stared past him through the wide-open front door to a handsome, smartly dressed man who had just come up the steps. "You must excuse me, sheriff," she said quickly. "There is somebody I must see at once."

As she hurried to the door, Hawley swung around to see who was there. He had never seen the man before, but Wade had seen him several times and had heard his name. He recognized him now as Archibald Ely Nash.

CHAPTER VII.

LEFTY BURKE'S SHOES.

AS the circumstances seemed to demand of him, Nash's face was very grave and his manner subdued as he grasped the welcoming hand Jane Marland extended in welcome.

"It was good of you to come," she murmured.

"I couldn't stay away," he said, looking sadly into her eyes. "I scarcely expected to see you, but I felt that I must call and at least leave my name and my deepest sympathy."

Nash, who had developed his natural social gifts by careful study of the ways of the fashionable world, was one of the most tactful of men. Though he was eager for information concerning the ghostly happening of the night before, he waited silently for the girl herself to speak of it of her own volition. He did not have long to wait, for, as he stepped into the hall, Jane whispered to him: "That big man at the foot of the stairs is Sheriff Hawley, and I'm afraid he means to make himself very disagreeable. I don't want to speak with him. For some reason or other, I believe he suspects Lefty. Only a moment ago, he asked me if he was here last night."

"The man must be a fool," Nash mut-

tered. "Don't worry about Burke. But if I were you, I'd answer the sheriff's questions. If you don't, you will only increase whatever suspicion he may have."

"Oh, I am so glad you are here!" she exclaimed under her breath. "If you will stay by me, I'll talk with the man and won't feel so much afraid of him."

Leading Nash over to the foot of the stairs, she introduced him to the sheriff. "Mr. Nash is a good friend of mine," she explained, "and he thinks I ought to answer whatever questions you want to ask. I might as well tell you right now that I didn't see Lefty Burke here last night—that he hasn't been here for weeks."

"No?" said Hawley incredulously. He turned his eyes to Nash. "I've just been told by Mr. Wade here that you're staying at the tavern. Did you see Burke last night?"

For a moment, Nash kept an awkward silence. "See here, sheriff, I don't want to say anything that might get Burke mixed up in this affair," he burst out, his face full of trouble.

"Which means, I suppose, that you do know something that might mix him up in it," the sheriff persisted with keener interest. "Tell me the truth, Nash. It's bound to come out some time. You did see Burke last night. Where and when?"

Nash hesitated over his reply. "It's better to tell what little I know," he decided suddenly. "It's impossible that Burke could have been connected with such a terrible crime as this, and no matter what I or anybody else can say his innocence is sure to come out. Usually, I go out for a little stroll before going to bed. Last night about eleven o'clock, I was passing the Marland grounds and was nearing the gate, when I saw Burke coming toward me. I spoke to him, but he didn't answer."

"Did he come out of that gate?" Hawley demanded quickly.

"I don't suppose so. I don't know where he came from."

The sheriff's eyes were bright with suddenly aroused excitement. "Jim, let's see that book," he snapped. He reached out and seized the pocket memorandum book that Wade produced. "Look at the name on this, Miss Marland. It was found this morning lying on the floor just inside the open window of the library. It belongs to Burke. Can you explain how it got there?"

Jane looked at the name on the cover and gasped. "Why, it's impossible!" she cried, her eyes wide with amazement. "He hasn't been here, I tell you, for weeks."

For several seconds, Hawley stared into her face without a word. "Well, all right," he sighed at last, plainly doubting her. "We'll let it go at that. But, Jim, go find Lefty Burke and bring him here. And if he isn't wearing shoes with fancy rubber soles, go to his room and look for a pair that has 'em."

As Wade passed out of the house, Nash noticed that the girl's nerves were in a bad state, and he turned to her with a look of sympathy. "Come away, Miss Marland. You can't stand any more of this."

"No! No!" she cried. "I've got to see this through. I've got to wait here for Lefty."

Though it had seemed certain that, if Lefty were in the village, he would be found very quickly, it proved to be a long wait, but at last they saw him coming up the steps of the house in charge of the deputy. Apparently, Wade had not taken any shoes from Lefty's room, for there was nothing in his hands. The young real-estate dealer looked completely bewildered. As he stepped into the house and saw the three persons who were waiting there for him, his eyes widened and he stared blankly at their grave faces.

"Well, Jim," snapped the sheriff impatiently. "What's the answer?"

Wade scowled. "Knowing Burke, I hate to say it, chief, but those shoes he's wearing seem to have the kind of soles we want. But we'll know in a minute. We'd better take him around outside to those prints under the windows."

Presently, as the two officers led Burke out of the house and around toward the garden in the rear, Jane Marland started to follow them. Nash protested, for he could see that she was under an intense strain, but she persisted stubbornly, and they went along together to the spot marked by the steps of the man who some time in the dead of night had come to Marland's library. As they arrived at the garden bed where the footprints were so clearly visible, Lefty, with the two officers standing beside him, was sitting on the ground taking off his shoes.

With fast-growing impatience, Hawley seized the first shoe to come off, and, holding it carefully over one of the footprints in the earth, found that it fitted the mark exactly. He turned the shoe over and studied the design of circles and crosses on the sole. It was a design that had its exact counter-part in the imprint in the earth, even to the places where the rubber had been slightly worn away by use.

Jane Marland saw everything. She saw how perfectly the sole of Lefty's shoe fitted the imprint. And suddenly all her sympathy for the young man she was engaged to marry vanished. "You!" she cried, staring at him with flashing eyes. "I couldn't believe it! I never could have believed but for this!" Her voice sank into a sobbing whisper. "But now—now I know!"

Stepping up to Burke, Sheriff Hawley pointed a long, accusing finger into his face. "Tell the truth!" he roared. "You did it. You can't deny it. You're the man who crept into this house last night and killed Andrew J. Marland."

There's no getting away from it, Burke. Look at this." He held up the little memorandum book before Lefty's eyes. "It's yours. It was found inside that open window."

Lefty tried to speak, but the words caught in his throat. His eyes, with a wild, baffled look in them now, turned to Jane. Her nerves had broken at last, and she was sobbing bitterly. Archibald Ely Nash had fondly thrown a long, slender arm around her shoulders—the arm with the wrist watch.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CLINCHING STORY.

EVER since the days when they had been friends and classmates in school, Lorna Sherwood had cherished a romantic attachment for Lefty Burke. Nobody ever suspected it, not even Lefty himself. She would never have dared speak of it to anybody. But that little secret love affair, coming into her drab life, had made the world brighter for her, had lifted her thoughts above the dull routine of household chores and her work in her father's store.

To her quiet brown eyes Lefty was a hero, a wonder man, the embodiment of all the gifts the gods have to offer to poor humanity. She hadn't seen him very often of late, but she liked to let her thoughts wander back to the old winter days when he had drawn her to school on his sled, and to the old summers when they had gone to the mill pond together and he had taught her how to swim and to fish and to row a boat. Even now he was her idol.

She had never really believed he would ever fall in love with her, for she did not rate herself very highly, and she had accepted his engagement to Jane Marland without a touch of bitterness. It was the greatest shock of her life when Lefty was arrested for the murder of Jane Marland's father. The whole village might believe him

guilty; in fact, most of the village did believe so already, but she herself would never doubt him, no matter what the evidence might be.

Lorna had formed some specific ideas of her own concerning the murder of Marland, and these ideas all directed her suspicion to one man. That man was Archibald Ely Nash. She had felt a sudden dislike for the Adonis of the tavern the very moment she first set eyes on him. A keenly intuitive girl, she had been quick to sense the evil nature that lurked behind the disguise of his handsome, alluring face. A logical process of reasoning told her that Nash had plenty of motive not only for killing Marland but for fastening the crime on Lefty. She knew that Jane was ignoring Lefty in his cell in the village jail, that she had turned against him, and that Nash was paying her devoted attention.

Marland, who would have bitterly opposed the smooth stranger's wooing of his daughter, was out of the way, and Lefty was no longer to be feared. That Nash might have had strong reason to get rid of both men was obvious to Lorna, but apparently to nobody else. Now that her father was dead, the headstrong Jane was her own boss. She could see Nash wherever and whenever she pleased. Lefty was no longer an obstacle to be reckoned with. For the Adonis of the tavern the way was clear, and, tactful, sympathetic, of polished manners and clever speech, he was making the best of his opportunities.

Two other men besides Nash were the recipients of Lorna's bitter animosity—Sheriff Hawley and his deputy, Jim Wade. She was convinced that the two officers were prejudiced against their prisoner and were ignoring every fact that might point to his innocence. She had to acknowledge to herself, however, that those facts were very few and seemed to be completely out-

weighed by the evidence that had been presented, and that was continuing to accumulate against her idol. The case of the prosecution was even stronger now than at the time of Lefty's arrest, for the weapon with which Marland had been killed had been identified as Lefty's hunting knife.

Lefty's own story was too fantastic for general belief. He had told at last of how he had been attacked in his office and left bound and unconscious. He had argued that his shoes could have been removed from his feet at that time without his knowledge, that they could have been worn by his assailant to Marland's house, and then, after the murder, could have been put back on his own feet. And he had explained how easy it would have been for anybody to steal his hunting knife from his room in the tavern. But the village was laughing at the prisoner's incredible story, and, convinced at last that he was the unfortunate victim of a perfect frame-up, he had given way to absolute despair.

Lorna was feeling pretty desperate herself. Almost convinced of Nash's guilt, she had been seeking some way of launching an attack upon him that would bring him under general suspicion. She had been watching him like a hawk at every opportunity. Remembering all the details of the murder, she had hoped to find he was left-handed. In that effort, she had been sharply disappointed, for the evidence all seemed to point the other way. She had found that he wrote with his right hand and seemed to use it at all times in preference to his left.

The morning of the day after Lefty's arrest, Nash called on Seth Sherwood in his little office in the rear of the store. After the man had gone, Lorna, observing her father's agitation, was deeply perplexed. She had not forgotten how troubled her father had seemed after the first visit Nash had paid him;

and now the same thing had happened again.

A few hours later, Sheriff Hawley came into the store. Ignoring Lorna, he passed on into the office, where he found Sherwood at his desk.

"I hear you've been looking for me, that you've got something important to tell," Hawley began.

The storekeeper was looking thoroughly miserable. His face was white and drawn, and his weak eyes were full of anxiety. "I'm afraid I have," he answered, drawing a hand across his forehead. "I've hated to tell you, Hawley, and it's all I can do to bring myself to it now, for I've known Lefty Burke for years and have never heard anything against him."

Hawley glanced at him with suddenly quickened interest. "So you know something against Burke, eh? What is it?"

"I—I saw him, Hawley, that night that Marland was killed," the storekeeper stammered with very obvious reluctance. He paused, frowned and bit at his lips as if he already repented his words.

"Go on, Sherwood. When and where did you see him?"

"You know my house isn't very far from the Marland grounds," Sherwood resumed with an effort. "Well, there was a letter I had forgotten to open, and I had left it here in my desk. I didn't think of it till late in the evening, and then it began to worry me. I thought it might be something important, and I felt that I couldn't sleep till I had looked at it. So I came down here and got it. I was on my way home, and was almost there, when I saw a man climbing over the Marland wall. He dropped to the path right in front of me. It was Burke. My eyesight isn't very good, but I was so close I couldn't mistake him. It must have been about eleven o'clock, and I asked him what he was doing out so late in the Mar-

land grounds. He didn't seem to be quite himself. He seemed dazed. He told me a rambling story about how he had been drinking some bootleg whisky, and he said he hadn't any idea how he got into Marland's grounds. I left him there and went on home."

For a few moments, the sheriff pondered the old man's story in silence, until at last a slow smile lit up his face. "We've got him, Sherwood! We've got him dead to rights now. That's the clinching story. It means a death sentence for Lefty Burke."

The smile was lingering on the sheriff's face when a little later, leaving Sherwood at his desk, he stepped out into the store. Hawley was a changeable sort of man. Though he had not been ready to believe in Lefty's guilt at first, after he was convinced of it by the evidence of the shoes, his former friendly feeling for the young real-estate dealer turned into contempt and he had been finding a grim satisfaction in the accumulating evidence. In his cheerful frame of mind, he did not ignore Lorna after leaving her father's office. She was standing behind one of the counters, and he stopped to speak to her.

"What are you smiling so happily about, sheriff?" she asked.

"I've just heard some pretty good news, Lorna," he replied. "Your father's been talking with me about Lefty Burke."

Lorna could scarcely conceal her sudden excitement, but she made an effort to show indifference. "Oh, I can guess what he's been telling you," she said with a shrug. "He doesn't keep any secrets from me."

"That so?" The sheriff was in a talkative mood, and he had no very strong reason for keeping his fresh information to himself. It would come out in court pretty soon, and he thought that probably the girl had heard the story from her father already. "So you

know about Lefty climbing over the Marland wall on the night of the murder?"

Lorna's wits were wide awake. "I heard something about it. Just what did my father tell you? His memory isn't very good and perhaps I can supply some details he's forgotten."

"Why, he told me about how he came down here to the store late that night to get something, and, on his way home saw Burke climbing out of the Marland grounds. Lefty told him he'd been drinking and didn't know how he got there. It's the clinching story, Lorna, coming from a man of your father's importance in the village. What he says, a jury will believe. We don't need anything more now to convict Burke of first-degree murder."

Lorna believed that Hawley, for some reason she could not fathom, was lying to her. It was impossible for her to believe her father had told such a story. But she was trembling when presently the sheriff passed out into the street. She rushed into the office. "Father, what did you tell the sheriff just now?" she demanded.

"Oh, nothing of any importance, Lorna," he replied nervously.

"He says you saw Lefty climbing over the Marland wall that night. He says you told him so."

Sherwood knew the whole village would know his story before long. He wouldn't be able to keep it from Lorna much longer. "I had to tell him what I saw," he muttered, turning his eyes away from her.

"You told him that?"

"Yes—told him everything."

"You deliberately told him that? Father! Why did you have to tell such a lie? For it was a lie. You were with me at home all that evening. You know you were. You didn't leave the house for a moment."

Sherwood looked as if he were in agony. "Lorna!" he cried desperately.

"I had to tell that story. There's a reason I can't talk about."

"A reason for telling a lie that will convict Lefty of murder?"

Sherwood had reached the limit of endurance. Suddenly, his quivering nerves seemed to break and a long-drawn sob broke from his lips as he covered his bowed face with his hands. "I was forced to tell it!" he whimpered. "Yes, forced! There's nothing about my past life that I must hide from you, Lorna, but I've got to stick to that lie or spend the rest of my life in prison."

His long shirt sleeve had slipped back from his right wrist, exposing the brand of the handcuff. Lorna several times before had seen that ugly strange scar and had often wondered about it, but she stared at it now with fresh curiosity. For years, she had suspected that there was some cloud over her father's past, but not until this moment had she felt certain that Archibald Ely Nash was connected with it.

"Was it Nash who forced you to tell that lie?" she demanded.

"He's been squeezing money from me, Lorna. To-day he came and promised he'd never ask me for another dollar if I'd tell that story about Burke. But if I refused he'd expose me, would tell everything he knew about me. I'm helpless, Lorna, and so are you. If you tell that I lied, it will be the end of me. I've got to testify against Burke in court or Nash will have me sent to prison for twenty years."

Into his daughter's face came a look of fierce determination such as he had never seen there before. Her eyes flashed, and her little fists were clenched tightly. "Father, would prison be any worse than the torment you'd have all the rest of your life when you realized you'd told a lie that had sent an innocent man to death? You've got to tell the truth. If you don't, I'll have a story of my own to tell in court—a true story."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SAVING LIE.

THE convetous hands of Archibald Ely Nash were drawing closer and closer to the Marland millions. The woolen king's will disclosed the fact that he had left to his daughter his entire estate; moreover, the fact that the mysterious Adonis of the tavern, of whose past life nobody seemed to know anything at all, had completely won Jane Marland's affections was becoming obvious to the whole village. The spell that Nash exercised over the girl was almost hypnotic. He knew that, after she had become his wife, he would find a way of doing as he pleased with her property. He had already made the pleasing discovery that Jane didn't have much of a head for business. The tragic death of Marland and the pitiful plight of Burke did not cause him any loss of sleep. In fact, he was able to find amusement in the thought that, while his former rival for Jane's affections was behind prison bars and would probably never be free again, he himself could look forward to a life of luxurious ease.

Not only had Lefty been abandoned by Jane Marland in his time of trouble but by almost everybody in the village. He had begun to believe that not one human being believed in his innocence, and that he was doomed to die. Against the mass of evidence pointing to his guilt, he felt that his case was hopeless. He scarcely expected that anybody would come to see him in his lonely prison through mere friendship or sympathy or faith in him, and, when one morning he discovered Lorna Sherwood standing at the door of his cell, his heart leaped.

"Oh, Lefty, I simply had to come to tell you I still believe in you, no matter what people are saying," she burst out with a little sob.

He had scarcely spoken with Lorna

for months, but now suddenly his thoughts went back to the old days when they were boy and girl together, and the realization that there was at least one human being who believed in him gave him a thrill. "Dear little Lorna!" he cried. "You're the truest friend I've got in the world. You always did believe in me. When we were kids together, you thought I was going to be a great man some day. I've been an awful disappointment, haven't I? It looks as if they'd got me. There doesn't seem to be any hope for me at all right now."

"I can't stay long," she hastened to tell him. "The jailer won't let me. But I don't want you to give up hoping. I've thought of a way to help you. I can't tell you what it is, but it's something that may set you free."

For a moment, Lefty stared out at her through the bars with wondering eyes. Then he gave a bitter little laugh. "Why, poor little girl, there's nothing that can set me free, nothing that you could do, anyhow."

"You're wrong, Lefty," she insisted. "You don't know what I'm thinking about. I really have found a way."

She was so very serious about it and seemed so confident that his curiosity was stirred. "Tell me, Lorna," he urged. "You don't mean you've found some kind of evidence that's been overlooked?"

"But I can't tell you," she returned with a frown. And then after a moment of thought she added: "But, yes, I'll tell you this much, that I'm going to lie for you, Lefty. Yes, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell a lie that will smash that whole case of Luther Hawley's to smithereens."

And, presently, leaving Lefty completely bewildered, she went away to look for Sheriff Hawley at the town hall, where he made his headquarters during his stay in the village. She found him before long at an opportune

moment, for he was alone in a little room where he had a desk.

"I never expected you'd honor me with a visit," he told her gallantly. "What's on your mind, Lorna? Got something to add to your father's story?"

"There's not a word of truth in my father's story," she returned looking Hawley squarely in the eyes. "He told me himself it was a lie. And, before long, he's going to be telling you the same thing. You'll never have him as a witness against Lefty Burke."

Hawley was startled. "A lie!" he exclaimed. "Why, Lorna, it's hard to believe you. Why would he tell such a lie as that?"

"Because that man Archibald Ely Nash told him to," she answered promptly. "He's a blackmailer. He knows about something—I don't know what—connected with my father's past, and he's been holding it over him. He's been squeezing money from him. Nash promised that he'd never ask him for another dollar if father would tell that story. And father had to tell it, for he knew that if he didn't something terrible would happen to him. Sheriff, I've come to tell you you've been on the wrong track in this case right from the start. You fell for the neatest frame-up that was ever put over on an innocent man. You never could see that Nash had a bigger motive than anybody in the world for killing Mr. Marland. He was after Marland's daughter and Marland's millions, and he had to frame Lefty to get him out of the way."

"Now—now, Lorna," the sheriff protested. "You ought not to say things like that. You can't accuse Nash without any more evidence than the fact that he's on friendly terms with Jane Marland."

"I've got more evidence than that," Lorna assured him. "I've got evidence, Mr. Hawley, that's going to make you

do a lot of deep thinking pretty soon. You never found the money that disappeared from Mr. Marland's pocket, did you?"

The sheriff seemed to be slightly puzzled. "I don't see what you're trying to show," he said, scowling and stroking his chin. "We've got all the case we need against Burke, even if we never find that money."

Lorna was in no hurry to satisfy his curiosity. "The last time Mr. Ferguson, the bank cashier, was in the store," she said, "he told me that money was in brand-new bills and that he happened to remember the numbers because the first four figures of the first number were the date of his birth and the rest were ciphers. Of course, when he had the number of the bill on the top of the pack in his mind, he knew what the numbers of the others were, for in a new pack they ran consecutively."

"Yes, we've got the numbers," Hawley admitted, "but what of it?"

"Just this, Mr. Hawley. I've got some of that money. And I know the man who paid it to me in the store."

From her purse, she took a new fifty-dollar bill and held it before the sheriff's eyes. "Do you remember the number, sheriff? It's one of those that's on your list."

Hawley's eyes widened. "Where did that come from?" he demanded nervously.

"From Archibald Ely Nash," Lorna answered. "This morning, he bought some handkerchiefs in the store. He said that was the smallest money he'd got, so I had to change it for him. It seems to me, sheriff, that it's up to you to take a look inside Nash's pocketbook, where you may find twenty-nine other new fifty-dollar bills."

The sheriff was too deep in thought to speak. The whole structure of the case he had built up so carefully against Lefty Burke seemed suddenly threatened with destruction. Presently, he

rose from his chair. "I think I'll take your advice, Lorna," he said sheepishly. "I'm going out right now to look for that man Nash."

What happened subsequently—the finding of the remainder of the missing money in Nash's room, the arrest of Nash for murder, Seth Sherwood's confession that his story of seeing Burke climbing Marland's wall was a lie—were a sensational series of events in the history of Northboro. The sending of Nash's finger prints to the police of the big cities of the country resulted in the discovery of his criminal career and of the fact that he was wanted as a swindler in several places. The faith of the village in Lefty returned with surprising suddenness, and his story was no longer doubted. In fact, in the light of what had been discovered about Nash, the story seemed so perfectly plausible from beginning to end that people began to wonder why Luther Hawley and Jim Wade had ignored it so completely. Presumably, Nash had gone to Marland's house in Lefty's shoes, taking with him Lefty's hunting knife and memorandum book. The finding of a blackjack among Nash's possessions provided a theory that he had first knocked Marland unconscious with a blow on the head and that he had then had time to strike a blow with the knife, that would appear to have been dealt by a left-handed man. Of course, there was no proof of this and there never would be unless Nash should confess. But the smooth-tongued adventurer was not that kind of a man. There was only one confession he made—suicide. "And that's confession enough to satisfy anybody," observed Luther Hawley.

To find himself suddenly facing the certainty of conviction either for Marland's murder or on many other charges when his hands had been so close to millions had been too much of a shock to the Adonis of the tavern. He was

found hanging from the bars of his cell in a strangling noose which he had made from strips of bedclothing.

When at last Lefty Burke was set free, he went at once to Seth Sherwood's store, where he found Lorna alone.

"Can you guess why I've come here, little girl?" he asked her.

"No, Lefty, I don't think I can," she answered, looking up into his face and trying to keep back the tears that were brimming in her brown eyes.

He took her into his big arms and held her close. And, presently, he whispered into her ear: "I know now that I've always loved you, Lorna—ever since we were kids."

"But I'm an awful liar, Lefty," she sobbed. "It wasn't Nash who gave me that fifty-dollar bill. It was Mr. Marland."

She was still in Lefty's arms when Seth Sherwood stepped out of his office and blinked curiously at them from behind his spectacles. But there was

no sign of recognition in his weak eyes until he had drawn very near. Then he saw how things were between his daughter and Lefty Burke, and he smiled happily. Without saying a word, he went back to his office. He no longer feared any immediate exposure of his past. Archibald Ely Nash, too busy with his own troubles to have room in his mind for any petty spite, had failed to betray him, and Luther Hawley, whatever he might suspect, had not the least desire to dig back into the years in an effort to bring ruin to one of Northboro's leading citizens.

For a long time, the old man sat dreaming at his desk. At last, he opened his eyes, pulled back the sleeve of his shirt, and stared wide-eyed at the scar on his wrist. "The brand of the fetters!" he whispered to himself. "I'll never be free from that. Some day, they may find me, and they'll know me by that mark. It's my punishment. With that mark, fear will always be with me to the end of my life."



POLICE RAID A COCK FIGHT

UPON information given to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, a cock fight was interrupted which was taking place in a hundred-year-old barn at Goshen, New York, and one hundred and twenty-six men were arrested.

While the men were gazing intently at two gamecocks which were fighting to the death, twenty State troopers were gradually closing in on them. Eight fighters had already met with death while the ninth bout was in progress. Many of the spectators were in evening dress. Burlap bags were hung before the windows to keep the light from revealing to outsiders that the barn was occupied.

The spectators were so absorbed in the two gamecocks, which were locked in struggle, that they had no idea they were being surrounded by the law. Even the lookouts left their posts and crept nearer the scene of activity. Suddenly, there came a warning cry, and the lights went out. A few escaped, but the majority were captured and arrested. Practically, all of them gave fictitious names and tendered ten dollars for bail. They were charged with misdemeanor. It was said that the men came from New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. The man who rented the barn was held in fifty-dollar bail, and the same fate was meted out to another who was said to have promoted the fights.

According to the law, all fines will go to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Forty-eight gamecocks were confiscated, as well as the pit, spurs, scales and other equipment, following the raid.

Mr. Clackworthy's Return

AFTER A LONG ABSENCE, OUR OLD FRIEND, THE
MASTER CONFIDENCE MAN, IS WITH US AGAIN.



By Christopher B. Booth

Author of "The Moving Hand," etc.

AT ten o'clock on a certain Tuesday morning in November, Mr. Amos Clackworthy was a millionaire. Before two o'clock of the same afternoon, he owed money to his brokers. Between those frantic hours, which so many thousands of people will remember with shudders as the first day of the stock-market crash, Mr. Clackworthy saw his paper profits melt and vanish, his margins swept away with such relentless swiftness that there had been no chance of salvage.

Being a philosopher and a good sport, having the nerve of the gambler who can lose his last chip without losing his

serenity, the master confidence man accepted this reversal of his fortunes without lament; while others who had lost less were tragically contemplating self-destruction—and some of them making this surrender to their desperation—Mr. Clackworthy merely mixed himself a high ball, lighted one of his excellent cigars, and reached the immediate decision that it was time he got back to his business of trimming "suckers," having himself been a sucker to the tune of a cool million.

Immediate activity was necessary if he meant to remain a tenant of this exclusive Lakeshore Drive apartment, for the November rent was due and to

pay it would reduce his bank account to an alarmingly small balance. It was an exceedingly satisfactory place to live, with a roof-top terrace and an unobstructed view of the lake, and he meant to keep it. But the apartment cost money, and Mr. Clackworthy's tastes were expensively in keeping with his abode. Money must be had, and quickly, too.

The door of the luxurious living room was abruptly flung open and James Early, the master confidence man's confederate in their many successful adventures, burst in stormily. But it was the storm of despair. Clutched in his hand was a crumpled copy of a Chicago afternoon newspaper, with the news of the stock-market crash screaming across the front page; upon his thin, lean, sharp-featured face was stamped an expression of dazed anguish which, however, began to relax as he saw Mr. Clackworthy sitting at ease, apparently in a cheerful and carefree mood.

"Good afternoon, James," said Mr. Clackworthy pleasantly. "You appear to be a trifle upset over something."

James Early, upon whom the police in days past had bestowed his nickname of the "Early Bird," stared searchingly at the master confidence man for another moment; a look of something akin to awe began to spread over his countenance.

"Boss!" he gasped out. "You—you got out with a whole skin, huh? This here Wall Street game didn't make a sucker outa you after all! Gee, boss, you sure outsmarted the rest of this whole cockeyed world. How'dja do it?"

"I didn't," responded Mr. Clackworthy. "No, my dear James, I certainly didn't."

The Early Bird's expanding smile began to lose radiance, but, viewing the other's calmness, he could not believe that disaster had been complete. Mr. Clackworthy, James decided, had been nicked, but not very badly.

"You're lucky at that, boss. Why, I seen guys down in the Loop that was stripped right down to their shirts. Lookit th' headlines; here's a bird that puts a hunk of lead inside the place his brains was supposed to be. Another one does a high-divin' act offn th' Monmouth Buildin'. The streets downtown is full of people talkin' to theirselves, and the nut ward at Cook County Hospital is dustin' off the old S. R. O. sign, and gettin' ready to sleep 'em three in a bed. I hears a street sweeper sayin' to th' blind dame what peddles lead pencils at the corner of Clark and Randolph that his broker had sold him out, and 'Lady Smoked Glasses' comes back that she lost five centuries in Radio. Everybody was playin' this crazy market—everybody. Includin' you and me, worse luck."

Mr. Clackworthy chuckled, enjoying, as he always did, the Early Bird's picturesque outbursts of speech, and the chuckle further falsely reassured the Early Bird that his friend and idol had shrewdly escaped the tidal wave of liquidation.

"So, James, you've been speculating along with the rest of us?"

"Yeah, and here's a laugh; a wise bozo in LaSalle Street slips me a hot tip that Zenith Vacuum Cleaner was gonna be pushed up to a hundred and fifty. It vacuum-cleaned me, all right. I ain't got a bean left outa th' wreck, and that ain't speakin' in no figurative language neither. I'm so flat, boss, that a pancake would look like Pikes Peak." The Early Bird stripped off his nobby English overcoat and sat down expectantly.

"Aw, loosen up, boss," he pleaded. "Gimme a tell. How'dja manage to get into th' cyclone cellar before th' tornado struck? And why, oh, why, didn'tcha give me a tip-off? Mebbe I could have saved a part of my twenty-seven grand."

"You don't seem to believe that I'm cleaned out, too, James," said Mr.

Clackworthy as he gently tapped an inch and a half of ash from his cigar.

"Nix on tryin' to hand me that stuff, boss!" he exclaimed disdainfully. "Why, if you was clean, that would mean mighty near a million bucks, and no guy, not even you, can say good-bye to that much dough and look like Merry Christmas. So quit kiddin' me and gimme th' low-down."

Mr. Clackworthy got up from his chair, produced another glass, and mixed two drinks.

"It pleases me to discover that I am such a game loser," he said. "The truth of the matter is, James, that market prices dropped so fast this afternoon there was no chance for any man to save himself. One stock I was in dropped thirty points in an hour and a half; the others were nearly as bad. I'm all in, down and out, James; I'm in debt to my brokers and I wouldn't be able to pay them what I owe and meet this month's rent on the apartment."

The Early Bird's mouth sagged open. For a moment, he was like a man petrified. It was extremely difficult to fit Mr. Amos Clackworthy into any picture of poverty knocking at the door, and yet he knew now that it must really be true. Mr. Clackworthy was broke, stony broke!

"A million bucks!" cried the Early Bird in a shaking whisper. "A million bucks gone—just like this." And he puffed to imitate a gust of wind. "B-but, boss, it—it can't be—as bad as that. Down to the last dollar."

The master confidence man's mouth tightened slightly. "Ah, but it is, James. I've been close to the ragged edge more than once; but never, never in my life, have I actually owed money that I couldn't pay. It puts me in a pretty bad hole."

A wabbling smile, sickly in its lack of mirth, spread over the Early Bird's face.

"For a couple of wise guys like you

and me, we're certainly a fine pair of suckers. Two nice, woolly Mary's little lambs what's gone and got ourselves fleeced right down to the bare skin!" His voice had become bitter.

"We've got a lot of company," observed Mr. Clackworthy, but the Early Bird found small consolation in that. Philosophy isn't a great deal of comfort when apartment rent is due and the figures of the check-book stubs have been reduced to three figures.

"It proves," said Mr. Clackworthy as he sat down again and took a sip of his second high ball, "an old adage of mine: that the sucker is a sucker for one reason and one reason only—because he's trying to get something for nothing. We've demonstrated it many times; we've merely demonstrated it again with ourselves in the rôle of victims. We tried to take some easy money out of Wall Street. We were greedy, as men usually are when there's easy money in sight. With you, twenty-seven thousand wasn't enough; with me, a million wasn't enough. Both of us wanted more, and we got it——"

"We got it," the Early Bird chimed in dismally, "in the place where we're both gonna be wearin' patches on our pants."

Mr. Clackworthy finished off his high ball; perhaps, underneath his magnificent calm, his nerves needed to be bucked up. But a better tonic, undoubtedly, was the Early Bird's familiar note of pessimism. It was like old times again to hear this prediction of dire disaster which was to put them on the street in rags and tatters. The master confidence man threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"Where's all the comedy?" grunted James Early sourly.

"Really, James, I wonder if you do expect to see me in the bread line?"

"Whatcha gonna do? Answer me that!" There was a challenge in the Early Bird's voice although, of course,

he didn't actually expect the master confidence man ever to be reduced to any such pitiful degree of destitution.

"Do?" murmured Mr. Clackworthy. "That, my dismal friend, is a question easily answered. You and I are going to dust off the old bag of tricks, and get back to business. To-day's stock-market debacle impresses me with the cheering thought of how many thousands of people there are who are trying to get something for nothing."

A bright sparkle lighted the Early Bird's eyes only to dim.

"There's plenty of suckers left," he muttered, "but try and find one of the poor saps who's got any jack."

Mr. Clackworthy's answer to that was to slide open a drawer of his desk and bring forth a small, card-index file which contained the names of various and sundry persons who, unknown to themselves, were candidate for election to membership in the master confidence man's own private lodge, the Ancient Order of Suckers.

From out of the little magic box, which Mr. Clackworthy called "the prospect list," there came the name of a certain Mr. Alonzo Prindivale. Upon the card devoted to Mr. Prindivale there appeared such information as the master confidence man might find useful in his particular field of endeavor. By a series of cryptograms, a great deal was contained in a small space, and Mr. Prindivale would not have felt flattered to have heard this condensed biography translated to its full meaning.

Alonzo Prindivale was a down-State banker in a town which bore the family name. It was a small town and none too prosperous. But Alonzo Prindivale was prosperous, amazingly so, considering his limited opportunities. By greedy dollar grabbing and parsimonious nickel nursing, he had become a very rich man. He owned half of Prindivale and had a mortgage on the rest.

Three days after the stock-market crash, having raised a small amount of working capital by various and sundry means, Mr. Clackworthy arrived in Prindivale on the evening train. It was raining, and this added to the dismal outlook from the railroad station platform: a block-long procession of shabby buildings across the tracks, headed by the only three-story edifice in town, the Prindivale House. There was no hotel porter on hand to look after the luggage of arriving guests. Mr. Clackworthy picked up his bag and started across the street which was poorly lighted. His foot splashed deep into a puddle of muddy water. The city fathers of the incorporated town of Prindivale were evidently not spending tax money for any such modern nonsense as pavements.

"I'll say," grunted the master confidence man, "that anybody who can make half a million dollars in a town like this is good." He smiled grimly. "The greedier they are, the better I like to take 'em."

Like its exterior, the lobby of the Prindivale House was shabby and unpretentious. That's what lack of competition does to a business sometimes. A man behind the desk surveyed Mr. Clackworthy with a listless gaze; the lines about his face bespoke bitterness and a state of helpless rebellion. He spoke no words of cheering welcome, knowing full well that his guests came to him because it was the only place to stop and that they would depart at the earliest possible moment. Professional glad-handing would be just so much energy wasted.

Mr. Clackworthy signed the register in his crisp, compact, businesslike handwriting.

"A room with a bath," he said, and got a quicker answer than he could have reasonably expected.

"Can't give you no room with bath,

mister. Got just one, and Mrs. Prindivale has got that."

"Prindivale?" murmured Mr. Clackworthy. "Do you happen to mean the wife of Mr. Alonzo Prindivale?"

"Uh-huh!" Even a grunt may contain a quality of voice which gives an index to a man's feelings, and the master confidence man knew instantly that the proprietor of the Prindivale House disliked the lady in question. More importantly, however, Mr. Clackworthy was immediately concerned as to the reason why Mrs. Prindivale was living at the hotel without her husband, or, for that matter, why she was living in the hotel at all. This didn't look so good; it offered a discouraging possibility—that Alonzo Prindivale was no longer to be listed among the living, that Mrs. Prindivale was a widow.

"And Mr. Prindivale?"

"Dead," said the hotel proprietor briefly, sourly, and thus was Mr. Clackworthy informed that he had wasted a tiresome train journey and twelve dollars in railroad fare—to say nothing of the unattractive prospect of sleeping in one of the Prindivale House beds which he was sure would be uncomfortable.

"Well, that's that!" thought Mr. Clackworthy with the philosophical resignation with which he characteristically met such annoying adversities of circumstance. Aloud he said: "So Alonzo Prindivale has passed from your midst. Um! The community must find it a distinct loss. It will be—ah—hard to replace such a leading and influential citizen."

The proprietor of the Prindivale House made a wry grimace. Perhaps he was unconscious of it.

"Not so hard as you'd think, mister. The only difference is that this here town of ours is bein' bossed by a skirt 'stead of a pair of pants. I guess, if th' truth was known, it's been bossed by the same skirt all the time. Anyhow, it's just the same as it was before—only

more so." Again there was that note of bitterness, but he suddenly stopped talking as a half-frightened look leaped into his eyes.

From out of the dining room of the hotel strode a woman who, although he had never seen her before, Mr. Clackworthy knew instantly could be none other than Alonzo Prindivale's widow. She was tall, angular, and masculine. Her stride was that of a man. Her face was harsh and forbidding; her eyes were as cold as those of a dead fish, and her dominant jaw jutted out beneath a thin-slitted, tightly clamped mouth.

The proprietor of the Prindivale House smirked and bobbed his head.

"I hope you enjoyed your dinner, Mrs. Prindivale."

"The soup was cold, the beef was tough, and the coffee vile," answered Mrs. Prindivale acridly, and with that she strode her masterful way across the lobby and vanished through a door which led to the stairs.

"What a pleasant person she is to have around!" murmured Mr. Clackworthy.

"Nothing ever suits her," mourned the hotel proprietor. "She ain't happy unless she's snapping at somebody. If the soup is served hot, she reads a paper until it gets cold, just so she'll have something to kick about. I buy a special brand of coffee, sixty cents the pound, and have it made special, but she always complains about the coffee, too. She complains that seventy-five dollars a month is too much for a room with a bath and three meals a day. And then she complains because I don't meet my notes at the bank right on the scratch."

"In other words," sympathetically observed Mr. Clackworthy, "Alonzo's spirit goes marching on."

"Thunder!" burst out the hotel proprietor, unable to resist the temptation of unburdening himself with a freedom with which he would not have dared to do to any one but a stranger. "Alonzo's

spirit, my eye! Everybody in this town thought it was Alonzo, but it was her all the time that made him so mean and hard with folks. Oh, it's easy enough to see that now." He drew a deep breath, leaned confidentially closer, betraying the fact that his tongue was being loosened by several drinks of strong liquor. "I'll lay a little bet, mister, that Alonzo Prindivale is dog-gone good and glad that he's dead."

Mr. Clackworthy encouraged further confidences regarding the Amazonian Mrs. Prindivale. He gathered that the woman's residence at the hotel was but temporary. Her home had burned down and another was being built. She not only owned the controlling stock of the Prindivale State Bank, but had elected herself to the presidency of the institution. She had stepped into her husband's shoes, and they fitted her so perfectly that every one realized that they must have been her shoes all the time. She drove the same hard bargains that Alonzo had driven—only harder. Her usurious rates of interest, disguised as bonus charges, were higher than even Alonzo's had been. She could foreclose a mortgage with a ruthlessness that would have made even Alonzo gasp.

All of this information, Mr. Clackworthy carried with him into the dining room along with his food, which was really quite excellent. Over his coffee, the master confidence man came to a decision which completely overturned his private code of ethics. Never in his life had he cheated a woman; he found that he was able to do it now without a single twinge of conscience.

It was a sartorially subdued James Early who disembarked at Prindivale from the morning train and surveyed the local scene with an expression of deepest disgust upon his thin, sharp-featured face. The more he saw of the town, the less he liked it; he couldn't recall that he had ever disliked any place as

he did this one. There flashed through his mind the thought that possibly he had got off at the wrong station, and heartily wished this were true, but the shabby sign over the shabby railroad station confirmed that this was Prindivale. Across the street was further proof: the "Prindivale House."

"Mebbe the Wall Street clean-out has made the boss cuckoo," muttered the Early Bird. "If there's easy dough in this burg, then there's orange groves in Alaska, and there ain't never no sunshine in Los Angeles. For two-bits I'd grab the next rattler back to Chi." Nevertheless, he picked up his cheap suit case and made his way toward the hotel.

Missing was the Early Bird's snappy English topcoat; absent was the raiment of dapper elegance which so delighted his vanity. His clothes gave him a bucolic air, the ridiculous hat, a size too small for his head, made him look like a simple-minded "hick," precisely the effect that was desired.

Half an hour later, James Early was entertaining further misgivings, inspired by his first glimpse of Mrs. Prindivale. The woman president of the Prindivale State Bank was sitting at her desk behind a railing, having it out with a borrower who couldn't meet his promise to pay. The Early Bird caught an occasional word of supplication. "Hard luck all winter; two horses died; lightning struck the barn and set fire to it; Rosie's appendix——"

The despairing tragedy of the poor fellow's face alone was enough to melt a heart of granite, but not a muscle of Mrs. Prindivale's harsh face relaxed, and her dead-fish eyes had the chill of death in them. What did she care for the misfortunes of other people other than that it usually meant a heavy profit? Another farm to be foreclosed and bought in for half its value.

The man stopped pleading, realizing how useless it was. His hands clenched. "Curse you!" Then he remembered

that he was talking to a woman. He stumbled to his feet, fumbling with his hat with twitching fingers. They were gnarled hands that had worked hard to feed his brood of young. He was breathing heavily, his mouth sagging open; his staring eyes saw only the void of black despair.

The Early Bird witnessed this heart-rending drama, suddenly stirred with the fervor of a crusader.

"Believe me, old girl," he said between his teeth, "you got a trimmin' comin' to you, and I'm gonna do my best to see you get one."

A moment later, the Early Bird was facing the lady ogre, playing the part of a perfect "sap." He sat on the extreme edge of a chair at the end of Mrs. Prindivale's desk, looking for all the world like a flustered yokel overawed by a greatly superior person.

"Y'see ma'am," James improvised haltingly, "I come into a tidy piece of money. My aunt, Mathilda, she died and left me some of them Liberty Bonds, but, shucks, four per cent ain't nothin' to earn on money considerin' the profit what's to be got outta th' chicken business."

"So?" said Mrs. Prindivale. "The chicken business?" How well did she know the kind of fool who, with a lead pencil and a few sheets of paper, got rich in the chicken business. It's the fastest way in the world for a poor man to get rich—on paper. But she did not tell this simple-looking stranger that he was a fool. She waited to see where it would lead to.

"Yes'm," the Early Bird went on eagerly. "There's a sight of money to be made outa chickens. I got it all figured out, and there ain't no way to lose. Why, ma'am, with eggs sellin' up to seventy and eighty cents a dozen, it's a purty onery kind of a hen that won't make a clean profit of ten dollars a year. Now multiply that by a thousand layin' hens——"

"Do you want to borrow money?" broke in Mrs. Prindivale bluntly.

"I got money without havin' to borrow it, ma'am. Y'see I was just lookin' fer a mite of advice about buyin' a farm to raise chickens on. I thought mebbe you knowed of some place that could be got reasonable."

Mrs. Prindivale perceptibly thawed. A smile appeared upon a face that nature had not fashioned for smiling.

"Oh, yes, I see, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Early's my name, ma'am."

"Well, Mr. Early, the bank is not in the real-estate business, but upstairs is the realty office of a man I can personally recommend. Mr. Kitt undoubtedly has some bargains in farms, and he'll treat you right. Go up and see Mr. Kitt. You may place full dependence in any representation that Mr. Kitt makes to you. If you want any more advice, I'll be glad to help you."

The Early Bird got to his feet, thanking Mrs. Prindivale profusely. Hardly had he got through the railing gate than the female bank president was reaching for a private telephone which connected directly with the real-estate office of Mr. Kitt upstairs.

"Listen, Kitt," she said in her hard, metallic voice, "a man named Early is on the way up. Wants to buy a farm and raise chickens. Looks like a good chance to unload the Tuccio place. What was the figure we bought it for?"

"Fifteen hundred," answered Kitt.

"Something tells me that this man Early can be induced to pay five thousand."

Mr. Kitt gasped over the wire. Had he not been in such mortal fear of Mrs. Prindivale, he'd have told her that she was crazy to expect a price of seventy dollars an acre for the rocky, worn-out Tuccio farm. He himself hadn't as yet seen what a simple-looking sap he had to deal with.

"I'll try," promised Mr. Kitt.

"Start at six!" commanded Mrs.

Prindivale who believed that a fool and his money were soon parted—and the sooner the better.

It would have been a mistake for Mr. Clackworthy to act too quickly, so, anxious as he was to recoup his finances, he quietly remained in Chicago and frequently smiled over the mental picture of the Early Bird in the rôle of chicken farmer, surrounded by cackling hens and crowing roosters. And the Early Bird, going right ahead with the building of poultry houses just as though he meant to stay in the chicken business all his life, with equal frequency thought of Mr. Clackworthy arising each morning amid the supercomforts of the Lakeshore Drive apartment. But James' resentment was not so great as might be imagined, for he had another picture—that of Mrs. Prindivale putting the screws on the poor devil who couldn't meet his mortgage.

A week and some odd days after the Early Bird had purchased the Tuccio farm for three times what it was worth, the master confidence man returned to Prindivale. Towns of this size are always curious about strangers, especially those who keep their affairs strictly to themselves. Mr. Clackworthy looked important; even in Chicago people would turn and stare after him as he walked along the street.

Mr. Clackworthy made himself a man of mystery. Each morning, after breakfasting at the Prindivale House, he would go down the street to Bud Seabrooke's auto livery and have himself driven out into the country. He would take along an empty canvas bag, always empty when he started and full when he returned. He never explained what it contained and Bud Seabrooke, extraordinarily adept at prying information out of people, went nearly crazy trying to figure it out. All he knew was that the mysterious stranger would suddenly order the car stopped with a curt "Wait here," and go striding across some farm-

er's field with his empty canvas bag. Mr. Clackworthy might be gone an hour; he might be gone four hours. Always, when he returned, the canvas bag dragged heavily at his arm.

"If he didn't look so sane and sensible," was all Bud could offer, "I'd say the guy was a nut."

"Maybe it's oil," suggested Elmer Robinson who worked in the Prindivale printing office. One guess seemed to be about as good as another.

Every few days, the mysterious stranger would ship a box of something to Chicago. What the boxes contained, no one knew. Mail arrived for Mr. Clackworthy, a letter a day in a long, heavily sealed envelope. But the address on the flap was annoyingly cryptic, merely "Suite 1241, Chemical Building, Chicago."

Eventually, Mrs. Prindivale herself began to share in the local curiosity, and, one evening at the hotel, she engaged Mr. Clackworthy in conversation. She found him a pleasant gentleman, willing to talk about anything save his own affairs.

While speculation was at a fever heat, Mr. Clackworthy received a telegram. Apparently, it was urgent for he packed his bags in haste and departed on the evening Chicago-bound train. He didn't say when he would return, if at all. And the town of Prindivale decided he never would, for almost a week passed and he hadn't come back. Apparently, the mystery would remain forever unsolved.

But, of course, Mr. Clackworthy did return. Another trip into the country, this time in the vicinity of the Tuccio farm, a neighborhood which he had already visited more than once. And that evening he called upon Mr. Kitt, the real-estate dealer whom Mrs. Prindivale dominated.

Mr. Kitt was a smallish man with a sharp mind and a weak chin. He had shrewdness but no courage, the sort who can never be anything other than an

understrapper. Overawed by Mr. Clackworthy's magnificent presence, palpitating with an eager but timid curiosity, he waited to see what had brought the impressive and mysterious stranger to his shabby realty office.

"Mr. Kitt," the master confidence man began briskly, "I want to begin by saying that I know how closely you are associated with Mrs. Prindivale."

Mr. Kitt raised his hand to his throat and toyed with his protuberant Adam's apple.

"Why, I—er—that is——" Directness of speech was not his way.

"I am fully aware," went on Mr. Clackworthy, "just what that association is, and you're mighty poorly paid for what you do. I am here to offer you a chance to make a thousand dollars as my agent. Did you ever get a thousand dollars in any deal in which you represented Mrs. Prindivale? The answer, Mr. Kitt, is no."

Mr. Kitt licked his lips avidly.

"I want to buy a piece of property that belongs to Mrs. Prindivale," pursued the master confidence man. "It's an eighty acre farm legally described as the southwest half of the northeast quarter of Section 41, Range 15, East. I want to buy it without Mrs. Prindivale knowing I'm buying it."

Mr. Kitt took down the county atlas and turned the pages to Range 15, East. His eyes sought the description Mr. Clackworthy had given him. His mouth sagged open.

"Why, that," he gasped, "that's the farm——" But the next instant, his teeth had clicked together like the snap of a steel trap, and the master confidence man pretended not to notice.

"Mrs. Prindivale's money bought it in at a foreclosure sale three years ago, for fifteen hundred dollars. The title stands in the name of Oscar Biddle who, I know as well as you do, is only a dummy for Mrs. Prindivale's transactions."

Mr. Kitt thought it wise to withhold the information that the Tuccio farm had passed from Mrs. Prindivale's control. He meant to find out, if possible, what the prosperous-looking stranger wanted with a worn-out farm. Why had the local man of mystery picked out the Tuccio farm after weeks of roaming through the country? There must be money in it—big money, perhaps, for Mr. Clackworthy, one instinctively felt, wouldn't be interested in any other kind of money.

"You wasn't mebbe thinkin' of farmin' the Tuccio place?" said Mr. Kitt. "I wouldn't hardly have took you for a --er—an agriculturist."

"Never mind about that," retorted the master confidence man. "I want to buy that eighty acres. Its salable value is something like twenty-five hundred. Mrs. Prindivale ought to be satisfied with that, but probably won't be. I'm willing to give five thousand. You get it at five thousand for me and the difference is yours."

Mr. Kitt had difficulty in controlling the muscles of his face. True, a simple-minded sap by the name of Early had paid fifty-five hundred for the Tuccio place, but Mr. Clackworthy was not, by any possible stretch of the imagination, simple-minded. If this canny man of the world was willing to pay five thousand, it was worth more—undoubtedly, a good deal more. Why, why? That question shouted through Mr. Kitt's rather bewildered mind and without any answer.

"I reckon, sir," he said when he could trust himself to speak calmly, "you got land values held too cheap. Mrs. Prindivale—that is Mr. Biddle—has refused six thousand for that farm."

Mr. Clackworthy's eyes narrowed accusingly. "Are you trying to kid me, Mr. Kitt? Mrs. Prindivale refused six thousand dollars for it? Don't make me laugh!"

"Fact," declared the real-estate dealer.

"Land values seem to be kind of boommin' around here lately."

"Then I'm not interested," the master confidence man said curtly and moved toward the door. When Mr. Kitt did not call him back, he paused, retracing his steps. He looked angry.

"Same old game they always play in these hick towns. Let a stranger want to buy something, and up goes the price. But I guess I can do business cheaper through you at that. Get the Tuccio farm for me at six thousand, and there's a thousand dollars in it for you."

Mr. Kitt drummed the tips of his fingers together. Here was a situation which required the use of his wits. He had to have time to think.

"I'll see what I can do," he said. "I'll let you know about it some time tomorrow."

When Mr. Clackworthy had departed, Mr. Kitt leaped to his feet and began pacing the floor. Here, he felt, was his chance to make a killing. But there were obstacles. To begin with, the Tuccio farm had passed out of Mrs. Prindivale's hands. James Early had paid fifty-five hundred dollars for the eighty acres; he had spent some money on poultry houses and chickens. Therefore, it wasn't likely that Early would sell for six. And there was Mrs. Prindivale to be considered. Her wrath would be a terrible thing if she discovered that he, Mr. Kitt, had been trying to make some money on his own "hook." Even at the thought of it, he had a faint feeling.

"It's no use," the real-estate dealer muttered. "There ain't nothin' I can do on my own. I gotta turn this proposition over to Mrs. Prindivale."

A few minutes later, Mr. Kitt was downstairs in the bank, conferring with Mrs. Prindivale.

"Nearest I can figger out," he was saying, "this here Early yap ain't had his deed recorded yet. That's why Mr. Clackworthy thinks tittle's still in Oscar

Biddle's name, and he knows that Oscar Biddle is really you. He's crazy to get hold of that no-good farm, and I'm half crazy myself tryin' to figger out why. What could he want it for?"

"Shut up!" rasped Mrs. Prindivale. "I'm trying to think."

Peremptorily summoned to Mrs. Prindivale's room, Luther Witherspoon, the proprietor of the Prindivale House, wondered uneasily what it would be this time. Without much doubt, it was going to be unpleasant, whatever it was. He rapped respectfully at the door of his star guest.

"Come in!" Mrs. Prindivale's voice sounded even more forbidding than usual. She fixed Mr. Witherspoon with her dead-fish eyes, and poor Luther shuffled his feet uncomfortably. For a moment, there was silence.

"Luther!"

"Yes, Mrs. Prindivale."

"You've got a seven-hundred dollar note due at the bank next Monday morning. Can you pay it?"

A sickly pallor began spreading over the hotel proprietor's face.

"Why—why, I guess you know I can't meet that note," he stammered. "You—you've been lettin' me pay a little something on it when I could."

Having made it clear to Luther Witherspoon that she could put him out of business any time she chose and hinting that such an eventuality was by no means impossible, Mrs. Prindivale abruptly switched to another subject. There was no apparent relevancy between the two but, of course, Luther would not miss the point.

"Luther!"

"Yes, Mrs. Prindivale."

"This man Clackworthy—what do you know about him?"

"No more than anybody else, ma'am, and which is next to nothing."

"I'd like to know what that man is up to, Luther."

"So would everybody else in this town, ma'am."

"I'm suspicious of the man, Luther. Honest men don't hide their business like he does. Who is he? What is he?"

The proprietor of the Prindivale House could only reply with a baffled gesture.

"He may be a crook, Luther. Maybe he's planning to rob the bank. I think we should know something about him." Again she impaled Luther with her icy gaze. "There is one way we can. It's our duty to do it, Luther."

"Do what, ma'am?"

"This Mr. Clackworthy is downstairs having his dinner. You've got a pass-key to his room. I want you to get me whatever papers he's got and bring them here to me—at once. Don't stand there gaping at me like that, you dolt. We're not going to steal anything."

"B-but," stammered Luther Witherspoon, "s-suppose he walked in and caught me goin' through his things? Why—why he could have me arrested; he might——"

"What I'm particularly interested in seeing," broke in Mrs. Prindivale, "is the contents of those important-looking envelopes that have been coming to him in the mail from Chicago." Her heavy, bulging chin thrust itself forward. "Are you going to refuse this simple request, Luther?" she demanded ominously.

Luther Witherspoon gulped. He was on the brink of dilemma; if he refused to rifle Mr. Clackworthy's luggage, she would refuse to give him another extension on his note. It meant he would lose the hotel.

"I'll do it," he capitulated with a grimace of distaste, wondering what Mrs. Prindivale's real motive was. The elegant, solid, substantial Mr. Clackworthy a bank robber? She didn't think that any more than she thought five per cent a satisfactory rate of interest.

It wasn't, after all, so difficult as

Luther Witherspoon had anticipated. Mr. Clackworthy hadn't taken the precaution of locking his bags. Resting conveniently within the top of the suit case was a portfolio neatly arranged with important-looking papers.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Prindivale was discovering why Mr. Clackworthy was trying to buy the practically worthless Tuccio farm. This information, contained in a letter on the letterhead of the International Chemical Co., made Mrs. Prindivale gasp for breath and sent her pulse up to one hundred and twenty. Anybody with a fair knowledge of things knew that the International Chemical Co. was a fifty-million-dollar concern, and what the excited lady didn't know, or rather what she didn't suspect, was that anybody with a printing press could print any kind of a letterhead he chose.

One paragraph in that letter contained the gist of the whole mysterious business.

Radium is where you find it. None of us can quite recover from our surprise to find it so close and in such unprecedented quantities, but the laboratory reports speak for themselves. The rock samples labeled No. 219-B make it clear that you have discovered the richest radium deposit in the history of the chemical industry. I am recommending to the board of directors that they vote you a bonus of one hundred thousand dollars.

Fantastic? We are living in a fantastic age, an era of almost incredulous miracles. A man with a bicycle shop becomes the richest man in the world. Three brothers capture the motion-picture business of the world with a phonograph disk and a radio loud-speaker. Science is the magician which makes impossible things come true. Radium in the rocks of a worthless hillside farm? Not so fantastic, perhaps, after all, considering all of the other amazing things that are happening!

Mrs. Prindivale's hands were trembling as she gave the filched portfolio

back to Luther Witherspoon. She was hardly aware that she did.

"Radium!" she whispered. "Radium! And I sold the Tuccio farm for fifty-five hundred dollars. A hundred thousand dollars—just as a bonus." That meant millions—millions! She tried to remember what radium sold for an ounce; as near as she could recall, it was something like fifty thousand dollars.

In a trance, the woman got to her feet. There was no time to be lost. Any moment Mr. Clackworthy might discover that she no longer owned the Tuccio farm, and then it would be too late. She had to buy the Tuccio place back. No matter if she did have to give the poor fool who thought there was a fortune in raising chickens a profit of two or three thousand, she had to buy it back.

Having returned to Chicago some hours ahead of the Early Bird, Mr. Amos Clackworthy was mixing himself a high ball when he heard the door of his Lakeshore Drive apartment open. The Early Bird stood in the doorway, flapping his arms and crowing like a rooster. He danced a jig, dug his hands into his pockets and, with a grand gesture, flung a fat packet of yellow bills on the table, then another, and then a third.

"There's the stuff, boss. Thirty grand—thirty thousand smackers! Who says there ain't no money in the chicken business. I wasn't called the Early Bird for nothin' huh? Never has it been such a pleasure to take money from anybody. Oh, boy, wouldn't I give somethin' to see that female Shylock's face when she gets tired of waitin' for you to come back and buy the Tuccio farm for two or three million and phones the International Chemical Co. and is told they hadn't never heard of Mr. Clackworthy and that there's about as much radium in her rocks as there is

in an old shoe. Oh, ain't she gonna be one mad lady when she finds out we put the bee on her! Yeah, and how! I gotta hunch, boss, we better slide outa th' country for a while."

The master confidence man shook his head.

"You mean that Mrs. Prindivale may have us prosecuted? No, my dear James, I anticipate nothing like that. Not even for thirty thousand dollars would she let that hick town know that she's been a sucker. But tell me, James, wasn't she rather bowled over when you screwed up the figure to thirty thousand? I didn't really expect you to get more than half of that. Thinking you such a boob, I wonder that didn't make her suspicious."

"Aw, that was dead easy, boss. I kind of give her the idea that Mr. Kitt had wised me up a little."

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Clackworthy. "That's genius, James."

"Sure, boss, I let her think that Kitt was tryin' to double cross her. And then I let her think she was real good by gettin' me down to thirty-five thousand."

"Thirty-five is it now, James? I thought you said thirty."

"I left five grand back there in Prindivale, boss. Y'see, there was a guy that Mrs. Prindivale had put th' screws on. He'd had a lot of bad luck—two of his horses died, and his barn got struck by lightnin' and burned down, and he had a couple of sick kids. She was foreclosin' on him, y'understand, and I kind of got soft about the poor guy. Anyhow, boss, I slipped him three grand he owed Missus Prindivale, and got his kid sent to a hospital, and did a few other little things for 'im. You ain't sore, are you, boss?"

Mr. Clackworthy laughed merrily.

"So long as you did this act of charity with Mrs. Prindivale's money, I'm not. One thing I've always liked about you, James, is that you're so human."

Satan's Wood

THERE WAS MYSTERY IN EVERY NOOK AND
CORNER OF THE PLACE.



By Ernest M. Poate

Author of "Let Me Confess!" etc.

CHAPTER I.

A SHORT VACATION.

ONCE, years ago, Doctor Aloysius Moran and I went hunting together in the Carolinas. We both enjoyed that trip, for we found that our ideas of sport coincided beautifully. To go hunting meant, for the chief medical examiner of New York City—as for my humble self—to go away out into the country, to wear rough clothes all day, to forget dignity and work, and spend the time eating, sleeping and talking, and occasionally, perhaps, to wander off into the woods, shotgun in hand, and loaf gorgeously under the trees. Squirrels would scold at us; rabbits would hop about fearlessly; the bobwhite quail would whistle in our ears. But the

wild life of the Carolinas was safe from us two; we preferred to sit, smoke, and talk largely about a dream world in which all patients should be rich and grateful, and all murderers crafty and vicious, in which I might work miraculous cures, and Doctor Aloysius Moran might endlessly solve intricate criminal mysteries, never failing, and never forced to waste his powers upon mere, obvious gunmen's battles.

We had found that trip delightful, and ever since we had, at odd moments, planned another like it. But something always intervened. When I found myself comparatively free, Doctor Moran would be submerged in some—to him—delightful murder, for he was a conscientious medical examiner, who refused to content himself with a mere autopsy and a formal report of the

causes of death, but spent his energies lavishly in search for the real criminal—usually to the satisfaction, if occasionally to the chagrin, of the police department heads. And when the city was law-abiding, and its citizens refrained from abolishing each other, so that the doctor became restless and irritable, and complained of the dullness of his job, even to the oft-threatened verge of inciting some likely person to murder, it would happen that I had a patient, or several patients, in critical condition, whom I could not leave. For, like every other virtuous practitioner, I was convinced that my patients had employed the best possible doctor for what ailed them; and if I intrusted their care to another, no matter how competent, they might well suffer for it.

And so, in spite of many false starts, and much desultory planning, Doctor Moran and I—Doctor John Pelton, at your service—never did get away together until last October.

On the fifteenth of that month, just at the end of my morning office hour, as I bowed out the last patient, I heard a tremendous, chattering roar from up the street. It grew swiftly louder, became deafening; and a huge, red automobile swept around the corner on two wheels, implacable as the car of Jaganath. It slowed down with a horrid screeching of brakes, and came to a bucking, skidding halt in front of my house. From it emerged a huge head, topped by a high, flat-crowned derby hat; then a great, square, red face; then a pair of thick shoulders. Doctor Aloysius Moran had come calling, in his usual impetuous fashion.

He bounced out of the big red car—a man of sixty-odd, somewhat under middle height, but with a body as long and wide and thick as a barrel. His shoulders were abnormally wide, and perfectly square, and his huge head was set upon them without the interposition of

any visible neck, so that it looked rather like a pumpkin set on top of a big dry-goods box. His arms were very long and thick, like a gorilla's, and his legs were short, and thick also, and much bowed out at the knees. He wore a suit of shepherd's plaid that fairly screamed, it was so loud, and seemed absurdly out of place with his ministerial-looking hat.

Such was Doctor Aloysius Moran, chief medical examiner—a striking figure, almost grotesque, but redeemed from absurdity by a certain forcefulness hard to describe. He was ridiculous, at first glance, as he rushed up the steps of my house, swaying on his short, thick, bandy legs, but one look into his tawny-yellow eyes would have told the most unobserving person that here was a man of importance.

"Hi, Johnny Pelton!" greeted the doctor, in a deep, bass shout. "Come on inside! Want to talk to you."

He removed his flat-topped derby hat, and wiped a forehead very high and wide and bumpy, and swept back the mane of tawny hair that fell across it. His eyebrows were a continuous, inch-wide band of fulvous yellow, sweeping across his face from temple to temple. Beneath it, yellow eyes, like a lion's, snapped and sparkled. He was clean shaven; his nose was short and snubbed, his mouth very wide, his chin as wide and as long as his forehead, and he was obviously in a state of vast excitement—not unusual with Doctor Moran.

"Come inside, man," he repeated, his voice rumbling deep in his throat. "Come on in! Got something to tell you."

I did not move quickly enough to suit him, and his great, square face turned purple. His yellow eyes blazed. Up came a thick, stumpy forefinger; he shook it beneath my nose. "Confound it, come in!" he rumbled.

Abruptly, his sub-bass tones broke,

and leaped two octaves to a shrill, falsetto squawk. "Confound, curse, blast and darn it all, Johnny Pelton!" he cried. "Move, can't you? Get inside, I say!"

The angry color faded; the doctor's wide face broke into the most amiable of smiles. He took his finger from beneath my nose, examined it curiously, and thrust his hand into his pocket. "Let's go into your office, dear friend," he invited, his voice back to its normal sub-cellar bass. "There's no use getting all excited and upset, and telling the neighbors your business. But you always were an incontinent man!"

Grinning widely, at his own inconsistency, perhaps, Doctor Aloysius Moran waddled past me on his short, thick legs, and went into my office. I followed, to find him settled in my most comfortable chair, fumbling at a pocket.

"Look here, Johnny Pelton," he rumbled. "Let me show you! Now where in blazes did I put that thing? Here it is. What do you think of that, young-fellow-my-lad, eh?"

He produced a small, neatly printed pamphlet, and slapped it down on my desk. I glanced at it. "Hotel Aradia, in the Heart of the Catskills."

"Why," said I, "I've got one of those myself. It came in the morning's mail. Yes, and I got another, several months ago; back in the spring, it was."

Doctor Moran snorted. "So did I. What of it? What of it, I say, blast and incinerate it all! This is now, not last spring. Listen!"

He tapped the desk top with a thick, blunt finger, his great, red face wreathed in smiles. He was as blissfully excited as a small boy planning to go fishing.

"Listen, Johnny Pelton! I'm tired. I'm bored. Things are dull—beastly dull! Not a respectable murder in months. Everybody honest, and loving his neighbor, instead of his neighbor's wife. It's no city for an industrious necrologist, Johnny. In short, I'm sick

of doing nothing here in the medical examiner's office, so let us go away somewhere into the woods, and do nothing there. How about it? Let's take a vacation, Johnny Pelton. What say, eh?"

I deliberated. "Why, we've talked it over so often, and something's always turned up to prevent. But things are pretty slow with me, too, just now. Yes, I believe I can make it."

Doctor Moran jumped up. "Let's go!" he mumbled, his wide mouth all agrin. "Come along!" And he started toward the door as though about to start his trip this instant.

"Hold on!" I called after him. "There are a few little things to decide, first, such as finding a substitute to take care of what little practice I've got left, and borrowing some money from the bank for expenses, and all this and that. And another thing, too: Where shall we go?"

He stared at me in apparent surprise, his tawny eyes sparkling. "Where? Where?" he cried. "What have I been talking about, all this while? Why, to this Aradia place, naturally. Haven't you read the prospectus, darn it? 'Good, plain food; quiet, homelike surroundings; hunting and fishing close by.' What more would you ask, eh?"

I glanced the pamphlet over. "It reads well," I conceded. "But what do we know about this place, anyhow?"

"What do we need to know? What more, I mean? Why, I've been getting an announcement from this place twice a year for two years, now; spring and fall. That shows it's an established hotel, doesn't it? Been running two years, at least. Besides," argued Doctor Moran pugnaciously, "what do we need to be so gosh-darned careful for, anyhow? Aren't we old enough, and tough enough, and ugly enough, to take care of ourselves? It isn't as though Alice Macy were loose," he finished, with a sudden change of tone.

I shivered involuntarily. That name was enough, at any time, to send a thrill of fear up my spine. For Alice Macy—or Alicia Tavannes, as she had called herself when we first knew her—had sworn a dreadful vengeance upon Doctor Moran and upon me. And she was quite capable of carrying out the most horrid threats, since, to our knowledge, she had poisoned a small boy, and all but murdered a woman in a peculiarly horrible fashion, by applying leeches to her veins while she lay unconscious.

"No," I agreed slowly. "She's not loose, thank Heaven!"

The medical examiner grinned cheerfully, and rubbed thick hands together. "She'll never trouble us again."

"Don't be too sure," I warned him. "Prisoners have escaped before now; and that woman is as clever as a fiend—if she isn't one in fact."

"There's a prison from which nobody escapes, though, and the fair Alice has been committed to it."

I stared at him. "You mean——"

"Exactly. I mean she's dead, and thank goodness for it. I got to wondering about her, not long ago, and I wrote the women's prison to inquire. They told me she died there, quite suddenly, about two years ago."

I pondered that a moment. "I'm mighty glad of it," I decided. "If it's true."

"True? True?" Doctor Aloysius Moran glared at me, his great, square face purpling. His voice leaped two octaves to an enraged squeal. "True? Of course, it's true, blast it! Think they'd lie to me?"

He shook a thick forefinger beneath my nose, then suddenly withdrew it and looked it all over, as though he thought I might have bitten it off. "You oughtn't to be so skeptical, Johnny Pelton," he mumbled very mildly. "Because it makes me nervous. Because I felt just about like that, myself."

The doctor paused, his tawny eyes

absent, a curious expression on his face. His fulvous eyebrows twitched.

"I'm not superstitious in a general way," he went on reflectively. "But there was something not quite human about that creature. She was really beautiful, you remember? Perfect features, and a voice like—like the ringing of thin glass. And those green eyes of hers, deep as the sea. But, Johnny, my lad, did you ever see her without shrinking? Didn't she make you shudder inside? Wasn't she like a beautiful, poisonous snake?"

"Worse than that."

"Worse, indeed! As I say, I'm not ordinarily superstitious, but, if there are witches, Johnny, she was a witch."

And to that I agreed. "Or a vampire," I added, shuddering again at the memory of Alice Macy, her white teeth gleaming from between parted, scarlet lips, as she stooped over the exsanguinated form of poor Mrs. Burbage.

"Well, witch or vampire, she was a demon—if there are demons. And I'm glad she's dead, Johnny Pelton. I sleep better of nights for knowing it."

What moved me to it, I cannot guess, even to this day, but my lips parted then, and I spoke. It was as though another voice used my tongue for its own purposes.

"Evil never dies," I said, and sat still, staring at my guest in dumb bewilderment.

Doctor Moran stared back, a strange expression on his face, and made an abortive gesture as though he would have crossed himself. Then he shook his great, thick shoulders, and burst into a rumbling laugh.

"We're two old women, Johnny Pelton!" he declared, thumping my shoulder. "Toothless, doddering grandmothers. Shame on us both! Now, let's plan this hunting trip, and have no more foolishness."

"Right you are. How do we get to this place, anyhow?"

The doctor thumbed that pamphlet. "Pollakville Station," he read. "On the B. & A., it says. Then you drive ten miles or so over improved roads. Motor bus meets trains by appointment."

"One place is as good as another," I told him. "As long as it's not too far away; and as long as it's quiet. What's the proprietor's name?"

"Manew. Mrs. Sarah Manew. Har-rumph!" Doctor Moran cleared his throat thunderously, as was his startling habit, so that I jumped. "Peculiar name, that. Manew. Pollakville. Sounds Balkan, doesn't it? Probably Manieu, to begin with. Well, Johnny Pelton, when shall I write Mrs. Manew to expect us?"

I thought a moment. "I can get H. P. D. Ames to look after my work. Why, I could start day after to-morrow."

"Good enough! I'll write to-night. No, I'll telegraph. Want to be sure and get rooms."

Doctor Moran half rose, then sank back into his chair, staring oddly at that neatly printed pamphlet. "Aradia," he repeated. "Hotel Aradia. Yes, and the seasons, too. May and October. There's something queer about that, Johnny Pelton."

"What's so queer? I suppose it's on account of the game laws, or something like that. But lots of such places have two seasons a year."

"Ye-es. Of course. But May and October, and at the Aradia."

"Why not?"

The medical examiner eyed me askance. "Didn't you ever hear of Aradia?"

"We-ell, I think—— It sounds familiar, somehow. But I can't remember anything about it. Might be the name of a Pullman car."

"It is the name," said Doctor Moran, half seriously, "of the patron goddess of all witches and sorcerers. Aradia was the daughter of Diana and Lucifer,

born in the dark of the moon, and her sign and symbol was the cat. Hence, all witches keep black cats."

He looked at me rather defiantly and went on. "And the night of April 30th is Walpurgis-nacht—Walpurga's Eve, the spring festival of Pan; the night when all evil spirits are loosened. While as for Halloween, the last night in October, I suppose even you, Johnny Pelton," he finished rudely, "I suppose even you must have heard tales about Halloween?"

I stared at the doctor curiously, wondering, as I had wondered before on more than one occasion, how much the man really believed of all that mass of superstitious lore he knew so well. For Doctor Aloysius Moran was a veritable mine of quaint and curious information about ghosts and vampires and witches and sorcerers and necromancers and succubi and incubi and I know not what of supernatural matters.

"You don't believe that rot, surely?"

Doctor Moran forced a grin. Or I fancied that his smile was constrained. "Certainly not. Har-rumph! But just the same, I'm glad Alice Macy is dead. If she were alive, I'd hesitate to visit any place called Aradia, and especially at Halloween time."

CHAPTER II.

WITCH HOLLOW.

IT developed that Mrs. Sarah Manew would be delighted to reserve two rooms for Doctor Moran and me; and so we completed our preparations and finally set out for Pollakville on the morning of October 18th, as delighted as two schoolboys on the first day of their long vacation.

The train trip was long and tedious. We had to change three times, waiting an hour or more each time, and changing from a dingy, cindery local to one still more dingy and forlorn, so that Doctor Moran mourned and bewailed

his foolishness in taking a train instead of motoring comfortably through the country. Throughout his complaints, he eyed me with bitter meaning, but I hardened my heart. Doubtless, this trip was dirty, smoky and fatiguing, yet to have trusted myself to Doctor Aloysius Moran's driving through a hundred-and-fifty-mile motor trip would have been suicidal. And so I told him.

"Grumble all you please," I said serenely. "It's dirty, yes, and sooty. My hair is full of cinders, and there's a big one in my eye. And this day coach hasn't been cleaned since Stephenson's day. All very true. But, my dear, good, reckless friend, in this way we shall arrive at our destination, dirty and uncomfortable, no doubt, but all in one piece. While with your driving—I say no more, Doctor Moran, except that I want to go to Pollakville, not to my last long home."

The medical examiner grinned reluctantly. "I suppose you'd like to have a boy on horseback riding in front of every automobile, waving a red flag," he gibed. But I was not crushed.

"It is a pity there can't be some means of warning traffic off the roads before you come along. Why, the car of Juggernaut would be nothing to that red car of yours, not even if it had sixteen cylinders."

"Har-umph!" said Doctor Moran. "This must be Pollakville, now. High time, too! We might have been here five hours ago."

The rickety engine squealed asthmatically; our battered day coach bumped to a halt, and we disembarked as the brakeman announced, "Pollakville!" My companion glanced disparagingly about the mean, dilapidated village.

"If this is city, what must the suburbs be!"

A flannel-shirted youth was approaching. His tanned face was quite expressionless; he chewed gum vigorously.

"This them two doctors f'r Mrs. Manew's place?" he inquired—of empty space, apparently, for he looked at neither of us.

"These is them," replied Doctor Moran promptly. "Can you take us there?"

"Uh-huh. Baggage?"

The youth chewed his gum harder than ever, and his pale eyes wandered about, looking for our bags. He seemed a taciturn person.

We collected our impedimenta: a suit case and hand bag each, and a leather gun case or two, and a jointed fish rod each. Though neither of us had much idea of hunting or fishing, it would have looked odd, we had decided, to come without any sporting implements at all.

The young man took a suit case in each hand, leaving the other things for us to bring. "Bus around behind the depot," he vouchsafed, and stalked away.

We followed meekly, to find an ancient flivver standing at the edge of a wide dirt road. It was an open car, and topless, and its fenders were sadly crumpled, and tied on with wires. One door was missing entirely, and the others swung loose; but as our guide cranked its motor, after heaping our baggage into the tonneau, it gave forth a satisfying regular humming roar. Obviously, for all its dilapidated appearance, the thing would still run.

Doctor Moran and I scrambled in, and settled ourselves as best we could among gun cases and bags, and the youth drove off without a word. We went down the one wide street of Pollakville, where a loafer or two sat somnolently on benches in front of mean little shops, and then struck into a well-paved State road. Our driver glanced to his right at the low-hanging sun, and opened his throttle wide, so that we sped along the pavement at the flivver's very best pace.

The country was rough and hilly. On

either side, steep slopes climbed to sharp summits, and beyond them we could see crest after crest, higher and higher, as the foothills gave place to veritable mountains. We drove along a narrow, winding gut, evidently a pass through the mountain range, and our general direction was southeast.

Our chauffeur spoke no word, but he kept pushing the flivver until its radiator puffed steam. It panted and labored up long grades, shot down steep hills like a frightened rabbit, took sharp curves on two wheels, so that I was almost thrown out, and began to wonder if I might not have been safer even with Doctor Moran's driving. And all the while, the driver kept his eyes front, save for an occasional worried glance at the setting sun, and vouchsafed us no attention whatever.

At last, I leaned forward to address him, thinking that he might be shy of us as city folks. I fairly had to shout, the rickety old car made such a noise.

"What kind of a town is this Pollakville?" I asked idly, with nothing in mind save to start a conversation.

The youth shrugged. "Bum," he grunted, never looking around.

I tried again. "Funny name, isn't it?"

"Nope. Settled by Pollaks and Hunnies, 'at's all."

We labored up a long, long slope, in places so steep that we had to go into low gear and travel no faster than a man could walk. At last, we reached its crest, and the driver paused to cool his boiling radiator.

Far off to our right, the red sun hung low above tall mountains. The sky was deeply blue, and very clear at the zenith; but around the horizon hung a vague, faint, shimmering mist—a haze, rather, such as one sees in Indian summer. I breathed deeply. The keen, sweet air held a faint and far-off tang of wood smoke.

It was a pleasant prospect that lay

outspreed before my eyes. Here, nature remained virgin. As far as one could see, there was no sign of human habitation and not even a road, save the one we traveled. Hill was heaped up behind towering hill, and all the slopes were thickly wooded, and trees and dense underbrush grew right up to the edge of the concrete. Here, if anywhere, we could find peace and solitude, I thought. It was very restful.

Before us, the country fell away in long, rolling sweeps, for uncounted miles, until one could see the distant plain beyond the mountains. On either side, the rolling hills marched off, separating gradually, to leave a wedge-shaped valley which notched deep into the mountain range so that its head was but a few miles before us. This valley was bare of trees, for the most part, though little woodlands stood here and there, but one could make out no signs of cultivation. That faint, thin haze hung over what seemed a natural meadow.

Beside me, Doctor Moran stirred. "Wild country, isn't it?" he murmured with a satisfied smile. "Not a sign of life. Good! How far is it to the Aradia Hotel, son?"

Our driver started, and glanced again at the sun. "Far enough," he grumbled. "Too far. Must be six or seven miles."

"It ought to be in sight, then," I protested, and searched the empty plain which lay at our feet.

"Can't see nothing. Trees hide it. It's in about there." The young man pointed briefly, and started up his motor, and began to plunge recklessly down the long slope.

"Many people live down there?" Doctor Moran inquired.

"Uh-huh. Some. Must be couple hundred folks in the Hollow, all told."

"Are they Poles, too? Mrs. Manew's name sounds as if it might have been Hungarian, once, or Roumanian."

The youth nodded. "Yeah. Her folks come f'om the old country. Lotta Hunkies, and all like that."

"What's your name?" I asked casually.

"Lesky. Con Lesky."

"Leslie?"

"Nope. Lesky! Conrad Lesky."

He was entirely serious; he saw no inconsistency in his contempt for "Hunkies and all like that."

All the while, young Lesky was driving faster and faster, until we shot down the long hill at a dangerous speed. I protested mildly.

"We're in no such hurry as that. Take your time."

But he only glanced over a shoulder at the sun, which almost touched the tallest mountaintop, and urged the flivver on. "Gotta get back," he mumbled uneasily. "It's most sunset now."

Doctor Moran leaned forward. "Are the people out this way very superstitious? Do they believe in witches, and so on?"

"Yeah. Sure. Reg'lar hill-billies, ignorant as anything. Superstitious as all get-out." He drove faster yet. "Backwoods Bohunks!" he sneered.

I was holding on with both hands, praying that we might reach the Aradia alive, but Doctor Moran enjoyed his ride. Our reckless speed exhilarated him. He laughed aloud.

"This is traveling!" he exulted. "Speed her up, son."

We fairly dropped down a last, long grade, and, with a sigh of relief, I realized that we had reached the bottom of that frightening slope. Now the road wound and twisted through waste lands, from which the timber had long since been stripped, so that it was grown up to ragged thickets of second growth. Hills cut off our view, and the road twisted among them. Evidently, the valley which had seemed so level from that mountaintop was cut up, actually, into ravines and guts between steep,

jagged, rocky knolls. Now we climbed one of these, and I could see for a couple of miles, perhaps.

Almost directly in front of us was a rather extensive woodland, which must have covered many acres. It was a delight to the eye, tired of viewing waste, brambly slashings, dotted with stumps.

"There's a regular forest, Moran," I pointed out. "That must be near the hotel, unless the announcement lied. There's no other woods in sight, and the notice claimed 'extensive forests.'"

"How about that, son?" inquired Doctor Moran.

Lesky nodded. "Yeah. It's A-dog Woods, a' right."

"What did you call it?" I demanded, struck by the odd name. "'A Dog's Woods'?"

Beside me, the medical examiner grunted significantly. "Ordog's Wood," he corrected. "Isn't that it, Con? Ordog's Wood—Satan's Wood—the Hexenwald."

Lesky looked over his shoulder, turning right around so that I made sure we would be wrecked. His face was troubled, uneasy, suspicious.

"Whaddayuh mean?" he asked. I saw him thrust out his left hand, fur-tively: its two middle fingers were folded in, its forefinger and little finger thrust stiffly out in that ancient sign of the horned hand of Ashtoreth—what the Italians call the "*jettatura*." As every one knows, that symbol wards off all witchcraft, and especially the "evil eye." It seemed that Con Lesky, too, for all his contempt of such things, acknowledged a grain of superstition.

"Whaddayuh mean, Hexenwald? Some of the old folks does call it that, sometimes." He mumbled his breath in a foreign language. I thought I heard a word: "*Stregoica*."

Doctor Moran nudged me. "Means a witch," he whispered. And, aloud: "What's the name of this settlement we're coming to?"

"Witch Hollow," grunted young Lesky, without turning. And he drove faster than ever, glancing at the sun. "Most there, now." He sighed deeply as with relief.

We had reached a crossroads. There was no house in sight, nor any sign of life; no evidence that human beings had penetrated thus far before us, save the road we traversed—its pavement gone, now, to be replaced by uneven, gravelly dirt—and that other road, which was scarcely more than a track, which crossed it at right angles. Beyond the crossroads lay the tall, thick-standing trees of Ordog's Wood. Con Lesky hunched his bullet head between his shoulders, as though against a driving storm, and forced the flivver to its utmost.

We entered the gloomy aisles of the forest, and lost sight of the sun. Here it was dusk, as it must have been even at midday, for the wood was very dense. Tall evergreen trees crowded right to the edge of the road. Our driver looked neither to the right nor the left; he was rigid and tense, and obviously afraid. I wondered why.

Presently—scarcely more than a hundred and fifty yards beyond the crossroads. I noticed an opening in the forest at our right. The great trees were more widely spaced, and there was less undergrowth, that was all. The forest remained unbroken. But one could see uncertainty, between thick trunks, for several rods into the woodland.

Looking that way, I seemed to see a gray-stone wall, and so rubbed my eyes and looked again. Yes, there was a building there, in the heart of that deep forest. I shivered involuntarily; it seemed a strange place to build. For there was something strange, uncanny, not quite wholesome, about that Ordog's Wood, so that I could not wonder at its name. Surely, Satan, and no more amiable spirit, dwelt here!

I was the more surprised, then, to

see, by straining my eyes, that it was a chapel which stood there in Satan's Wood. Yes, it was tumble-down and half ruined, its gray stone walls breached, and half its spire fallen, but it was a veritable church, none the less.

A breath, a flash, and we had passed and were rocketing onward through dense forest. The ruined chapel had vanished as though by magic, and I half doubted having seen it at all. I turned to Doctor Moran.

He nodded. "An old church. I saw it, too. With a graveyard beside it. Odd place for a church!"

Our driver heard, shuddered, and crossed himself. Then, suddenly, he screamed, and jerked at the steering wheel until we lurched and skidded half across the road. The flivver slid into the left-hand ditch and nearly upset. Con Lesky stared with bulging eyes at something in the thick woods on our right—something white, which seemed to flutter and move as I watched it.

The boy was livid with horror. His teeth chattered; he muttered thickly, and I caught one word: "Vrolek! Vrolek!" repeated over and over.

With prompt presence of mind, Doctor Moran half rose, and, leaning far over, reached a thick arm past our trembling driver to catch the steering wheel. Exerting his great strength, the medical examiner straightened the flivver out, so that we scrambled back into the road.

"Har-rumph!" said he. "Newspaper. Nothing but a piece of paper. Drive on, my bold lad."

Con Lesky flushed darkly. He seemed ashamed of his outbreak, and gripped the wheel again, and drove on. None the less, he glanced apprehensively over his right shoulder at intervals.

"Them woods is—is queer," he muttered defensively. "Feller's got a right to be scairt, things that's happened there."

He would say nothing more, though I plied him with questions. The wood was "queer"; things had happened there. And, furthermore, he must get us to Mrs. Manew's place just as quickly as he could, because he wasn't going to drive through Ordog's Wood after sunset. And he drove as fast as if the Erl-King himself rode after us.

I was vastly intrigued, and, I must admit, the least trifle uncomfortable. But Doctor Moran, beside me, only grinned a placidly superior grin, and said nothing, save that he whispered once to me, too low for our driver to hear:

"Vrolek," he said, "means a vampire."

That called up a most unpleasant memory. Once more, I seemed to see Alice Macy, or Alicia Tavnanes, green eyes blazing, red lips parted, as she suddenly leaned over the ghastly, bloodless figure of Mrs. Burbage, on whose bare throat was a tiny, pale-lipped wound.

I leaned forward nervously, and I was almost as glad as Con Lesky, I think, when we made a sharp turn to the right and a rambling white house came into view. Con pointed toward it.

"Mrs. Manew's place," he vouchsafed.

It was not a large building. It seemed scarcely more than a cottage. It stood well back from the road, beneath tall, funereal evergreen trees: fir and hemlock, that loomed blue-black in the fading light. Its paint, originally white, but faded to a ghostly gray, gleamed faintly from the shadows all about, so that I thought of an ancient tombstone. Altogether, it was an uninviting place to reach after our drive through Satan's Wood.

No light shone from its small, many-paned windows; no smoke rose from its low, rough-stone chimney. It seemed deserted, lurking beneath those tall, sad trees like some furtive ghost

hiding from human eyes. As I stared at the old house, a huge black cat appeared from nowhere, and sat itself down upon the stone doorstep, and watched us with yellow, shining eyes.

"This can't be a hotel!" I protested. But as the flivver squealed to a stop, I saw a signboard, freshly painted, that hung from a tree by the road: and its legend ran thus: "Hotel Aradia."

"It's Mrs. Manew's, a' right," Con Lesky repeated. And without more words, he leaped from his seat and began, with frenzied haste, to fling our baggage out upon the ground.

Almost before Doctor Moran and I could alight, he was back in his place, and racing the flivver's motor. "Don't you want your pay?" I suddenly shouted, above its roar, but he only shook his head.

"Be on th' bill!" he screamed, and backed his car, and wrenched it about in the road, and was off at top speed, driving as though Satan pursued.

Thick dust, mingled with black smoke from the exhaust, blew into our faces; and, before we could protest, Con Lesky had vanished around the nearest curve, leaning forward over his wheel like a jockey in the stretch.

I looked at Doctor Moran, and laughed uneasily. "Well, here we are."

"Har-rumph! Quite! Here we are, as you so clearly state it. And I, for one, am glad of it. Let's go eat."

The doctor picked up suit case, bag and gun case, and turned toward the Hotel Aradia. As he stumped up the weed-grown path, I glanced westward. The round, red sun had reached the treetops; even as I watched, it sank, as with a sudden plunge, behind the western hills, and was gone.

Sunset! And Con Lesky must be in the very thickest of Ordog's Wood. I wondered vaguely what he might meet there among its shadows, and cursed myself for a superstitious fool, and followed the medical examiner.

CHAPTER III.

THE ARADIA HOTEL.

AS we stumbled up that weed-grown path, the huge black cat sat upon the doorstep and watched inscrutably. In all the visible prospect, there was no other sign of life, yet it seemed to me that our every movement was watched by something invisible, as keenly as by that enormous, coal-black cat.

The beast sat still until we were almost upon it. Then it rose abruptly, yellow eyes aflame, and arched its back, and opened its red mouth, and spat at us soundlessly. Its fierce, triangular face was a mask of demoniac hatred; laid back ears, bushy tail, sharp claws, all spoke of such fury that involuntarily I halted.

Doctor Moran chuckled. "If Aradia has any votary hereabouts, this would be a splendid familiar," he declared, nodding at the cat. And then, quite undisturbed by the brute's menacing attitude, he set foot on the doorstep.

With a movement so swift that the eye could not follow it, the great black cat whirled and darted into the shrubbery which grew thick and untrimmed all about the house. It was there, and it was gone, and it needed no great stretch of imagination to fancy that it had vanished, instead of running away.

In the same instant, the closed front door, ornamented with a knocker cast in the shape of a human head which wore two short horns, swung silently back, and we saw an old woman in the aperture.

She was a gaunt old lady, much stooped and bent, with thin, gray hair drawn tightly back, and knotted, oddly enough, with a bright-red ribbon. Her nose was large and hooked, and her pointed chin thrust forward. She was toothless, so that her jaws shut together like nutcrackers, and nose and chin seemed almost to touch, as in old pictures of witches. Beneath shaggy gray

eyebrows, her deep-set eyes were rheumy and red-rimmed, and to me they seemed haunted by some secret terror. Altogether, she was a strange old woman, and one who, three centuries ago, might well have been burned at the stake merely because of her eerie look, and the great black cat she kept.

But she smiled at us pleasantly enough, and, when she spoke, she seemed a kindly, innocent old lady as one might wish to meet.

"This is Doctor Moran, isn't it? And Doctor Pelton, too? Come right in, gentlemen. Elvira! Elvira! Drat that girl! She's mooning again. Sorry you had to fetch your own baggage. Con ought to have fetched it in before he went. But come right in, gentlemen, and warm yourselves. Gets chilly around sunset; for all it's only October. Supper'll be on the table in a jiffy."

So she ushered us in, talking all the while, and brought us to a large, pleasantly furnished sitting room in which a log fire burned in a fireplace almost as large as a hall bedroom. The room was brightly lighted with oil lamps, but the shades were so closely drawn that not the least ray could escape to lighten the dusk without. The fire crackled and snapped cheerfully, and from the rear a faint, delicious smell of cookery floated in to our eager nostrils.

Doctor Moran settled his thick body in an armchair, and spread out blunt hands to the blaze. Chin on his great, arched chest, he looked all around, turning his eyes but not his head, as was his habit.

"Har-rumph! Quite a contrast," he mumbled. "Outside was just the least bit—er, well, ghostly, so to say. But inside—fine!" He sniffed hugely. "Smells good, doesn't it? I can't remember when we ate last, can you?"

"A long time ago," I declared sincerely. "I'm all ready to eat again."

Our hostess had disappeared, but now she returned, thrusting before her a

slatternly figure clad in a soiled red dress. "Come on, now, Vera," she scolded. "Fine lot of good you are to me, mooning around like you do. Why weren't you outside, to get these gentlemen's bags? Take and fetch 'em upstairs, now, and hurry up about it." She turned to us.

"More trouble trying to get anything out of her than to do it myself," she complained. "But then——" She looked around. Elvira had gone out, carrying a bag in either hand. Mrs. Manew tapped her forehead. "But then, she ain't hardly accountable. Comes from that Raggles tribe, back in the hills, and they're no better'n half-wits, all of 'em. Live just like animals, they do."

The slattern came shuffling back, and I looked at her curiously. She was young, surely not more than twenty, but her face was drawn and wizened like that of an old woman. It was a rabbit-like face, almost chinless, with narrow jaws and protruding teeth over which inadequate lips refused to close. Her eyes were prominent and watery and very pale, almost colorless, and they were vacant and dull. No light of intelligence shone in them. The girl was patently an imbecile. It did not need her crumpled ears, her symmetrical features, one eye set half an inch higher than its mate, nor her microcephalic head, scarcely half the normal size, to tell me that. Her vacant glance alone betrayed her.

For the rest, she was gaunt and ill made, with huge hands and feet. She shuffled awkwardly, stumbling over her own feet, and her loose lips were set in a never-changing, silly grin. It was pitiful.

"Don't earn her keep," Mrs. Manew complained. "More trouble'n she's worth, a sight! Elvira Raggles! Pick up them bags and fetch 'em upstairs, you hear me? Stand there gaping!"

Elvira giggled emptily, and obeyed.

Doctor Moran gave our hostess a questioning glance. "It's good of you to put up with her," said he. "But wouldn't she be better off in some institution?"

"A sight better!" Mrs. Manew agreed. "Been in trouble already, Elvira has, on'y them Raggleses don't think nothing of that. Wouldn't know enough to call it trouble, even. Got a baby, 'bout two year old. She——"

A beam in the ancient ceiling creaked sharply, and Mrs. Manew stopped short with an apprehensive glance upward. "There's lots of queer noises in this old house. A body'd think, sometimes, the roof'd fall in onto your head. But it's good and solid, gentlemen. You don't need to worry."

I fancied that the look of secret apprehension in her deep-set eyes was more pronounced. Certainly, she fidgeted nervously, arranging vases on the mantel shelf. And she would say no more about Elvira Raggles, though we both questioned her. When Doctor Moran suggested again that the girl belonged in an institution, Mrs. Manew only shrugged.

"Can't none of us do what-all we'd like to," she evaded. "There's reasons I——" She checked herself, a look of manifest fear in her strange eyes. "Your supper's all ready. Better come on in and set up."

Thankfully, we sat down to an excellent hot meal. Mrs. Manew seemed the very soul of hospitality; she pressed food upon us, and smiled at our appetites. When we had finished, she showed us upstairs to our bedrooms.

We were her only guests, she explained. Usually, she had five or six at this time, but this year no one else had come. Times were hard, on account of the stock market, so folks claimed, though she didn't know anything about that. She hoped we'd like our rooms.

They were very pleasant, indeed, large and airy, and comfortably fur-

nished. There was even a well-equipped bathroom between them. The water came from springs back on the hillside, Mrs. Manew told us. There were no electric lights, but she planned to have a small electric plant installed, another year.

The house was small, as I have said. These second-floor rooms were low-ceiled, with dormer windows, and there was no third floor. I could see only two doors, beside our own, which opened into the hall, and I wondered, idly, where our hostess could put six guests, if she had them.

Looking absently out through the half-open door of my room while I listened to Mrs. Manew's chatter, I saw the door opposite move silently. It opened a little way, and I fancied that I could see a flutter of black garments through the crack.

"Why, you've got another guest," said I, forgetting what she had told us. "We'll have to remember there's a lady on the floor, Moran."

Mrs. Manew looked frightened. "Why, no!" she fluttered. "No, no, there ain't another body in the house—not a one. Elvira and—Elvira, she sleeps in an outhouse, and my room's downstairs in the lean-to. Ain't another soul in the house, on'y you gentlemen."

I wondered at her insistence. "I thought I saw the door across the hall swing open, that was all."

"Must've been the wind. Yes, sir, doctor. O' course, it was the wind."

This explanation appeared to relieve her so much that I said no more, though the night was singularly still. But that huge cat might have pushed the door open; and, as for the draperies I had fancied, they might have been no more than the play of shadows from a flickering oil lamp.

I was too tired and sleepy to be very curious, anyhow. So I yawned, and said "good night" to Mrs. Manew, and prepared to retire. Doctor Moran sat

for a moment in front of the fireplace—for there was a fireplace in each room, with a glowing log fire therein—smoking and pondering. Then he stretched his long, thick arms and rose.

"Aradia," said he thoughtfully. "It's well named. A grand place for witchcraft, sure enough. Mrs. Manew would pass for a witch, anywhere, and we saw her familiar outside."

"And Elvira, I suppose, is the princess whom she has bewitched," I suggested, trying to make a joke of it.

Doctor Moran gave me a queer glance. "Elvira has been bewitched, all right," he answered. "Did you see what she wore around her neck?"

"Why, no. What, then?"

"Take a look in the morning, and see what you think of it. Ho-hum! I'm going to bed. Sorcery or none, it's a comfortable place, this. M-mm, but those biscuits were good, and also the maple sirup. Good night, Johnny, my lad."

CHAPTER IV.

COVEN?

I WAS up betimes, and dressed and went out into the fresh, fragrant morning air. The sun was just rising; it was crisply cold and bracing so that I felt young and exuberant, and whistled cheerfully as I walked around the old house.

Early as I was, Doctor Moran had been before me, for I met him striding stoutly along on his thick, short bandy legs, and humming in a sub-cellar bass: "Rocked in the cradle of the deep!"

The last word came in a vibrant organ tone that was almost too deep for a human larynx to compass. "Bravo!" I applauded, making believe to clap my hands.

"Har-rumph!" The medical examiner seemed embarrassed. "How do you like the Aradia by now?"

"Fine! I think we're going to enjoy it here."

We stood beside the ancient house, where we could see the kitchen garden at its rear, and a small structure a couple of rods behind it, apparently made of logs. This was the outhouse, no doubt, where Elvira Raggles slept.

My guess was verified almost at once, for the slatternly girl emerged from it, her thin, sandy hair all in tangles about her tiny head, her pale eyes swollen with sleep. She carried a shapeless bundle in her arms, and her face was bent over it, and she crooned to it tunelessly.

For all the asymmetry, the imbecility, of her wizened face, Elvira Raggles was almost beautiful in that moment. Her pale eyes were bright with mother love; her smile was tender. She clutched the squirming bundle awkwardly enough, but as carefully as though she held the world's greatest treasure.

Then, seeing us, she started back with a feral snarl, like some wild animal surprised and ready to defend its young. Doctor Moran spoke to her gently.

"Good morning, Elvira. Is that your baby?"

The woman's face changed. Once more it was vacant, silly, idiotic. "Uh-huh," she nodded, grinning.

"Let us see, won't you?"

She hesitated, then advanced warily, and we looked at what she held.

It was a child of two years, perhaps—a pitiful object, with the huge, bulging head of the hydrocephalic, and beneath it a pinched little visage like a monkey's face from which bright black eyes peered knowingly. The little creature was deformed, rachitic, unwholesome. Its eyes were sore, its skin was blotched and roughened, and it wore, as such children sometimes do, an expression of uncanny, evil wisdom such as might have shone from the eyes of a very ancient, very learned, and quite unprincipled woman. Yet to its mother, it was precious, for she held it lovingly,

and awaited our praise with patent pride, as if to say, "Of course, my baby is wonderful!"

I strove to look admiring, and muttered a few words, and put out a finger to touch that pitifully wrinkled cheek. The child stared at me coldly, contemptuously, with that air of precocious wisdom, so that I almost blushed. Doctor Moran rubbed his long, heavy chin.

"An unusual baby," he declared, with complete conviction. "Unique, in fact. Har-rumph!"

The uncanny little creature burst into sudden, elfin mirth. Elvira grinned her foolish grin, and eyed the medical examiner with abject gratitude. "You—you're good," she declared, and came closer.

"Listen!" she whispered, glancing furtively about. "Listen! You go away f'om here. G'wan, quick! It ain't—ain't—healthy."

"Maybe we know how to take care of ourselves, Elvira," replied the doctor. "Look!" And he showed her his left hand, its two middle fingers folded into the palm, its little finger and forefinger stiffly extended in that sign of the horned hand that Con Lesky had made, last night. What was the man getting at?

But Elvira grinned widely, and nodded as though completely enlightened. "Oh! Well, o' course, if you're one of them over there"—jerking her head sideways to the left—"that makes it—"

"Elvira! Elvira Raggles, you come here this minute."

Frightened, Elvira wheeled toward the house. "Yes'm, yes'm yes'm," she shrilled. "Comin'." Stumbling over her own feet, she turned to her cabin, and darted into it, to emerge again, presently, without her child, and shuffle toward the house.

"Let's take a stroll, Johnny, my lad," suggested Doctor Moran. "How about it? Mrs. Manew!" He raised his

voice to a bass shout. "Mrs. Manew! Have we time for a walk before breakfast?"

"I guess so," answered our hostess in a shrill quaver. "Breakfast won't be ready f'r an hour, a'most. Didn't figger you'd be getting up quite so early as this."

So we set off toward the road, and crossed it, and struck into the woods beyond. Doctor Moran wore ancient corduroy breeches, and leather putties and thick-soled shoes, and I, too, was roughly dressed, so that we feared neither mud nor brambles. And the deep woodland was inviting; and, this morning, cheerful and innocuous enough, full of the songs of birds and the loud chattering of squirrels. Wild flowers bloomed here and there, late as it was, and chipmunks whisked about, and a partridge rose with a sudden thunder of wings, almost beneath our feet. It was very pleasant in the woods; my vague fears of last night were forgotten quite. Ordog's Wood! Satan's Wood, indeed! This was a delightful spot, to one who loved nature, and seldom had a chance to commune with her.

We walked on, Doctor Moran and I, deeper and deeper into the thick wood. Wild, furtive, furry creatures were all about, eying us dubiously from treetops or darting behind fallen logs to hide, or racing up and down thick trunks to scold angrily at our intrusion.

We took no heed of direction, moving now this way, to examine an unusually tall tree, now that way, to look at a fern, now the other way, to watch a busy squirrel, so that after half an hour or so we had no more than reached the center of the woodland, which was scarcely a mile wide. I was about to suggest that we turn back when my roving eye caught a glint of something rough and gray.

"Hello!" said I. "We must be near the road we drove over last night.

Here's the chapel that scared young Lesky so."

I started toward it, and the doctor followed, but we did not reach the ruined church that morning. We could see it plainly, standing in a tiny clearing—a tumble-down structure whose steeple tilted perilously and half of whose roof had fallen in. It was all built of gray stone, moss covered and evidently very old and long deserted. Beside it was a small graveyard in which mossy, stone slabs canted this way and that.

But as we went toward the old chapel, we saw another clearing before us, and suddenly debouched into a circular open space. It might have been forty feet in diameter and it was so regular in outline that one felt it must be artificial. Beyond it the woods began again, and through them, between close-set trunks, I could see the old chapel. It was farther away than I had thought, more than a hundred yards, even now.

I would have struck across the clearing without pausing, but Doctor Moran's shrill whistle checked me, and I turned. My companion had stopped in the middle of the open space, and was leaning over a big, rough boulder which stood there.

"Come here, Johnny Pelton," he called, in a queer, dry voice, "and tell me what you think of this."

I obeyed; and, as I came, glanced about the clearing more carefully. It was round, as I have said, and in it no tree grew, nor any bush or shrub. Not even a fern or weed or stalk of grass grew here. The earth was bare and brown, and packed hard and smooth, like the floor of a clay tennis court, save at the center, where, about that boulder, a few glossy, thick-leaved plants grew lustily and bore odd, dark-red, fleshy-looking flowers.

The boulder beside which Doctor Moran stood was of hard, igneous rock, shaped, no doubt, by some moving glacier in ancient times. I am no geologist,

to give it a name, but it was of a yellowish-gray color, flecked here and there with rust-colored spots, and its surface, though irregular, was fairly smooth. It was half buried in the earth, at the exact center of the clearing. It stood perhaps four feet above ground, and its diameter was considerably greater. Its top was somewhat flattened, and had been discolored by fire, apparently. Altogether, the thing somehow suggested a primitive altar stone.

Doctor Moran stood watching me, chin on chest, his yellow eyes very bright. He seemed oddly interested, almost excited.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"Why," I answered uncertainly. "I don't know. Some old Indian relic, perhaps? It makes one think of an altar."

"Har-rumph! It does, indeed. But look again, Johnny, my lad. Look closer." Stooping, he pointed to that side of the stone which faced east.

Here, the hard surface of the boulder had been chipped and scored, obviously by human hands. Some one had used a chisel there. I saw several roughly graved symbols—something vaguely like a pin wheel, and on either side other crude carvings.

"Why, some little boys have been here!" I exclaimed.

But the medical examiner shook his head. His great, square face was grim. He shook a blunt forefinger beneath my nose. His deep voice cracked, and leaped two octaves to a shrill falsetto. "Blast it, man, use your eyes! Use your brain, if any!" He pointed. "That is a swastika. And that is the lingham, and that the yoni."

As suddenly as it had arisen, his apparent fury subsided. He smiled amiably, thrust both hands deep into his pockets, and nodded at me. "In short," he said, in his normal bass, "if you'd be reasonable, instead of flying into a temper, you'd realize that you are taking a very superficial view of these carvings.

Very! I tell you, man, this is an altar, right enough, but it's no Indian relic. Look around you." He pointed to the hard-packed earth. "Dancing feet have pounded that so flat; yes, and recently, too. See, there's not one single weed in the ring. And these carvings—there's no moss in them. The rock is fresh, unweathered, where the chisel has cut. Those carvings have been made within a year, at most."

I wondered idly at this excitement. "What of it? What do you think it means, then?"

"It means this: Witchcraft. Demonolatry. Devil worship, if you like. Just that." He paused, glaring at me defiantly from bushy brows.

I laughed uneasily. "Nonsense! In this day and age?"

"Why not? Devil worship isn't dead yet, by a long shot. Listen." He checked off the points on thick, blunt fingers. "A house called Aradia. And Aradia is the goddess of witches. Located where? Why, in Witch Hollow. And here, in a forest called Ordog's—that is, Satan's—Wood, we find a beaten circle. A 'fairies' ring,' no less, such as one finds to this day in England, where witches held their sabbats once. Close by is a churchyard, inhabited by a vrolek—a vampire. Isn't all that enough, even without finding the very altar stone, graved with the lingham and yoni and swastika?"

"Do you seriously suggest——"

He brushed my words aside. "These are primitive people. Even Con Lesky is very superstitious. They came from the Balkan peninsula, which is, of all countries in the world, the most ghost haunted and full of sorceries. Why shouldn't they bring their own beliefs, their own superstitions, if you like, to this country with them? And, obviously, they have!"

"We-ell," I said, dubiously, overborne by his insistent heat. "Well, if so, what of it? It doesn't concern us."

"Har-rumph! I hope not, Johnny." Doctor Moran shook his great head so that his fulvous mane waved loosely. "I hope not. But— Devil worship is evil, my son. Naturally enough. Yes, and Halloween is almost here—the time for the autumn festival—the Witches' sabbat. I hope no innocent child—"

He broke off abruptly. His face was white. "But that's rot, of course." He glared at me accusingly, as though the suggestion had been my own. "Nobody but a fool would think of such things. Come along, Johnny Pelton, let's go home to breakfast."

Without more words, we set our faces toward the Aradia Hotel. For a while, Doctor Moran clumped along in moody silence. Then he spoke.

"Humph," said he. "Ten days more. Johnny, I think that when the local coven meets, on Halloween, you and I will be hidden right here or hereabout. It ought to be interesting. Practical study in anthropology. Har-rumph!"

Something gray flitted across an open space before us, and vanished again. I started violently; my nerves had been shaken, despite my incredulity, by Doctor Moran's remarks. "Wh-what's that?"

The doctor stopped short. "Where? Ah! Quite! What is it, Elvira?"

The slattern emerged from behind a tree, finger in her mouth, giggling foolishly. "Mrs. Manew, she says—"

"Elvira," the medical examiner challenged. "Elvira! What's that you wear around your neck?"

She clutched at her scrawny throat, hiding something—I could not see what—that hung from a string, like a scapular. She seemed frightened; she could not speak, but only goggled at us.

"Is it this?" asked Doctor Moran. And he stooped, and scratched a crude drawing on the earth with a bit of twig.

Elvira Raggles gasped. "You—you know, too? Then you are—"

"'Ashtoreth-Asmodeus,'" quoted Doctor Moran. "We have heard the word the cat spoke to the ass."

"Elvira!"

It was Mrs. Manew's voice, doubtless. It must have been. And yet that distant call rang silver clear and sweet, so that I wondered how the old lady's withered throat could compass it. The carrying sound floated across the valley, to be echoed from the farther hills. "Elvira! Elvira!"

Elvira heard, and squeaked aloud in ludicrous yet evident fear. Clutching her draggled red skirts about her, she fled, calling over a shoulder: "Break-fas' all ready, like I said. And I ain't said nothing else, neither—not a word!" She seemed to be denying it, not to us, but to some unseen auditor.

Then she was gone, and we two were left staring at each other in silence. After a while, Doctor Moran shook his head somberly.

"A black business," he rumbled "Mark my words, Johnny Pelton, a black, black business!"

CHAPTER V.

BABY RUTH.

WE walked on; but, before we reached the edge of Ordog's Wood, I heard a baby crying dolefully.

"Must be a lost child," said I, and, with my companion, hurried toward the sound.

Sitting on the ground beneath a huge old tree, we found a little girl—a mere babe, scarcely more than two years old. Her golden curls were tousled; her pretty face was scratched and soiled, and tears hopped down her rounded, dimpled cheeks. In one chubby fist, she clutched a straggling bouquet of wilted wild flowers.

Seeing us, she emitted one last wail, then blinked her wet eyes and smiled trustfully.

"Youse an awful while comin'," she

accused. "I cried an' cried, an' nobody camed till now." She sniffled briefly, then scrambled to her feet. "But Baby Ruth'll fo'give. She good girl, Baby Ruth; fo'give ever'body. Wanna go home now."

And she trotted up to us, and thrust a chubby, earth-stained hand out to each. "My mamma wants me. Take me there, p'ease. See, I pick some f'owers. Won't she be p' eased?"

A trustful, friendly mite, and pretty as a picture, grubby though she was. Doctor Moran laughed aloud, and swept her up to his great shoulder, where she sat quite contentedly, chattering to us both.

"What's your mother's name?" I asked her.

"Why, mamma. Jus' mamma, 'at's all. An' me, I'm Baby Ruth. Ever'body knows Baby Ruth."

I could well believe that everybody in the neighborhood did know Baby Ruth and love her; she was such a dainty, affectionate, precocious mite. But we had not had that honor, as yet.

"Where does your mamma live?"

"Write over there." She pointed vaguely. "No-o. I guess there. No-o. Baby Ruth's losted!"

Her face puckered dolefully; she seemed about to weep once more. Then she blinked back the tears and smiled down at me, dimpling. "Not losted now, though," she corrected, with pretty courtesy. "Nice mens founded me. So now it's aw-wite, isn't it?"

I assured her that it was, and, a moment later, we broke through a thicket and emerged upon the highroad. To our left, I could see the gable of the Aradia Hotel, beneath its surrounding evergreen trees, and far to the right I caught a glimpse of a red barn.

Toward this, Baby Ruth pointed confidently. "Mamma, she lives there. So does Baby Ruth. With mamma, see?"

But we need not go all the way. Presently, I saw a woman's figure hurrying

toward us, and pausing at intervals to shade her eyes and look this way and that. Faintly, I could hear her call! "Ruth-ie! Ba-by Ruth!"

"Who-oo! Here I is!"

Baby Ruth shrilled her answer, waving so violently that she almost fell from the doctor's shoulder. As we hurried on, she kept explaining at the top of her lungs:

"I's aw-wite, mamma dear. I got losted, on'y these nice mens founded me. Baby Ruth got losted and founded and ever'thing, aw-wite. An' see what nice, pitty f'owers I pickted; an'——"

The woman who ran toward us was calico clad, and a flapping sunbonnet hid her face. Yet one could see from her graceful, slender figure and swift, lithe movements that she was young—and, I guessed, attractive. Of course, the mother of this fairy child must be pretty, too.

Now she was within a few yards, her arms already outstretched. Beneath her sunbonnet, golden ringlets clustered about a smooth, oval face, comely and dimpled, but pale now with remembered alarm. She was breathless.

"Oh, baby, baby, how you frightened me!" she gasped, and seized the child and hugged her desperately. "Are you safe? Are you hurt?" She began to look Baby Ruth all over to feel her limbs, to look anxiously into her smiling face. Dimpling and chuckling, the baby hugged her, babbling of the "pitty f'owers" she had brought.

After a little, her fears somewhat quieted, the young woman looked at us. "You been awful good," she began nervously. "I—thank you so much."

She was very shy, and the color came and went deliciously in her fair cheeks. She spoke with a faint foreign accent, as one not entirely used to the English language, yet, as she told us later, she had been born in Witch Hollow. But most families hereabout spoke some Balkan tongue at home.

"Baby Ruth been in the woods," the child insisted, tugging at her mother's sleeves. "Way, way, way back in the woods—got losted."

Her mother gasped. "In the Wood? You've been in Ordog's Wood? Oh-h, Baby Ruth!"

The woman was aghast; her agitation was pitiful. Her face grew pale and pinched, and she crossed herself frequently, and whispered a prayer, and then made that ancient sign of the horned hand.

"Breakfast will be waiting," I reminded Doctor Moran. "Let's get started."

But the lady would not have us go thus. "Excuse me, please!" she begged. "I must thank you both so much, to find my baby. Me, I am Marie Skelly, and this is my baby, Ruthie Skelly."

"Skelly?" I queried. Certainly, she did not look Irish.

"Szekeli, the medical examiner corrected "Szekeli. You are Magyar, Mrs. Szekeli?"

She nodded eagerly, and plunged into a guttural foreign tongue, but Doctor Moran shook his head, smiling. "No, I can't understand. Sorry. But I knew the name. They are a brave people, the Szekelis."

Mrs. Szekeli—or Skelly, as I shall call her, since it was thus that her name had been corrupted—nodded proudly. "But about those woods; I am much troubled for my baby. These are most bad woods. How shall I say? *Stre-goica*. What you call witch work. In those woods is a wampyr, that has already taken two babes." She crossed herself again.

"Two babies?" queried Doctor Moran sharply.

Mrs. Skelly nodded. "On Walpurgisnacht, a year ago, one little boy, Petey Lesky, a year old only. On Allhallows before, another babe—a girl; my own husband's cousin's baby Celeste. We can only pray. Baby Ruth," said she,

sternly, "if you go again in the wood, mamma must whip hard!"

The child sniffed, and choked back a sob. "Baby Ruth fo'give. She good girl," she quavered.

"Come. We go home now." Mrs. Skelly turned to us and dropped a quaint, old-fashioned curtsy. "We thank you very much, Ruthie and I, to have saved her from evil. God go with you, sirs!"

"And with you, madam," replied Doctor Moran very courteously. "And may He watch over you both, and protect you from evil, always!"

Off they went, Baby Ruth bobbing on her mother's shoulder, and looking back often to wave at us. Doctor Moran and I walked swiftly up the road toward the Hotel Aradia. We were both hungry; we had little to say.

But once and again, the medical examiner shook his great head forebodingly, and rumbled deep in his throat. "Two babies already! And Halloween comes in ten days."

Then he stopped short in the road. "Johnny Pelton," he said gravely, without a trace of that illogical heat he so often affected, "Johnny Pelton, there is an evil abroad here—an ugly, ancient, evil mystery, that must be cleared up. An evil that must be exercised, before other innocent babies perish!"

I gaped at him. "Perish? You think these children were murdered? Oh, surely not that!"

"Har-rumph!" said Doctor Moran cryptically. "I'm hungry."

CHAPTER VI.

CHANGELING.

AFTER what we had seen that morning, and particularly after Doctor Moran's vague references to some great and sinister mystery, Mrs. Sarah Maw's breakfast table was satisfyingly matter-of-fact. Delicious buckwheat pancakes, with home-churned butter

and real maple sirup, fried salt pork and thick milk gravy, hot biscuits and honey, savory fried potatoes, steaming coffee—all these were not only delightful to a hungry man, but somehow obscurely comforting. In a world which offered such matters, I felt, there could not be anything very terrible. By the time my ravenous appetite was appeased, I was ready to smile incredulously at the medical examiner's dark sayings.

But when breakfast was over and we two sat smoking before a cheery, open fire, my curiosity got the better of me.

"Look here, Moran," I began, "how much truth was there in that rigmale about sorcery—if any? And how much of it was an attempt to scare me into seeing witches behind every tree?"

The doctor shrugged his thick shoulders, and turned his whole body until he faced me squarely. "I didn't even think of scaring you," he denied.

For a while, he smoked in silence, his yellow eyes, like the eyes of a sleepy lion, brooding upon the fire. Then he spoke.

"Witchcraft," said Doctor Aloysius Moran, "is a religion. A cult, if you like, and to-day a small cult, though larger than you might believe, Johnny Pelton. Yet it is a cult—a religion—and a very old one. Nobody knows how old. Certainly, it was known in ancient Egypt, and Assyria, and Chaldea—all over the ancient world. In Old Testament days, when the children of Israel went astray, and worshiped strange gods, it was the witch cult which seduced them most often."

He paused a moment. Then: "You remember Moloch, whose image held a blazing furnace into which babies were cast, alive? You've heard of the goddess Ashtoreth, who was Astarte, who was Hecate, the horned goddess of the moon?"

"I thought Diana——" I objected, but he waved me aside.

"Diana, yes. But it was Hecate who was the goddess of the dark of the moon, and the goddess of witches. Or, as the Aradia myth has it, Diana herself, during the dark of the moon, carried on scandalously, and so had a daughter by Lucifer, who is Aradia, goddess of witches. At any rate, moon worship has always had this darker side. Witchcraft has always been, in part, a fertility religion. But there is another element, too, and there Satan comes in. The worship of Pan was witchcraft, also—so much so that to this day the personal devil of Christian legend wears the horns and hoofs of Pan, and has the legs of a goat. Pan, Asmondeus, Janicot, Ahriman—they are all one: the prince of this world. And witches worship him also."

"You mean, they did."

"I mean they do. Now, to-day, in this land of the free. Oh, not many, perhaps, yet the prince of this world has his followers."

"But devil worship isn't the same thing as witchcraft!"

"There are cults of Satanists, true—like the Yezidees of Persia, who do not quite belong to the witch cult. Yet all of them practice incantation, and work by spells. The witch religion is not exactly Satan worship, though. Rather, theologians have taken the Satan idea from the witch cult. Janicot is not the Christians' Satan; he is older, much older, and different. He is the prince of this world—the prince of the power of the air, whose symbols are the lingham and the yoni, and whose worship is very ancient. Very ancient indeed, and always evil. Quite as evil to-day, when his ritual has been changed and corrupted, as it was thousands of years ago, when men called him Moloch."

"You've been hinting around long enough. Do you actually mean to sit there and tell me that human sacrifice is still practiced—in these United States?"

Doctor Moran sighed heavily. No smile lit his somber face. "Can you deny it? Wasn't a witch murdered in Pennsylvania within the year?"

That silenced me, for I remembered reading of at least two murders committed near York; of two so-called witch doctors, "hexes," slain by their imagined victims.

"That's not the same as human sacrifice," I argued feebly.

"Har-rumph!" said my companion. "Idiot."

After that, he refused to continue the discussion. "Maybe I imagined it all. I hope so."

A new thought struck me. "What's that thing Elvira wears around her neck?" I demanded. "And what did you draw on the ground with that twig? I couldn't see. Yes, and what did you mean, about 'the word the cat spoke to the ass'?"

Doctor Moran grinned tantalizingly. "There are no witches. Yet Elvira, who is surely no mental giant, understood both my sign and my words. She is an initiate, Johnny Pelton."

"Well, are you? Don't tell me *you* are initiated into this witch cult you talk about. Because I won't believe it."

"You needn't, my bold lad. And I'm not. But I got it all out of printed books, Johnny Pelton—as you might, if you'd been studious enough. You can find out about the mysteries by consulting anthropological authorities. Go to it, dear friend! Afterward, you can try out your knowledge on Elvira, and see if she reacts."

I gave it up. "It's nothing that interests me," I lied. "Meanwhile, are you planning to sit here all day, or will you come out into the air and work up an appetite for dinner?"

The medical examiner heaved up his bulk, and we went outdoors. For the rest of that day, and for the days that followed, we led a delightfully lazy, comfortable existence. We hunted or

pretended to, carrying guns which we had no intention of using; we fished, and even caught a horn pout or so, which our hostess fried very nicely. But for the most part, we wandered idly about beneath the trees, or climbed the surrounding hills to see what lay beyond them which invariably proved to be more hills—or held long, desultory discussions.

Gradually, we came to know the people who lived thereabout: shy, kindly, primitive folks and very superstitious. At first, they held aloof, and scarcely spoke to us, but Doctor Moran's personality—for he could be very winning when he chose—soon drew them closer. Me they came to accept, after a while, almost as one of themselves, but the medical examiner they regarded as some one greater, wiser, more learned than they. To him they brought their difficulties and disputes, and he listened gravely and made simple explanations, or gave just judgment. It was surprising to see how quickly he came to be an authority among the Witch Hollow people.

It was surprising, too, to see how much more thickly the Hollow was populated than it had at first appeared. From the Aradia house, we could see but one other dwelling—the Skellys—and that only in part and by an effort. But we soon learned that a number of other farms were scattered about, so that fully two hundred folks dwelt in the wedge-shaped valley called Witch Hollow. Little, irregular-shaped patches of arable land lay here and there, along the creek bottoms; perhaps a fourth of the country which at first had seemed quite wild was under plow.

As I say, they were a primitive people, who rarely left their hills. For the most part, they were Czechs, or Slovaks, or Szekelis, or Magyars; I am not skilled enough in race to say exactly which. At any rate, they, or their forebears, hailed from the Balkan peninsula,

being the remnant of a considerable colony which had emigrated from the old country nearly a century ago, to settle hereabout—perhaps because the mountains were homelike to them. Most of them still spoke their native tongue, by preference, and some had no English whatever. In some ways, they must have been a little like the Pennsylvania Dutch, I suppose, though in others they were very different.

Without exception, they were densely superstitious. All believed firmly in witchcraft and sorcery and charms, and in ghosts and demons and vampires. At least a dozen of them assured us that there was an indubitable vrolek, wampyr, or vampire which inhabited the churchyard beside that ruined chapel. But when I asked why the chapel had been deserted, none would answer. They only shook their heads, and went on driving six miles over the mountains to the church in a near-by town.

One other matter I must speak of, in passing, though it has little enough to do with my tale. Far back in the hills, in country wilder than the Hollow, dwelt a peculiar, half-savage folk known as the Raggles tribe. These were part Indian, or so folks maintained, and part Negro—a clan made up of outlaws and runaway slaves and renegade Indians, originally, which had dwelt apart, inbreeding for eighty years, without law or morals or schooling, until most, if not all, had become feeble-minded and deformed. I have known one other such tribe, scarcely less degenerate, in western New York; and such must have been the tribes described by one or two anthropologists.

I mention these strange creatures because of their scientific interest to students, and because the queer, slatternly girl, Elvira, was one of them—and for one other reason.

Thus our days slipped by, one after another, and we enjoyed them to the full. It is strange to remember how

rapidly we became accustomed, Doctor Moran and I, to this life, and, for that while, how simple and wholesome and cheerfully normal it seemed.

For that while only—because a strange and shocking thing occurred which changed the atmosphere of Witch Hollow for us. We had been at the Aradia Hotel for ten days—long enough to grow used to Elvira's oddities, and to become sincerely attached to Mrs. Sarah Manew, in spite of her eerie, witchlike appearance—when the blow fell. That was on the twenty-ninth of October, and I shall never, while I live, forget that date.

We had seen Baby Ruth Skelly but twice since our first meeting with her, for her mother kept her close at home lest she wander off again; and so, on the evening of the twenty-eighth, Doctor Moran suggested that we walk to the Skelly place next morning, to visit the child we both had come to love.

That was at supper. When the doctor spoke, I fancied that Mrs. Manew looked at us strangely, the hidden terror which always lurked in her sunken eyes more visible than usual. And Elvira Raggles, who waited on us, dropped a plate and broke it, but that was nothing unusual, for her.

"I'll be glad to go and see her," I agreed. "She's a very attractive child."

Mrs. Manew spoke in a strained, quavering voice. "Elvira, go to your own room for a minute." And when the slattern had shuffled out, she leaned far across the table toward us two, and whispered earnestly.

"Doctor Moran, and Doctor Pelton, I—I've come to be fond of you, kind of. I wish— Hadn't you better go on back to New York, the both of you? In the morning, early; I can get Con Lesky to come after you."

We stared at her in amazement. "But, why on earth?" I protested. "We planned to stay a month; and we like it here. I don't want to leave. Do you?"

Doctor Moran shook his head. He was eying our hostess keenly. "Why, no. I'd much rather stay. Unless, of course, Mrs. Manew wants to get rid of us?"

The old lady wet her lips. Her skinny fingers plaited the tablecloth; she was so uneasy, so terribly in earnest, that I was almost alarmed.

"I don't want you to—— But I wish, for your own sakes——"

Then came a distinct knocking from the ceiling, exactly as though some one in the room overhead had tapped with a stick. Now this was the room whose door was opposite my own. The night we came, I had fancied a movement therein, but ever since the door had been closed and locked—for I had tried it once.

"Elvira must have gone upstairs," said I, though I did not believe that.

But Mrs. Manew flinched, and turned ghastly pale. Her shrunken lips quivered; that constant look of fear deepened in her dim old eyes until I pitied her, she seemed so panic-stricken. When she spoke, her voice quivered like a violin string overstrained.

"It's nothing—nothing. Queer noises you hear, in old houses like this. A body'd almost think they was folks around or spooks, maybe." She forced a laugh, but it was a dreadful, mirthless sound. Somehow her eyes avoided mine.

"No, it's nothing on'y the timbers cracking. What was it I was saying? Oh, yes! I mean, I wish you'd stay, both of you, just as long as you can. It's a real pleasure, having you; you don't make a mite of trouble. So I do hope you won't let anything interfere with staying your time out; leastways, until after Hal—after the first of next month."

I glanced at Doctor Moran, and he stared back at me. His tawny eyebrows were raised, and there was an odd, speculative quality in the look he presently

turned upon our hostess. He cleared his throat.

"Har-rumph!" said the medical examiner. "Quite. Yes, Mrs. Manew, we are planning to stay, if you'll keep us."

The old lady relaxed, heaving a tremulous sigh. Yet that secret trouble which lurked in her deep-set eyes was undiminished. Rather, it seemed increased, so that I wondered why she had so suddenly changed her mind. Queer noises in an old house? That had been a queer noise, surely, for ancient timbers to emit, unaided. And yet there could be no one upstairs.

Doctor Moran and I went to bed early. Indeed, we had to, for that bracing mountain air so stimulated us to physical activity during the day that evening found us too sleepy to stay awake. We slept soundly all night long; and, when I rose and looked out at the round, bright sun as it topped the eastern hills, I thought that I had never seen a more idyllic spot, nor one more conducive to wholesome, simple living.

Before two hours had passed, I was disillusioned.

Mrs. Manew was nowhere to be seen. The medical examiner and I breakfasted alone, served by Elvira Raggles, and that slattern seemed unusually distraught and clumsy. She spilled coffee down my back, gave us vinegar instead of maple sirup, and broke three dishes. Her eyes were red and swollen, and she sniffled constantly. She must have caught cold, I thought.

Indeed, she seemed so distressed and upset that I sought to put her at ease. Casting about for a topic, I remembered that hideous, hydrocephalic child of hers, and the obvious affection she had shown it.

"How's your baby, Elvira?" I inquired casually. "Not sick, I hope? I haven't seen her for several days."

I expected her to brighten up at this, for, when her child was mentioned, her

dull eyes would usually shine, so that she seemed almost human. But instead she set down her tray with a clatter, and threw a soiled apron over her face and began to blubber outright. Then she fled, stumbling over her own feet and nearly falling, and the kitchen door slammed behind her.

I glanced ruefully at my companion. "I said the wrong thing, evidently. Do you suppose the child is really sick? Maybe we ought to—"

Doctor Moran grunted. "It would be a mercy," he began, and then, characteristically, softened. "I hope not. Poor brat! We'll ask Mrs. Manew when she comes in."

But she did not come in, and Elvira failed to answer repeated summons. So we finished our breakfast without further attention, and after it procured caps and sticks and set out for the Skelly house, a few rods away.

That was a beautiful morning. The air was balmy and soft, like that of an Italian spring, yet subtly bracing. Already, heat waves began to shimmer upward from the hard-packed road, and all around the horizon the soft haze of Indian summer made the harsh outlines of the mountains diaphanous as mist. I sniffed the clear, sweet air, laden with a resinous fragrance tinged with the scent of distant burning leaves, and sighed.

"It's a mighty good old world," I said. "It's hard to believe that this same sun shines on New York City. There the very air is heavy with poverty and sordidness and vice and crime; here, everything seems sweet and wholesome." And I laughed at my own sentimentality; yet what I said seemed true.

The medical examiner stopped short in the road. His great, square face turned purple; he shook a thick forefinger beneath my nose.

"Simpleton," he rumbled, deep in his barrel chest. Then his voice leaped to a shrill falsetto of apparent fury.

"Idiot, idiot, idiot!" he shrilled. "Crime, says he; and vice, he says. Johnny Pelton, I tell you that the worst sinks of the gas-house district are Sunday schools compared to this pernicious spot!"

Abruptly, his angry color faded. He took his finger from beneath my nose, stared at it intently, as though to see if I had bitten it, and thrust both big hands into his trouser pockets.

"Such wordy disputations are undignified, Johnny Pelton," he continued in his usual deep bass. "You should strive to control your evil temper, Johnny, my fine lad." He grinned at me amiably and impudently. "Be calm, Johnny, as I am. And remember that there are worse things than open crime. Much worse, Johnny Pelton! Very much worse!"

I was impressed in spite of myself by his obvious sincerity; yet I did not wholly grasp his meaning. "You mean," I asked, instinctively lowering my voice, though there was no one in sight, "you mean this witchcraft stuff you've been talking about?"

"Maybe," the doctor answered cryptically. "Maybe you'll see for yourself before very long."

We had reached the Skelly farm, and turned off the main road into the drive which led to the house and that big, red barn. Mounting the back steps, Doctor Moran tapped at the kitchen door—for in the country, one avoids the front entrance of any house, save on ceremonial occasions, such as a wedding, or a funeral.

No one was in sight. Mr. Skelly, a red-faced, inarticulate, bristly chinned individual, was in his fields, no doubt; and his wife must be at her household tasks. But it was strange that Baby Ruth was not out, this gorgeous morning.

Doctor Moran rapped again, but no one opened the door. He hesitated, his face very grave, and laid his ear against

the wood. Listening, I fancied I could hear faint sobbing from within.

"What——" I began. But the medical examiner waited for no speculation. He opened the door softly, and went in, and I followed at his heels.

We entered a big, roomy, pleasant kitchen. It was spotlessly clean; the very dishes on the dresser shone. At our left stood a table covered by a red-and-white cloth, and littered with dishes which still held remnants of a cold meal. That was an alien note in this meticulous cleanliness; it spoke with silent eloquence of trouble.

For an instant, my eyes had been dazzled from the bright sunlight without; then they cleared, and I could see the rest of the big room. At my left, away from the windows, stood a spotless kitchen range, and beside it a high chair in which sat a child. It was wrapped and bundled to the ears, and its back was toward me, but I supposed it was Baby Ruth.

But I was struck more by her mother's occupation. For Mrs. Skelly stood bent over the cookstove, one of whose lids had been lifted so that the fire within flared up through it smokily. The young woman's face was pallid and swollen with hopeless grief. Her eyes were red and dull, and she kept them fixed upon her task. And that task was so bizarre that I exclaimed aloud.

Broken eggshells littered the floor. Mrs. Skelly held a small, wire-mesh strainer, on which was balanced half of an empty eggshell, which she was holding over the fire as though to broil it.

Stranger yet, the eggshell was full of water. And even as I stared at it, the water began to bubble and boil in that extraordinary container.

"What on earth——" I began.

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

The young woman did not look up. She was unconscious of our presence. She stared across the fire at the child opposite, her sick heart in her eyes, her soft lips parted in unbearable, despairing expectancy.

As I watched, the faint spark of hope died away. Her mouth corners drew down, and she sobbed thickly, but her dull, reddened eyes were dry. "It's no use—no use!" she groaned, and dropped to the floor and crouched there in a huddled, hopeless little heap, heart-wrenchingly pitiful.

"No use! No use! The charm won't work, and she's gone. My baby's gone—lost!"

I was still bewildered, but the medical examiner was white and grim and purposeful. He strode over to the crouching girl—for she was nothing more—and lifted her gently.

"Tell me, Marie: has anything happened to Baby Ruth?"

Meanwhile, thinking to comfort her by the sight of her child, I had gone to the high chair to lift her. As I moved, the little creature in that chair stirred, and turned slowly to face me.

It was not Baby Ruth!

Ah, merciful Heaven, what could it mean, this horrid metamorphosis! This creature was sickly, unwholesome, its skin mottled and broken out. Its face was pinched and tiny beneath a huge, bulging, hydrocephalic dome—a head like a pumpkin. It stared at me with bright, black eyes that seemed to hold a mocking, evil wisdom, so that I shuddered.

And then I heard the heartbroken mother's wail.

"Changeling! Oh, the changeling. Oh, have mercy! Doctor, the Little People have taken my baby."

CHARLOTTE DOCKSTADER, always a favorite, gives us "THE BLIND EYE OF JUSTICE," in next week's issue.

DS-5C

His Fast One

HE'D SEEN ETERNITY LOOKING OUT OF GUNS TOO
OFTEN TO GET WEAK-KNEED NOW.



By Donald Van Riper

Author of "Call to Victory," etc.

I JUST wanted to be sure," rumbled Allen Spenser. "The rumor reached me, and, though I really did not credit it, nevertheless, I thought I'd better stop in and remind you that to-morrow is something more than the day of execution for Rossman."

"I'm hardly apt to forget," said the governor with a measured smile, "that to-morrow is primary day."

"And," added Spenser pointedly, "that I need but say the word and you will fail to be renominated by the party. You may sign a stay of execution for Rossman, but, if you do, it will be your final important act as a public official. It will mean you are through."

The governor nodded and contrived another smile as Allen Spenser stood looking back from the door of his office.

Spenser was too big a power to be defied. He must be nodded to, smiled at, and obeyed. That Spenser's attitude was spiced with a desire for personal vengeance against the man condemned made the governor's acquiescence a foregone conclusion.

"As a matter of public policy," thundered Spenser, "there must be no leniency for cold-blooded killing crooks like Rossman." He dropped his voice discreetly lower before he thrust a reminder of his own peculiar personal interest at the governor. "And the man he killed was my own most trusted employee, the head of my factories, a man I would have been proud to own as my son."

"I understand," said the governor. He bowed slightly but with a world of deference in the action.

As the door slammed behind Spenser, he straightened and stood there scowling at the place where Spenser had stood. There was a calculating compression of the lips, a thoughtful narrowing of the eyes, and not the least trace of a smile remained upon his face now. He was double crossing Allen Spenser, but the latter would never know until it was too late. Once let the party renominate him and he would be as good as reelected. All the power, prestige and wealth of Allen Spenser could not balk him once he had the nomination. To-morrow, as Spenser had needlessly pointed out, was indeed a very important day in the career of Governor William Courtney.

To-morrow was primary day. To-morrow morning at seven, Rossman was to be executed. If the news of a stay of that execution became known in time, Spenser might easily balk Governor William Courtney's ambition. Defeat in a party primary would finish him. Victory in the primary—and nothing could halt his subsequent election.

William Courtney's plan of action in the case of the condemned man, Rossman, was to grant the stay of execution at the eleventh hour. If the fact of that stay of execution became known only a minute or two before seven on the morrow, there would be scant time left for Allen Spenser to strike back. Much early voting would be done before the news would be on the streets. By the time the full force of Allen Spenser's opposition could be known, the issue would probably be settled irrevocably in favor of Courtney.

Governor William Courtney! It was a long and curious way which he had traveled to reach this place of power and the marks of it were clear in the furrowed lines of his face and the pure gray of his hair. It was a queer, bitter, double-crossing business. In the primary he feared the opposition of

Spenser. In the election itself it was the power of men like "Big Jack" Bannigan that he dreaded.

Only through holding back that stay of execution until the last possible minute could he hope to handled the two opposing pressures which threatened him with political extinction. Too late would Allen Spenser learn that the governor had signed the stay. Big Jack Bannigan cared not how or when it was done so long as there was no execution on the morrow. It would be close work, touch and go, but then that was the sort of trickery through which men like William Courtney gained their ends.

Courtney knew this game and the men who played it. He knew that the vital thing to-morrow was not whether Rossman should live or die, but whether he, Courtney, should be renominated. Therefore he was not surprised when Big Jack Bannigan put in an appearance within half an hour after Allen Spenser had departed.

"Say, Bill," began Bannigan without any preliminary of courtesy. "I just got the word that Spenser had been here to see you, and that he was laying down the law about Rossman."

"Your information," answered Governor William Courtney, "was approximately correct."

"Say," snapped Bannigan, "you can lay off the ninety-eight-cent words and talk plain five and ten to me. What I came to see about is whether you're staying put on signing Rossman off for thirty days more."

Governor William Courtney smiled easily. That easy smile was not the least significant element in his ascent from the depths of ward politics to his present place at the top position within the gift of the State's electorate. A smile, faintly humorous and yet possessed of a brooding appearance of wisdom! A smile which had ever stood him in good stead! Now he waited for the full effect of that smile to work

upon Big Jack Bannigan before he spoke again.

"I've already arranged everything."

Big Jack Bannigan's frown softened a bit at that. "I knew you would, Bill."

"But Spenser doesn't know it yet, and he must not know it until the last possible minute. You must not tell any one—not a single soul—that just a few minutes before seven to-morrow morning the stay of execution will be delivered to Warden Lafarge. I can give you positive assurance that Rossman will not die to-morrow. Of course I just told Spenser a lie. I told him that Rossman would die."

"For a high hatter that guy Spenser sure is bloodthirsty," commented Bannigan. "Just because Rossman and some other gun toters happened to kill Spenser's right-hand man in swiping that big pay roll from Spenser's factory, why should Spenser follow up a thing like that into politics?"

"Why," countered Courtney, "should a bunch of Reds try to make Rossman out as a political martyr? It was Rossman's own friends who first put a political slant to this business."

"Why?" Bannigan laughed heavily. "A guy with your experience asking that. The only real reason in the world. There's money in it for some one."

"How's that?"

Bannigan grinned. "I can't tell you the source of my info, but I got it on the level that it was Rossman who got away with the jack from the robbery. And before he was picked up, he had hidden it away somewhere, and no one else knew where he stowed it. There was just about fifty thousand dollars in the haul. And if Rossman dies to-morrow, he will take the secret of that hiding place with him. A wise guy this Rossman! Nothing like telling where the jack is for him. He just let his pals know that it was up to them to save him or else they never would get a cent of that loot. Not so dumb, eh?"

"Not so dumb," echoed Courtney.

"And fifty grand isn't light money any time," added Bannigan. "So you can see why they are trying so hard to spring Rossman."

"And," mused Courtney, "because of money on one side and personal desire for vengeance on the other, my whole career is at stake. Imagine that! A cheap gunman affecting the governor of the State."

Again Bannigan laughed loudly. "Honest, Bill, you make me laugh. Being called his excellency and honorable, and all that bunk sure has made a difference in your slant on such stuff. Why, you know as well as I do that this political game just smells with money deals and personal vengeance; whether you're a governor wanting another term like you or just a city boss like me doesn't make any difference. As for cheap gunmen, you might just as well have developed into one of them if it hadn't been for me. It's a tough game no matter which way you go, anyway. 'Up from the streets' sounds good, but I always ask that old one whenever I hear it. You know that old question about 'How far is up'? Ain't it the truth, Bill?"

Courtney nodded grudgingly. He could not bring himself to say it, but there was a world of truth in what Bannigan said. He was a sham, a bluff. He would bargain and connive and trade in life or money, do anything and everything, in fact, which would promote his personal ambitions. The Honorable William Courtney was a fictive creature, a person of appearances only. Underneath, he was still plain Bill Courtney, still a potential gunman just as Bannigan had said.

"And you're sure there can't be any slip-up?" demanded Bannigan. "Suppose you got everything fixed to be fool-proof?"

"Absolutely," answered Courtney. "I'm waiting now to hear from Whit-

ney, my secretary. He ought to phone me any minute now that he's on the scene in the town of Gorham."

Bannigan whistled with slow significance.

"What's wrong with that?" demanded Courtney.

"How long do you think it will be before some one wises Spenser up that your secretary is in Gorham? And how long do you think it will be before Spenser decides that your secretary being in the same town with the State's prison might have some meaning to-night?"

"A long, long while," sighed Courtney. "Whitney's reservation at the hotel there was made for a party named McDonald. And McDonald will be a flashy-looking fellow—all decked out with jewelry and sporty-looking clothes. Also McDonald will be all fixed up with this artificial sun-tan stuff. If any one can recognize my calm, quiet, easy-going secretary in that rig, it will be a miracle. McDonald signs in to-night. Leaves a call for half past five to-morrow morning. Checks out in the morning and goes straight to the prison, hands Warden Lafarge the stay of execution just at the last possible moment."

"Kinda hard-boiled yet yourself," observed Bannigan. "You ain't figuring what a fine night poor Rossman is going to have, are you?"

"Rossman," answered Courtney, "doesn't figure. He's guilty if ever a man was."

Bannigan nodded in agreement. "No denying that, but just the same he'll do some tall worrying to-night."

"Let him," said Courtney. "What I must have is your solemn oath, Bannigan, that you won't tell a soul. You and Whitney and myself are the only people in the world who have any idea that there is to be an eleventh-hour stay granted Rossman. Not another soul dare know. Understand?"

Bannigan understood. There was a grudging admiration in the nod of as-

sent. There was no gainsaying that William Courtney was handling a hair-trigger situation far better than the average man would have done. Long before this, another man would have definitely broken either with Spenser or Bannigan. Courtney had taken a better course. Too late Spenser would hear of that executive reprieve. A few minutes before seven that stay would become operative, and at seven the primary voting would begin throughout the State. To-morrow morning would be too late for Allen Spenser to block Courtney at the polls.

Bannigan glanced at his watch. Ten o'clock! Nine more hours until the time set for the execution of Rossman! Nine more hours until the polls were open for the primary election!

Down in the village of Gorham a bleak-eyed, pallid-faced man put into words part of the unspoken thought of Bannigan. There were two of them in the little room in the Mansion House on Gorham's main street. The speaker, Lon Jerome, was clearly dejected. He had a right to be low in his mind. So, too, did his companion, "Rat" Fallon. They were mourning the fact of Rossman's execution, mourning, however, in a peculiar, "financial" type of reasoning.

"Nine more hours, Rat, and they bump off Rossman."

Rat nodded with more than a trace of anger. "And we don't know any more about where he stowed the loot than we ever did. The rotten double-crossing dog gave us a fine break. Telling us that the way to get our share was to spring him out of the death house. Here we been using our own jack and breaking our necks trying to to get him out of it, and the thanks we get is nothing. And of all the bum ideas, this one of yours to come up and see him to-day was the worst."

"I notice you came along," sneered Lon Jerome.

Rat Fallon's tiny, jet eyes gleamed at

that. "And why not? If he was going to spill any info about where he shoved that loot, I wanted to be in on it, too."

"You're about as trusting as a bank president," sighed Jerome.

"And why not?" countered Rat Fallon. "After this fast one that Rossman pulled on us, I ain't trusting anybody. And here we are in this hick town of Gorham wasting our time. Nine more hours before they give Rossman the hot seat, and it might as well be nine minutes for all we can do about it."

"There's still a chance that Big Jack Bannigan can pull something. Even if it is only a stay, it would give us thirty days to work on Rossman. And if he gets a stay, he'll have to admit we been doing our best to spring him."

"If he gets a stay. *If* is right. Big Jack Bannigan may be a big shot in the city, but he hasn't got the governor of the State under his thumb."

"Just the same, there's a chance."

"We got as much chance as a couple of five hundred to-one shots in the Kentucky Derby. Me—I'm not hoping any more."

"There's always a chance," insisted Lon Jerome. He spoke bravely enough, but the look in his slaty gray eyes belied his words.

"Yeah," snarled Rat Fallon. "I've been sitting here in this cheap dump of a hotel room waiting for you to come back and thinking plenty."

"Thinking?"

The jeering tone did not escape Rat's attention, but he ignored it. "I've been thinking that, when it comes time for him to sit down in the chair, a yellow, double-crossing hound like Rossman is apt to blab the whole works. That would be nice, wouldn't it? Us right here in town waiting to get nabbed! Suppose he says that it was you and me that was in on that pay-roll killing with him."

"Any other pleasant little thoughts?"

"Yeah, I been thinking what a pile of jack and time we've wasted trying to get the truth out of him about where he hid the jack."

Little by little, Rat Fallon's voice had risen under the stress of his futile, seething anger. "You better think in whispers," hissed Jerome. "No telling who's in the next room in a hotel."

"The devil take this hotel," muttered Rat Fallon. "Me—I'm going back to the city right away. You can hang around here if you want to, but I've given up hoping. Maybe you like being stony broke, but not me. I got to get out of this hick prison town and get to the city. And the first shot I get at easy money I'm gonna grab it."

"Listen, Rat, I might as well tell you. Rossman told me to-day that, if he got a stay, he'd come clean about where he hid the fifty grand."

"I should worry," answered Fallon. "There's not much chance of his getting a stay. It's in the cards that he gets the big jolt to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. You mean to say that Bannigan wouldn't let you know if the governor had kicked in with a stay of execution?"

"Give him time. Maybe he'll phone any minute."

"And, more likely, he won't. Nothing doing, Lon! I'm going to shuffle along to the station and grab the next train to the city."

Rat Fallon had risen and jammed on his derby at its cockiest angle. He spoke finally from the door. "See you in town to-morrow, Lon."

Lon Jerome did not answer. He was too deep in the grip of despair for speech. He and Rat had tried everything, done everything and failed. And now the conviction was firm upon him that Big Jack Bannigan's trip to see the governor had likewise failed. And to think that a stay of execution would have meant that Rossman would talk! Just a stay of execution! Once Ross-

man talked and told the location of the loot, Lon Jerome did not care how fast the law finished him. Rossman was guilty enough. Only good luck that Lon Jerome and Rat Fallon had escaped the same fate. Rossman had not squealed at any rate.

Rat Fallon, having decided to leave the village of Gorham, wasted no time about getting down to the station.

"Next south-bound train is due in half an hour," said the man in the ticket window. "North-bound coming in right now."

Whereupon Rat Fallon purchased a ticket for the city and ambled out to the platform. Half an hour to wait. He watched the north-bound train slowly coming into the station.

Railroad stations were among the valuable observation points for men of Rat Fallon's crooked stamp, and therefore, in spite of this being a hick town, he instinctively measured the alighting passengers. Who knew when a fellow might sight fair game for the purposes of a stick-up artist? If so, there was a lot that a fellow could do in half an hour, especially when he considered that this station was well away from the brighter part of the town.

The third and last passenger caught more than a passing glance of interest from Rat's close-set eyes. He looked like ready money. Rat's eyes narrowed still further as he caught the sparkle of a big diamond ring as the fellow stood indecisively for a moment. He followed with guarded glance as the man walked inside the station.

Back in the office of the governor, the phone bell was ringing. Bannigan watched and listened as Courtney spoke in guarded, careful monosyllables into the receiver. After a minute or so, Courtney replaced the receiver and beamingly looked upon Big Jack Bannigan.

"That was Whitney. He just phoned

me from the railroad station at Gorham. His train was a few minutes late. But he's there now. So there is no need to worry about any slip-ups. He said he would get along up to the hotel and be on the job bright and early to-morrow morning. Everything is set now for that eleventh-hour stay of execution."

Big Jack Bannigan nodded, and a grudging look of admiration shone in his eyes. This man Courtney knew how to play the game for all there was in it. He pulled out his watch once more. "Only eight and a half hours till—till——"

"Till the polls open," concluded Governor William Courtney. He said it with that easy smile which had helped to carry him so far. Courtney was mightily pleased with himself.

It was the feeble gray of dawn outside the prison when Rossman handed the chaplain a folded sheet of paper.

"After it's all over," said Rossman, "you can turn that over to the warden. You see, I'm not the praying kind, but I figure you'll see that every one knows that what the message says there is true. It'll tell them where I stowed the loot from the robbery. I told my—my—the rats that were with me that, if they could get a stay, even I would tell them where the loot was. But they didn't come through. So after I'm—I'm gone—you can see that the loot goes to the people it belongs to."

"Then you really are guilty?"

"Whoever thought I wasn't," was Rossman's crisp answer. "Sure, I'm guilty, but no other crooks are going to get a penny of that loot."

"And have you no word of repentance?"

Rossman laughed. "Repentance? It's just a few years too late for that, chaplain. I'm not going to sing psalms at the eleventh hour. And no use to remind me about eternity. I've seen eternity looking out of guns at me too

many times to get weak in the knees now."

"Even at the eleventh hour, as you call it," said the chaplain, "it is not too late to repent."

Rossman's only answer was a half articulate laugh. It was his final gesture for the mob on the corner. He must not weaken now. He must show them that Rossman had known how to die.

He must walk when it was time as nonchalantly as though that grim corridor outside led to freedom and not death. He must laugh just once again when they led him to the chair. The mob on the corner must read that Rossman had died as he had lived—hard-boiled.

They would read, too, the real truth about the loot. They would all know that Rossman had kept his word, that he had given back the loot rather than let his unknown partners share the wealth which had cost Rossman his life.

The thought braced him. He could imagine Lon Jerome and Rat Fallon reading the news. He could shut his eyes and vision up the headlines that would tell the story. "Condemned Reveals Loot." "Rossman Tells Where Money Was Hidden."

So he laughed and then refused to repent.

That same gray light of daybreak saw Big Jack Bannigan abroad. He must be out early, mustering the votes for Courtney. He must see that the early votes were cast before the word came of that last-minute reprieve for Rossman. He must do all he could before Allen Spenser should turn in futile and belated rage against Courtney.

He wondered just how many hours would pass before the papers would be blazoning that surprising story of the last-minute stay of execution for Rossman. He wondered just how long thereafter Allen Spenser would throw all the weight of his influence against

Courtney's renomination. It was, he reflected, a queer world where a governorship hung in the balance over a man who was nothing but a cheap and ruthless crook.

If that stay gave the crook's lawyers a chance, they might yet save Rossman's life. To think that the governor would chance that for the votes that he, Big Jack Bannigan, controlled! It was enough to make Bannigan heave out his chest and grin broadly as he started out to the polls. He must hurry and be the first in his district to vote for William Courtney.

Promptly at seven o'clock, Big Jack Bannigan stepped into the booth to vote. In another district, at the same hour, Allen Spenser did likewise.

Promptly at seven o'clock on that same morning, the station master at the village of Gorham swung through the short-cut cross lots back of the station. Suddenly he halted. Some one lay there in the path, groaning.

The man on the ground stared wildly up at him. "I've called for help for hours. I'm nearly paralyzed. Can't move."

"What happened to you?" gasped the railroader.

"I must have been slugged—black-jacked—robbed." The man's face was a picture of agony. "The time! I must know the time."

"Seven o'clock." Automatically the railroader pulled out his watch. "One minute after—railroad time. What you need, mister, is a doctor."

The injured man on the ground had not answered. With a gasping, horror-ridden groan, he had lapsed into unconsciousness.

A few hours later extras were being cried through the city streets. Here was a story that was news indeed: The governor's messenger had been waylaid and slugged while bearing the reprieve papers to Warden Lafarge. Rossman had disclosed the hiding place of the

loot and freely admitted his guilt before he died. But for the murderous attack by some unknown footpad, a man who had already admitted his guilt, would have received the governor's reprieve.

Here was news, indeed, for Allen Spenser and for Big Jack Bannigan. Especially was this news for Rat Fallon. He read and reread the story until his head fairly buzzed.

In his pocket was the money he had taken from his victim: twenty-one dollars and seventy-five cents. The ring had been junk, the diamond not even a fair imitation. He had thrown that away.

He sadly tossed aside several papers from his victim's pocket. Suddenly, his own relation to the whole affair dawned on Rat Fallon. One of those papers had been the stay of execution. In that one swift, impulsive crime, Rat Fallon had blocked the eleventh-hour reprieve for Rossman. He had tossed aside with those papers the very document which would have meant that Rossman would live a bit longer and that he would have told Lon Jerome and Rat Fallon where the loot might be found. He had actually thrown away fifty thousand dollars aside there in the gloom of that cross-lots short cut to the Gorham station.

To the governor's office, meanwhile, there had come two very hostile messages. Spenser's voice had been edged with malice as it came over the phone.

"You were trying to double cross me, Courtney. I'm out to beat you now."

Big Jack Bannigan's message was to the same effect. "So you tried to pull a fast one. Had this phony slugging take place so that the stay couldn't get through."

To deny, to argue, to plead—these things were all in vain. Courtney knew better than to try. Both Spenser and Big Jack Bannigan were against him. The old familiar way of deception and double dealing which had raised him up would now hurl him down again.

After a bit he decided to slink away. From the street he could see the great stone figure of Justice atop the building which he quitted. He saw it now with a new and understanding look. Blind Justice! There were the bandaged-eyes, the balanced scales, and the mighty sword. Blind Justice! Herebefore he had thought of it as a great, unreasoning figure of stone. Now he knew it for a symbol of a mighty force of Fate, a power that even at the eleventh hour could measure out punishment against the transgressor.



CHINESE WAS GREEK TO HIM

ALTHOUGH the duties of a policeman are many and his qualifications too numerous to mention, there are times when he sadly falls down. One of these times happened to a New York detective the other day. He arrested a Chinaman on a charge of possessing policy slips. The supposed offender was sixty years old and president of one of the important Chinese societies.

The "policy slips" were translated in Tombs Court, and read as follows: "The dragon will walk the eternal paths of glory and the lion shall be exercised. Would that our ancestors bring on to us only fair skies with shining suns." When it was found that the strange characters represented extracts from "One Thousand Classics of Chinese Verse," the venerable Chinaman was released.

The detective who was responsible for the arrest is thinking seriously of going to night school to study the Oriental language so that he will not make a monkey of himself again.

The Chinese Tub

OUT OF A PEACEFUL EXISTENCE, SHE WAS LIFTED
INTO DANGEROUS ADVENTURE.



By Edgar P. Meynell

Author of "Marked for Death," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BLACKMAIL.

AS Helen Riddel opened the door of her roadster, that bright September afternoon, something indefinite, something which she was never afterward able to explain or to understand, drew her head around.

The car was standing at the curb, outside Messinger's Department Store. At this time of the day—three o'clock—the wide, concrete walk was crowded with shoppers. Helen saw the solid stream of faces, saw the gay autumn frocks of the girls and women, which made them look like brightly colored flowers in an old-fashioned garden. And then she saw Theo Bursley.

She hadn't seen him for years, and he had changed decidedly, she realized even in that first glance, and not for the better. His face was deeply tanned, his eyes, which for a moment held hers, were narrowed and calculating; altogether there was something predatory and dangerous in the face of this man whom she had once thought she loved. A shudder ran through her flesh. She slid quickly into the car, and, next moment, was swinging hurriedly out from the curb.

She had completed her shopping, and now she drove home and into the two-car garage adjoining the house. Five minutes later she was in her room, her purchases thrown on the day bed, her wide, excited eyes studying the face that looked out at her from her mirror.

That face had changed, too, she realized, in the days since that early love affair. She had been a girl then, and now she was a woman. Mere girlish prettiness had changed to something fuller, richer, deeper. A look had come into her eyes—the expression of serene expectancy which comes to a woman who loves, and is deeply loved in return. She had been happy, every day of her married life. Not that there weren't little things, such as Jim's unreasoning jealousy and his preoccupation with business; but she looked upon these details as really evidence of his love for her. She was the only woman in the world for him, as he often told her, and he didn't want other men looking at her with that hungry expression he always read into their glances. That made him jealous. And he wanted her to have everything she had ever dreamed of having, and that made him industrious. She had been very happy. She had come a long way since she and Theo used to hold hands. A vivid flush, almost of shame, swept over her face as she thought of her agony when he had gone away to a distant city. She could feel again the hot tears that had flowed down over her cheeks.

A tap at the door brought her slowly around. She had been so immersed in those old memories that, for an instant, she was unable to place herself. Beatrice, one of the maids, opened the door in response to her low-spoken command.

"A man to see you, Mrs. Riddel!"

The girl's keen, inquisitive eyes were fastened on her face. Helen knew that she must look startled, almost frightened.

"A man? Did he give you his name?"

"He didn't give his name, but he said you would be expecting him!"

Helen turned back toward her dressing table. Yes, she had been expecting him, although she had tried to hide the truth from herself. She knew who the

caller was, without asking additional questions.

"Tell him I will be down in a few minutes," she said, without turning her head.

By the time she went down the wide staircase that led into the reception hall, she had partially mastered her excitement. Her heart was still beating fast and hard, but she felt that her eyes were steady and that her manner would not betray her. She entered the east room, into which visitors were always shown, and stood for a moment silently appraising the dark, lean face turned upon her own. Yes, he had changed—terribly. Instinctively she seemed to glimpse the formidable adventures he had passed through, which had brought him to this.

"You have a good memory for faces, my dear!" Theo Bursley said in a low, purring voice. "I've changed, and you could hardly have been expecting me. But you knew me in an instant. Why did you run away?"

Helen felt her hard-won self-control slipping away from her. Her lips parted, one hand came slowly up toward her throat. Then she turned toward the French windows which opened into the garden.

"Come out here, if you must talk to me!" she said.

She hardly recognized her own voice. It was thick and unsteady.

He followed her, without comment. When they had gone down the steps into the garden, he strode along at her side. They reached a summerhouse, and Helen mutely gestured for him to enter and seat himself.

"Now what is it you want?" she demanded, standing before him.

"Want? My dear Helen——"

"Don't dare call me that! I am Mrs. Riddel!"

"Ah, yes, so I have learned. But why all the heroics?"

Why, indeed? Again she fought valiantly with her fear. She was play-

ing her hand very badly. After a moment she sat down, some distance from where he was sitting.

"Forgive me!" she murmured. "You certainly startled me. I thought you were dead."

"It was necessary for you to think that. I was dead—to you! I had to disappear, and I did it very completely. As a matter of fact, I am a dead man now. Theo Bursley died, and was buried. I am only his ghost!"

She was reacting from her excitement. She forced herself to relax, to sit quietly back, listening to his low, purring voice. Even that had changed.

"Yes?" she said. "Of course, I don't understand!"

"Of course, you don't. It's hardly necessary. I got into trouble—terrible trouble. Never mind just what it was. Even a ghost can feel fear. I had to make my exit from the drama, and leave you and the others to their own devices. Of course, I knew you wouldn't break your heart over me, in spite of those letters you wrote! Pretty hot letters, Mrs. Riddel! I still have them!"

She had known that, too. Those letters—written with all the heat and ardor of her "puppy love!" Innocent letters, but so foolish, so easily misunderstood!

"You have them?" she murmured.

"Yes, dear lady! I have them, and they are for sale!"

Everything that had lain hidden in her deeper mind was now openly expressed. She had known, in that moment when she looked into the hungry, threatening eyes of this man out of the past, that he would follow her home, that he had those schoolgirl love letters of hers, and that he would threaten her with them!

A voice sounded from the direction of the house.

"Helen! Oh, Helen!"

Helen Riddel was on her feet, was

standing in the doorway of the summerhouse, speaking tensely over her shoulder.

"Stay here! I'll come back when I can!"

She flew along the graveled path and up the steps. Jim stood in one of the open French windows, looking smilingly down.

"Enjoying the roses?" he inquired. "You might have brought poor old hubby one!"

"I was in too much of a hurry when I heard you calling," Helen told him, and blushed hotly at the ironic truth of her statement.

Jim was looking strangely at her. She didn't imagine it; there was a spark of suspicion or of uneasiness in his eyes. He slipped an arm round her and led her back into the east room.

"Dinner nearly ready?" he asked—and now she was sure he was trying to make his voice sound casual.

"Come on, we'll see!"

She wasn't taking any chances on leaving him alone. He might saunter out into the garden, and her heart gave a great smothered throb when she thought of what might happen if he found Theo Bursley, sitting in the summerhouse. It wasn't only that Jim's jealousy would suddenly be quickened into flaming life. He might be in danger—physical danger—from the terrible creature lurking there!

Dinner was ready. They sat down in the pleasant dining room, and Jim talked casually of the events of his day. Helen always tried to show her interest in these things. To-night it was not difficult. She was immensely interested in every word her husband uttered, in every glance he gave her. The impression grew upon her that he was uneasy, was watching her.

And then suddenly he spoke.

"There's no use hiding my guilty secret any longer, old dear, or trying to hide it. You've been watching me

like a hawk ever since I came home. You knew, you little rascal, I've got a committee meeting on for to-night! There, I don't know whether we have anything on or not——"

"The Grenigers were coming over to play bridge!"

"Deuce take it, I knew there was something! Well, you call them up and——"

"I'll do nothing of the kind. You go to the phone this minute and talk with Mr. Greniger. There's absolutely no reason why I should always have to break dates."

Jim meekly rose and laid his napkin aside.

"Want them to come over and keep you company?" he asked, looking ridiculously timid and apologetic.

"Of course not! Imagine proposing three-handed bridge to two fanatics like the Grenigers! And bridge is all they ever talk about. Just get yourself out the best way you can!"

Something deep within her listened and criticized. What a hypocrite she was! She was saving herself, and making poor old Jim think he was to blame for everything! But issues were involved to-night that would brook of no argument. She must save herself—and him!

Jim Riddel came back, perspiring and red-faced.

"Whew!" he muttered. "That wasn't so hot! You'd think bridge was the be-all and the end-all of existence! Greniger was quite stiff with me! Well, it can't be helped, and I'm more bothered about you than about the neighbors. You'll have a dull evening, dear."

"I'll manage. I've plenty of reading in the house. Don't worry."

Jim left as soon as he had finished dinner. Having cleared up his various difficulties, he set out for his committee meeting with all the enthusiasm of a small boy going to a performance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Helen waited

five minutes, then returned to the summerhouse.

Bursley was waiting with an ominous kind of patience.

"Get hubby out of the way?" he said softly, but there was a sneer in the words, for all their velvet quality. "Well, I've waited plenty long enough! I told you that I wanted to sell those letters of yours. You're the logical buyer!"

Helen was steadier than she had been before dinner. She stood looking down at the crouching figure; he was like a great spider, huddled there in the shadow of the rose branches.

"To think that I once fancied I loved you!" she murmured. "You call yourself a man, and you try to sell me the letters I wrote you!"

"Life has kicked me hard, and I've learned to kick back. My price is one thousand dollars, cash."

"A thousand dollars? Where would I get that much money?"

"That's your concern. Beg, borrow or steal it, if you haven't it on hand. The point is, you can get the money, and it will be the best investment you can make. You weren't anxious to have friend husband find me here. Suppose he learns that I waited while you got rid of him, and then reads these red-hot letters of yours!"

"I haven't the money."

"Don't tell me that again! I never was patient, as you ought to remember! Get the money, any way you see it, and bring it to me at this address! Bring it in person and don't you dare try any tricks!"

He stood up and approached her. She shrank back. For a moment his hands were on her arms, the fingers gripping down till she wanted to scream. Then he had pushed her roughly aside and was gliding along the garden path.

In her quivering fingers was a scrap of paper, which Theo Bursley had put there.

CHAPTER II.

DONOVAN MAKES A PROMISE.

THERE was an address on the scrap of paper, Helen Riddel saw, after she had hurried to her room and had locked herself in with her problem. Her fear-widened eyes took in the word and numbers scrawled in pencil, but she had never heard the name of the street. It must be in some remote part of the city.

What ought she to do? Her eyes came slowly up and she saw her own face, reflected in a mirror across the room. If Jim were to have come upon her at this moment, nothing she could have said would have explained the look of stark horror he would have seen. When she heard him calling her from the steps leading into the garden, earlier in the evening, she ought to have turned Bursley over to her husband's care. That was the natural and common-sense solution, but she had instinctively avoided it then, and now she had come a long way from anything so simple and easy. Every second's delay, after that logical moment, had added tremendously to her difficulties. Now she was out of sight of land, floating on a chip, with the high seas breaking all about her.

Dim memories of the things she had written back in those schoolgirl days came back to her, and, in an instant, her cheeks were burning. Jim would never have understood. If he could really have seen everything as it was, could have put aside his ridiculous jealousy, he would not want her to expose her heart. He wouldn't ask it. But, on the other hand, it would be infinitely worse to let Theo Bursley go to Jim with the letters. That wasn't to be thought of.

One thousand dollars? Helen thought of her diamonds; she had quite a collection of them. Women in trouble and in need of money pawned their jewels.

But Helen hadn't the faintest idea how that was done. Should she ask Jim for the money? To ask such a question was to answer it. He wouldn't begrudge her the money, but, of course, he would want to know what she intended doing with it. She quickly came to the conclusion that there was no way in the world for her to raise one thousand dollars in cash for any such purpose as she now had before her.

She leaned back in her chair, her eyes closed. And, suddenly, there flashed upon the curtain of her inner consciousness a face—a rugged, honest face, which she had not seen for many months. Clyde Donovan, a college friend of her dead brother's, had been almost as much at home in Helen's home, for several years, as he had at his own boarding house. Clyde apparently had no family of his own. When Ed died, Helen had tearfully promised herself to look after the young fellow who had almost broken down at the grave. But after that had come her marriage—and she had forgotten.

Now hastily she stood up. She hurried across to a closet and slipped into an evening cloak. For a moment, after she had unlocked the hall door, she hesitated. Should she call Clyde, and be sure he was at home? But Beatrice and the other servants would be sure to hear her talking, and observation was one thing she must avoid. So she went quickly down to the front door and let herself out.

The evening was fine, but that meant little to the young woman hurrying along the deserted street. She had not even dared take her car, for it might be noticed and Jim might hear of it; her heart throbbed rebelliously when she realized how involved she was in this web of lies and evasions. Once she paused abruptly, a slow flush rising to her cheeks. She ought to go back, wait till her husband returned, and tell him the truth. There was nothing in it for

her to fear. Only the eager sentimentalism of a young girl.

But Jim was the last man on earth to understand, and she didn't dare risk it. So she went on, and, half an hour later, she was ringing the bell of Clyde Donovan's apartment.

He was waiting for her in his open door, when she stepped from the elevator. His face was gaunter than she remembered it. She looked pleadingly into the steady, hazel eyes. A lock of coarse, straight black hair hung across his forehead. He swung his head with a gesture she remembered as well as if she had seen it yesterday. Then he ran his fingers through that black mane of his, and stood aside for her to enter.

Clyde Donovan had done well in business—partly, perhaps, because he was not a very companionable young fellow, and was left much to himself. He had to work hard to keep from being bored. He had few distractions. His apartment was well furnished, but it showed at the first glance that it was strictly a bachelor establishment. Helen looked quickly round, then again was facing her dead brother's friend.

"You didn't expect to see me," she murmured, and could have bitten her tongue out at the inane remark. "I've been meaning to call for a long time," she added, and realized she had not made things any better.

"I've seen your name in the paper once in a while," Clyde said. "I read the society columns just to kind of keep track of you."

He was smiling—that faithful-till-death smile she remembered so well. In an instant all the hesitancy was gone from her heart. Here was a man with whom she didn't have to be diplomatic. He expected nothing for himself, was ready to give without promise of return.

"Clyde," she whispered, "I'm in terrible trouble! I can't tell Jim about it,

so I've come to you! Please sit down and listen!"

He seated himself obediently. There was a little tightening of the strong mouth, a furrow of attention on the broad forehead.

"Tell me about it, Helen," he said.

Helen told him of seeing Bursley on the street, and of his coming to the house.

"I never really cared for him," she explained, repeating the old phrase women from the time of Eve's daughters up have used about their discarded lovers. "I was a silly young thing, and the time had come when I had to love something. So I created a man, and called him 'Theo Bursley.' I never saw him as he was, although I'm sure he wasn't then anything like what he is now. He is terrible. I can't make you understand how terrible he is."

Clyde Donovan smiled faintly at her energy.

"I've known a few bad eggs," he remarked. "Now let's get this straight. You wrote him some love letters, and he threatens to take them to Mr. Riddell unless you pay him a thousand dollars?"

"Yes, and they would ruin my life, if Jim were to see them! You know, Clyde, they were just the sentimental ravings of a silly child. I actually wrote poetry to him. I called him, 'My sun-crowned hero'! Imagine poor old Jim reading that! He'd never feel the same toward me again."

Her companion nodded soberly.

"I guess he wouldn't" he agreed. "Anyhow, that isn't the point. You want the letters back, or want them destroyed. And you want this dog shut up. Well, I could buy him off, and if I thought he'd disappear and never come back, I'd do it. But he wouldn't. I've read the newspapers, and I know this blackmail game. There's only one way to handle a fellow like this—but never mind the details. I'll get your letters

back for you, Helen, and I'll see to it this skunk flies his kite!"

Helen had always winced at Clyde Donovan's salty expressions, in the old days, but now she found them singularly comforting. She closed her eyes for a moment, then quickly stood up and held out her hand.

"I'm not going to try to thank you, Clyde," she said. "I knew I could count on you. You were the first and the only person in the world I thought of appealing to."

"I'm glad of that! And just you lay the thing off your mind! It's as good as settled!"

She gave him the slip of paper containing Theo Bursley's address. Clyde read and nodded.

"He's roosting in the Oriental quarter," he commented. "Well, I'll go down and see him, and you can call me some time to-morrow. Before nine I'll be here, and afterward I'll be at the office. Good night and don't you dare to worry!"

She had a final glimpse of his rugged face and of his broad shoulders as he stood in the open doorway of his apartment, waiting for her to enter the elevator.

CHAPTER III.

A VISIT FROM THE POLICE.

BEATRICE was hovering about near the front door, when Helen Riddell reached home. The maid's inquisitive eyes looked steadily into those of her mistress.

"Mr. Riddell called a few minutes ago," she said. "I told him that you were taking a bath and he said for you not to worry if he didn't get home before midnight."

Helen frowned, hesitated, then turned toward the stairway. She began to realize how unfitted she was for a life involving anything but honesty. This girl was not to be trusted, but she was already deeply in the affair concerning

Theo Bursley. She had admitted him and probably had seen Helen take him out to the summerhouse. Now she had taken it upon herself to lie to Jim, and Helen didn't dare reprimand her for her presumption.

"I hope I did right, Mrs. Riddell!" Beatrice said.

"If you thought I was bathing, it was all right to tell Mr. Riddell so," the mistress of the house replied, without turning her head.

She went up to her room, and, by the time Jim came tiptoeing up the stairs, she was apparently asleep. But long after his steady breathing told her that he had forgotten the cares and the vicissitudes of money-making for what remained of the night, she lay staring at the dimly visible ceiling.

She had left Clyde Donovan with a feeling of perfect confidence. She vainly fancied, for the moment, that the heavy weight of her problem had been transferred to other and stronger shoulders. Clyde was capable and direct. And he seemed to know just what he was going to do. But by the time she lay down to rest, a reaction had set in. After all, what could Clyde do? He had said he wouldn't pay the extortioner any more, and, without paying, how could he hope to get the letters? What had she expected him to do? She must have been temporarily out of her mind. No good could come of the meeting of these two. And very easily evil might come.

Clyde was so confident, but he didn't know the evil creature he was going up against. Her brief interviews with Theo Bursley had developed in Helen Riddell's mind a surprising belief in the evil possibilities of her girlhood lover. Perhaps her subconscious mind had noticed things about him then which it wouldn't admit, but which had been stored away for future use: his selfishness, his quick temper, his ready resort to violence. At any rate, she was sat-

ified now, without argument, that Bursley was capable of murder.

That word came like a wraith into her thoughts. She sat up in bed, her hands groping for the covers. She must call Clyde at once, and assure herself that he had gotten safely back to his apartment.

But, of course, she couldn't to that. The web was wrapping itself about her. Soon she would be unable to turn, to move. Her lips parted, she sat staring into the soft darkness. A sensation of terror wrapped itself round her. She felt that something unspeakably evil had drifted into the room—something ghostly and terrible. For a space of minutes she could hardly keep herself from screaming.

After that her pounding heart steadied down, and she sank back to her pillow and lay through the long hours of darkness, listening to the regularly recurring chimes of the French clock in the lower hall, trying vainly to sleep. As dawn began to drift into the room, she sighed deeply and turned her head.

She opened her eyes and stared before her. Sunshine lay like gold leaf on the floor and on the coverlet. It must be late. Jim was gone; he had dressed without her hearing him. Her head was heavy; however, she slid quickly out of bed.

It was a quarter to nine. Helen slipped into a dressing gown and went into the hall. Beatrice was dusting.

"I'll take breakfast in my room," Helen said. "Melon, toast, and coffee."

After the maid's footsteps had died out in the distance, she seated herself at the telephone table and looked up Clyde Donovan's residence number. She put through the call and sat waiting.

The phone hummed and occasionally the chatter of voices broke in on her anxious reverie. But, at last, the prim voice of central told her that her party did not answer.

Helen felt suddenly cold and frightened. He had said he would be at his apartment till nine—and he wasn't the kind to deviate from even so indirect a promise. She waited five minutes. Beatrice brought up her breakfast tray, and was sent back to the kitchen for hot water. Helen tried again.

"They do not answer!" central informed her, after another time of waiting.

Helen made a pretense of eating breakfast, but now she was thoroughly alarmed and even the thought of food was repugnant. Finally, she rang for Beatrice and had the tray taken away.

Standing in the doorway of her room, Helen waited till she heard a door slam in the direction of the kitchen. Again she hurried across to the phone table. She tried to get Clyde's apartment, then hunted up his office number.

A woman's voice promptly answered. "Mr. Donovan hasn't come in yet," she said. "Will you leave a message?"

"What time does he usually come to the office in the morning?"

"He should be here now. If you'll leave your number——"

"I'll call later," Helen said, and hung up.

She went into her room and crossed to a window. Looking through it, she could see the rose garden and the graveled paths and the summerhouse where she had interviewed Bursley. Her flesh was hot and cold alternately. She tried to think, but the human mind is easily thrown out of gear by a high voltage of emotion. Now all she could see was quickly shifting images, as if she were looking into a kaleidoscope. She saw Jim, his face red with amazement and anger. She saw Clyde Donovan lying with his eyes half closed, the color gone from his rugged cheeks. She saw herself, stared at, whispered about, deserted.

At ten she called Donovan's office a second time. He had not yet come in,

the telephone girl said. Helen waited till noon and called again. He had not come in.

She called only once during the afternoon. Something occurred on that occasion that frightened her away from the telephone. In answer to her question, the woman's voice at the other end of the line stated that Mr. Donovan had not been at the office during the day.

"You're the lady who has been calling, aren't you?" the phone girl continued. "Would you mind giving me your name and address? We are quite worried about Mr. Donovan——"

Helen hung up abruptly. In a flash she saw it all. Clyde had confronted Theo Bursley and had demanded the letters. There had been a fight, and the man she had so wantonly dragged into this sordid affair had been killed. Now, in spite of everything, she would be involved in the case. They were sure to connect her with it sooner or later.

But she couldn't wait for that, she realized. The time had come at last when she must confront the thing that menaced her without trying to dodge or twist. If Clyde had been murdered, as she was certain he had, she would not be able to wait till they dragged her out. She must go to the police and tell her story!

However, the time had not quite come for that. She sent out for afternoon papers and read them through, looking for any tiny fragment of news that might have a bearing on the tragedy. There was nothing. Evening came, and the evening "home edition." Again there was nothing; she had feared headlines announcing the discovery of the murder. She found herself pacing the floor and abruptly sat down.

Jim came in soon after six, and, without preamble to-night, announced that he had another board meeting on.

"Got to get this thing settled," he said grimly. "The only time all of us can get together is at night."

He went on explaining, but his wife hardly heard a word of what he said. She was listening for something—a sharp step outside the front door, the ringing of the bell. She had the feeling that time was closing in about her, and that it would be minutes, at the outside, before the earth opened to swallow her.

But Jim had dressed and had gone out for the evening before the expected ring came. Helen Riddel stood up. She heard one of the maids hurrying to the door, then caught the murmur of voices. Footsteps sounded, coming swiftly toward the east room.

The door, which was ajar, swung fully open and she saw, standing for an instant on the threshold and looking steadily in at her, a tall, strongly built man of fifty or thereabouts. He wore gold-rimmed glasses and was dressed so that he might have been a doctor or a lawyer or a banker. But she knew that he was a detective.

He advanced a couple of steps, looked back into the hall, and spoke.

"We won't need you, my girl. Just you go to your room and read your book!"

Helen heard the girl hurry away. The door closed and again the stranger was looking down at her.

"Mrs. Riddel?" he inquired. "I am Inspector Forbes of the homicide detail!"

In spite of herself, a tortured cry escaped her lips.

"Have they found him? Is he dead?"

"You're the party that called Walnut 3242 several times to-day?" Inspector Forbes continued, without heeding her questions. "I had the call traced the last time. By then I had got around to Donovan's office!"

Helen's thoughts began to clear. She sat looking up at the detective, trying to read his expression. It was at the same time benignant and severe.

"Now, Mrs. Riddel," the inspector

said, "I think it will be best for you just to run over your story with me, without wasting any more time. You ask if he has been found, and if he is dead. My reply to both questions is, 'Yes'! Now, as the serial writers say, 'Let's go on from there'! Although, as a matter of fact, we've really got to go back to the first chapters."

Helen sat drooping in her chair. She had known it, all the time, but this was a different kind of knowing.

"I sent him to his death!" she said, her voice so low that instinctively the detective stooped toward her. "I can't understand now how I could have been so selfish or so blind. I was in trouble—I can't tell you about that—but I went to Clyde and he volunteered to help me. He had to confront this creature. When I couldn't get him at his apartment, early this morning, I feared the worst. I don't know what to do!"

Inspector Forbes listened, his head on one side.

"I'm going to ask you to come with me," he commented. "No, of course, you're not under arrest. There's no reason why you should be, is there? You didn't kill him!"

"Oh, no, no! But must I come? How long will it take?"

"I'll have you back in half an hour!"

"I'll get my cloak!"

Helen hurried up the stairs. Three minutes later she was seated in Inspector Forbes' car and was being whirled through the streets.

They penetrated a part of town she had never seen before, and, after that, came to a stop in front of a four-story brick building. On the ground floor was a Chinese grocery.

"Up here—and don't you be afraid of anything," Forbes said. "Just keep hold of my arm!"

They went up two flights. A policeman, outside a closed door, saluted.

"All quiet, inspector!" he announced.

Inspector Forbes nodded and opened

the door. He stood aside for his companion to pass. Helen took a step forward. A droplight in the center of the room was turned on, and directly beneath it was something.

She cried out in amazement. The sightless eyes leered at her; the crooked mouth seemed to grin. Dead—unmistakably dead—but it was the predatory face of Theo Bursley that stared, mask-like, up at her.

CHAPTER IV.

HELEN EXPLAINS.

THROUGH the confusion and horror that followed her discovery, two distinct thoughts penetrated Helen Ridel's mind. The first was that if Theo Bursley was dead, Clyde was probably alive. That brought her a great feeling of relief. The belief that he had been killed while trying to help her had been so terrible that her own little problem was for the time forgotten. But Clyde hadn't been killed; she didn't try to work out the logic of this conclusion. She was sure now that he was alive. She drew in a deep breath as she entered the room, gently but remorselessly propelled by the hand of the detective, which rested for a moment on her arm.

But the second thought was of a different character. It brought a quick flush of resentment into her cheeks as she faced Inspector Forbes. He had tricked her into telling of Clyde's visit here. She saw now that Forbes' statement that "he" had been found and that "he" was dead had referred to Bursley. He had let her assume whatever came most easily into her consciousness. And she had made damaging admissions in her ignorance.

The man from headquarters seemed to be reading her thoughts without effort.

"My business, young lady," he said, "is to catch the man who did this murder. The fact that he may be a friend

of yours has nothing to do with it. Did you ever see this before?"

"This" was a little brightly lacquered box, with two gay figures painted on it. It was about three and one half inches square by half an inch deep. Helen looked irritably at it.

"No, I never saw it before," she replied. "And I certainly wouldn't think of telling you if I had," she added with spirit.

Inspector Forbes shook his leonine head.

"That's not the way to talk, or to feel," said he. "But in this case it doesn't happen to make any difference. Your friend owned this cigarette case, which fortunately is an unusual one. During the fight, last night, it fell out of his pocket. It took some of my men all the morning to find the dealer who sold it, but our troubles were at an end when we found him. He knew Mr. Donovan personally, and gave us his name and business address. It isn't often we get a break like that, at the beginning of a case!"

Helen had a new perception of the complexity of life. She saw it as a vast mechanism, where one cogwheel is meshed to another, and where a series of apparently casual relationships can be traced, by the adept at such things, over a wide span. A wooden cigarette case, made in France, imported to America, and sold by a neighborhood tobacconist, had brought Clyde Donovan into the shadow of the gallows!

"How was this—this creature killed?" she asked, her voice husky.

"Well, first he was beaten up very thoroughly. And then he was stabbed! A clever job! Under the arm so that we didn't find the stab wound till the medical examiner came round and pointed it out to us!"

Helen ignored the expression of distaste which for the moment appeared on her companion's face, at mention of the medical examiner. One word stood out

before her, as if it had been written in letters of fire.

"Stabbed?" she cried. "Clyde never did that! Never!"

"You think not?"

"I know he didn't! I would believe it of myself sooner than of him!"

"Ladies are very handy with knives and with pistols, too," Inspector Forbes commented. "Give a nice, quiet-mannered young woman who has never seen a gat sufficient provocation, and let her get her hand on a gun, and she'll make a bull's-eye of the villain's heart as sure as anything! But that doesn't prove your boy friend didn't stab our party here. You see, the cards lie kind of funny. You tell me that he came here to face this egg for your sake. Murder has been done many and many a time for the sake of nowhere near as pretty a face as yours, my dear. So we know he came, and we've pretty good evidence that he gave the deceased a terrible beating. Then he stabbed him. Of course, he did. Otherwise, why did he take himself off?"

"Where did he go?" Helen asked unsteadily.

Forbes smiled.

"Yes, that's it—where did he go? And why, if he wasn't guilty?"

"Are you sure he wasn't killed? Have you looked for his body?"

"Who would have killed him?"

"Theo Bursley, of course! He had it in his heart to commit murder!"

"So, his name was Theo Bursley? That isn't what he was called hereabouts. But to get back to your little conundrum: if Bursley here had killed him, his body would be lying in this room or not too far from here, wouldn't it? Well, it isn't. The neighborhood has been gone over with a fine tooth comb!"

Helen could see that he was telling the truth. Indeed, that idea of Clyde's also having been killed in the battle of the previous night had not been a very convincing one. She stood now, look-

ing shrinkingly down into the leering face of the dead man.

"Clyde never stabbed any one," she said again. "He couldn't have. And, besides, why would he want to? You say he gave this creature a terrible beating. That would be enough! He was no murderer!"

"Now, ma'am," the detective commented, "I expect we've been round the mulberry bush enough. I can see that you really believe Donovan didn't kill Bursley. If that's so, I don't want to waste my time playing on a dead card. But you can't expect me to take your word for it. You know all about the business, and I don't. The thing for you to do is just to lay your cards on the table like a sensible young woman. Don't be afraid to go into details. I know a good deal already. This lad on the floor, whose face I don't at all like, had some letters or papers of yours that he was threatening to make trouble with! You're a married woman——"

"And I love my husband and have never loved any one else," Helen broke in fiercely. "He had some letters I wrote years ago; not wicked letters—just silly ones."

"I know that as well as you do," Forbes assured her. "It's the silly letters that make most of the trouble in this world. All love letters ought to be written in vanishing ink. But, anyhow, Bursley had them, and he threatened to go to Mr. Riddel with them unless you paid him his price. How about a thousand bucks?"

"He demanded a thousand dollars," Helen said.

"I thought so. You see, my dear, I've had a lot of experience with birds of his feather—what you might call the 'vulture tribe.' He'd have come back for more, of course."

"That was what Clyde said! He thought he could get the letters without paying anything!"

"Well, I fancy he did. Bursley seems

to have done something of a business in blackmailing, but there was only one document on the place, and that didn't concern you. Yes, I fancy Donovan cleaned him out, after putting him under the table. But by that time he was too mad to be reasonable. He went a step farther, and murder is murder!"

"Clyde never stabbed any one! He couldn't have," Helen Riddel sobbed.

"Then where is he now? Why didn't he call you up? Why didn't he show up at the office to-day?"

Helen's eyes were wide with fright.

"I don't know," she whispered. "Where can he have gone?"

Inspector Forbes glanced at his watch.

"Just time to get you back inside the half hour," he muttered. "Come, I'll take you home. You can trust me, Mrs. Riddel. I won't haul you into this if I don't actually have to!"

CHAPTER V.

A HARD-BOILED LADY.

FORBES returned his unwilling witness to her home, and at once drove back to the brick building where the murder had occurred. His lips were pursed, his eyes meditative, as he went up the stairs to the death room.

Standing against the wall, with the door closed, he looked broodingly down at the body. An expression of extreme dislike appeared in his steely eyes.

"Killing is a lot too good for you and your kind, my friend," he remarked aloud. "But there isn't any way made and provided for in the statutes for getting you out of the way. Now let's see!"

His glance went slowly and methodically around the room. It was scantily furnished, and showed unmistakable evidences of the fight that must have preceded the murder.

"This chap, Donovan, certainly gave him a lacing," Forbes thought. "Doc

says one rib is busted, and there are welts all over his body. He tried to fight back, but his gun must have been knocked out of his hand before he had a chance to use it. It was clear back against the wall, under the bed. Hadn't been fired—only the dead man's finger prints on it. Yes, Donovan beat him up and did a thorough job. He got possession of the letters—and then he stabbed him? What with? Doc says the death weapon had at least a six-inch blade. Stabbed him under the arm. Why the deuce did he do that? And why did he take the knife away with him?"

This case seemed obvious enough, but nothing is more dangerous than an "obvious" murder. Inspector Forbes had no intention of following off a smoked herring, and being shown up in court as a dub and a fool.

"This Riddel woman is a good clean type," he reflected. "And I'm not the man to brush aside the hunches of such as her. She knew Donovan; I'll have to go into that a little deeper, I expect, but there's nothing crooked about her, I'll wager. She knew him well enough to go to him when she needed a friend. And she says he wouldn't have stabbed anybody. It's always hard to say what any given party will or won't do. But a woman will come closer to hitting the truth than a man any time. All right, suppose we say he didn't stab Bursley. Who did—and when—and why? It was done after the fight. How long after?"

One of Inspector Forbes' handicaps in this case had been the lack of witnesses, even indirect ones, in the neighborhood. No one had been at home when the battle took place. The other roomers in the old brick building were a shady lot, and he knew he would have gotten a whisper out of some of them if they had known anything. But the building had been practically deserted between nine and eleven. The grifters

and the mouchers had been out, reaping their evening harvest.

"Half a dozen folks could have come and gone," Forbes realized. "Suppose we make another grab into the bag, and see what we can bring out!"

He slid his hand into an inside pocket and produced a letter. It was addressed to "Miss Gwendolin St. John, Hunter's Theater." The cancellation stamp showed that it had been posted two years ago.

"Exhibit B," Inspector Forbes muttered. "Also found on the floor, covered with a newspaper. There isn't any Hunter's Theater in this town, but as it happens there is a Miss Gwendolin St. John close at hand, and I think I'll just drop in and have a little chat with her."

As he went out into the hall, he paused to speak to the patrolman on guard at the door.

"They'll be sending up for his nibs," Inspector Forbes explained. "But I want you to stick around for a while longer. Just go inside and keep quiet. You might snap off the light, if you feel like it, and don't lock the door. If any one comes inside, grab him. I'll be back in an hour or so."

The call Forbes purposed making was in the neighborhood, so he left his car in front of the brick tenement and walked briskly along the street, his eyes from force of habit taking in the shop windows and the faces of pedestrians. At the door of a flat building he paused to consult his notebook.

"No. 312. Probably on the third floor!" he murmured. "No elevator! We'll walk up!"

This he promptly did. The halls were dark, and odors of cooking pervaded the place. Inspector Forbes made his way quietly upward and eventually stopped before the door of No. 312.

For a moment he stood with his ear against an upper panel, shamelessly listening. However, his moral turpitude

went for nothing. He stepped back and knocked.

Footsteps sounded at once. He heard a chain rattle, and then the door swung open just far enough to show the face of a woman of thirty or thereabouts—a keen, suspicious-looking face, still rather pretty in spite of a too liberal use of paint and powder.

"What do you want?" she demanded, her voice edged with hostility.

Inspector Forbes mentally classified her.

"Hard-boiled! Out for the money, but not quite clever enough to get much. Trusts, no one, couldn't understand an honest man to save her soul!"

But his words were pacific enough.

"Miss St. John? I'd like a little talk with you, if you can spare the time. I'm from police headquarters, but don't you let that worry you. Just a little routine matter I thought you might be able to help me with!"

She tried to slam the door in his face, but his foot had been thrust into the aperture. On the other hand, Inspector Forbes couldn't shove his way in, because of the short, strong chain that had been hooked into place.

For a long moment they faced each other silently. Then, with a contemptuous shrug, Miss St. John unfastened the chain and opened the door.

"Come in," she said. "Though I'm sure I don't know what you want with me!"

Forbes didn't enlighten her at once. He stood with the closed hall door at his back, calmly looking over the room before him. It was gaudily furnished. There was too much gilt and tinsel, too many things that pretended to be one thing but were another. He saw that even the neat sectional bookcase facing him was a dummy; probably, it concealed Miss St. John's liquor supply, or even an opium layout. Her narrowed eyes were fastened on his as he looked about.

"Well?" she said surlily.

"I'm not looking for hooch or dope," the detective assured her. "Just a little routine matter, as I've said. In fact, if you'll answer one question promptly and truthfully, I won't bother you further. Where were you last night between nine o'clock and eleven? Quick, let's have it!"

But he had to wait at least thirty seconds before he received his answer.

"That's easy! I was at the Bijou Theater in my dressing room or on the stage!"

"Not very prompt," Inspector Forbes commented. "Sure you were there every minute?"

"I certainly was!"

"That's better! Now how about this?"

He flashed the envelope before her eyes. Unexpectedly she made a leap forward and all but tore the letter from his hand.

"Ah, naughty, naughty!" he said. "Mustn't snatch! You were brought up better than that!"

"Just you come across with my property," the woman facing him snarled. "Don't bother with your cheap humor. You cops are a funny lot, all right, but I don't feel like laughing at you just now! Give me that letter!"

"You admit that it's yours, do you?"

She bit her lip. Her angry eyes bored into his.

"It has my name on it. It certainly isn't yours," she declared.

"You never can tell. I've got it, and that's something. Now how would you like to revise that statement of yours about where you were last night between nine and eleven?"

"I was at the Bijou," she said sullenly. "Give me that letter!"

"No, I'm not going to give it to you. I might have traded it for the truth about your whereabouts."

"I told you the truth!"

She was almost panting, in a vicious,

feline way. Inspector Forbes felt that his series of verbal darts had accomplished its purpose. She knew more than she was willing to tell; he was certain of that. But, for the present, he would not be able to go further.

"All right," he said negligently. "I just thought I'd drop in and see what you had to say."

He turned and laid his hand on the doorknob. Over his shoulder he flashed a last look at the actress. Her lips were still parted; her eyes were hot and questioning. She seemed about to speak, but, next moment, she closed her teeth with a click and pressed her lips firmly.

"Not yet," the detective realized philosophically. "Well, I'll give her all the rope she wants!"

He went down into a street, and, from a corner drug store, called headquarters. Two plain-clothes men joined him five minutes later. One of the pair was the understudy who had located Gwendolin St. John for Inspector Forbes. He knew her by sight.

"Don't bother her unless she tries to fly the coop!" Forbes commanded. "Let her run around all she wants to, but keep tabs on any one she talks to. I'll go over to the Bijou myself and check up what she says about last night!"

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE.

THE case had already gotten into the footwork stage, Inspector Forbes realized. Sooner or later they all did. Milling around, following up this lead and that, hoping to blunder upon a flimsy thread of evidence that would help: that was the trouble with murder kicks. In a case of robbery, there were always the "stoolies." Professional thieves were known to each other, and eventually some one was pretty apt to "rumble." But murder, unless it was a professional job, wasn't apt to be simplified in this way.

"Just have to wear out my shoes, like any other roughneck with a strong back and a weak head," Forbes thought discontentedly. "Well, here's the Bijou. Let's see what we can dig up about the lady."

Not so much of a "lady," either, he reflected as he presented himself at the stage door and accosted the surly-faced watchman on guard there. Forbes hadn't formed any tender attachment for Miss Gwendolin St. John.

The guardian of the stage door inspected the detective's shield without enthusiasm.

"Yeah?" he said. "And what do you want?"

"You stick around here pretty steady all evening, I suppose?" Forbes asked.

"If I didn't, the show would bust up! There's forty young Johnnies a night, on the average, that try to crash this door!"

"Well, that ties you down. From the time the show opens till it closes, you're right here, the iron-faced boy that keeps the show going. No one gets in without your approval. But any one can get out that wants to, of course. The actors and actresses—"

"The men can go out when they want to," his informant interrupted. "The girls can't go out till their act is over for the night."

"Why not?"

"Orders of the management. One of them went out one night and didn't come back—eloped, or got soused. And, besides, we ain't going to have our girls standing around on street corners, between acts, talking with fellows. Some of them will do it, if they get a chance."

"Yes, I expect they would. So when a girl comes on, in the evening, she's here till she goes off—at what time?"

"That depends on the evening. Wednesdays and Sundays we give a late show. That keeps them here till about midnight."

Inspector Forbes reflected that as to-

day was Thursday. Miss St. John's alibi for the previous evening was pretty convincing. He didn't want to mention her by name, if he didn't have to. This guardian of the honor of the stage looked as if he might wag a wicked tongue, when it came to the pastime of gossip.

But there was another possibility. The previous evening had been warm, and he noted that the watchman's chair, to-night, had been close to the end of his little lane—within two feet of the sidewalk. Forbes turned and stared reflectively in the opposite direction. Mostly darkness there. He could check up on that detail presently.

"No one sick or otherwise absent last night?" he asked.

"Sickness ain't no excuse. Sick or well, they got to report. If a girl is dead, that's different."

"Also 'orders of the management,' I suppose," the inspector murmured. "So they were all here last night?"

"Yes, they was!"

"Well, I'm glad to hear it." A group of girls came hurrying toward the stage door from the street. Forbes moved silently in the opposite direction—into the shadow end of the narrow lane that flanked the theater building. "See you later," he added.

He had to grope his way through the darkness, but, after stumbling a hundred feet or so along a narrow concrete walk, he came out into an alley. A grim smile twisted his lips. All the St. John woman had to do was to watch her chance, and slip out behind the watchman's back. By turning to the left rather than to the right, she would not have to encounter his formidable glare.

The alley led into the side street. Inspector Forbes consulted his watch, then went briskly forward. In less than five minutes he arrived in front of the brick building where the murder had taken place. Yes, she would have had no

difficulty in getting here, and getting back, between acts.

Forbes went up two flights of stairs and entered the unlighted room where he had left the policeman on guard. The solitary officer reported that nothing had happened, there had been no visitors, although he had heard the other roomers passing along the hall.

More footwork, this time only figurative! Inspector Forbes went down to his car and drove to the headquarters building. In his little office he found a memorandum left by the plainclothes man who had been sent out to gather the facts on the dead man's previous activities. There was quite a little docket.

Theo Bursley had been known as Marx. He had been in the city nearly two months, but there was no evidence that he had been up to anything out of the way until recently. About two weeks ago a patrolman in the lower part of the city had brought him in, together with a well-dressed young man, obviously both scared and excited. They had been arguing loudly, had been apparently on the point of fighting. Marx had refused to talk. His companion had demanded that his attorney be called, and a well-known family lawyer had come to the station and managed to get the thing hushed up. Now both the attorney and his client were "out of town" for an indefinite time.

"Blackmail, and they won't do a thing to help us!" Forbes realized. "A nice case all the way around!"

Blackmail cases were usually like that. The only victims of extortion who ever fought back were hard-headed middle-aged business men, who knew better than to yield to the first demand. And usually they were made to look so foolish and despicable, before the thing died out in the newspapers, that all the other victims were scared into submission.

"It's no good," Inspector Forbes told himself. "I'm getting old, and I never

was very bright. I wouldn't have been a detective if I had had any brains! Just a roughneck policeman, no education, no friends, nothing! I ought to go and hop into the bay!"

But at this moment the office door opened and a debonair-looking young man, with his featherweight felt hat a trifle on one side and an airy whistle on his lips, came into the room. Forbes began to glower. This medical examiner always set his teeth on edge.

"So, here you are!" he growled inhospitably. "Well, don't spring any of your stuff because I won't stand it, see? I don't know anything about detecting, and I'm not supposed to. I'm a fool. But there's one thing: I'm not the only one around here. I haven't got a big microscope and a lot of bottles and glass tubing strung all over the place. I don't know human blood from red ink or raspberry juice. And at that, I know as much as the medical examiner. Why don't you go over to France, or to Germany, or to England, and learn how to examine evidence? Those babies over there can take a hair and tell you all about the man that shed it, or they can take a spoonful of lint and dust off a man's coat and tell you where he's been and what he's done. You're a big help, you are!"

Young Doctor Alex Giddings continued to go through the motions of whistling, but no sound issued from his puckered lips. His eyes widened slightly and he seemed overcome by amazement.

"Inspector," he asked in a hushed voice, "are you a mind reader?"

"Go on, spring it!" Forbes grunted.

"Well, if you're not, Old Man Coincidence has some explaining to do! Do you know what I came in here for?"

"I don't know why you ever come in here," Forbes said unkindly. "I could get along without you."

"Don't say that. You'll regret it in a minute. You said I ought to go to Europe to learn how to use a micro-

scope in criminology? Well, I didn't go there, but I did spend my last vacation with a man out in California—a policeman who knows his business. They call him the 'scientific cop,' and let me tell you he doesn't have to go to Paris or to Berlin to ask how to handle his end of things."

"I've heard of him," Forbes admitted. "But what's that got to do with me?"

"Kind of self-centered to-night, aren't you?" the young medical man suggested. "However, I don't blame you. But just you come over to my place and I'll show you something."

In spite of himself, Inspector Forbes was impressed. This irritating young fellow had always had a suggestion of competence about him, and now he seemed more in earnest than Forbes had even known him to be. The inspector stood up, locked his desk, and followed out into the hall and around to the alley door. Soon they were passing through the hallway that led past the morgue and into the offices at the rear.

Doctor Giddings unlocked a door and motioned for his companion to enter. The room beyond was brightly lighted. A bench ran around three walls, and on this bench were all the paraphernalia Forbes had so slightly mentioned—microscopes, cameras, flasks, beakers, condensers. The medical expert crossed to one of the microscopes, stooped over it for a moment, and then, with a rather theatrical gesture, straightened up.

"Have a look at that!" he commanded. "I took it out from under the dead man's finger nails!"

CHAPTER VII.

JIM DEMANDS AN ANSWER.

ON her return home after her visit with Inspector Forbes, Helen Ridel's first feeling was one of infinite relief. Clyde was not dead. Bursley was. For a short time these two facts seemed all that mattered.

But the inevitable mental reaction set in. Long before Jim had returned from his committee meeting, she had begun to worry. Why had Clyde disappeared? Was it possible that he had actually killed Bursley—with a dagger or knife? At first, she was firmly convinced that this was out of the question. Clyde Donovan was the last man in the world to resort to anything so "un-American." He would use his fists, or in a dire emergency even a revolver, if one was at hand; but he would never stab any one.

The more she thought about the matter, however, the more confused and uncertain she became. Bursley might have drawn the knife—it would have been in keeping with his character, she felt—and Clyde might have wrested it from him and struck the fatal blow. Then he had "run for it"; but that also was out of character, and she felt herself more and more baffled. There was just one possibility which was in keeping with what she knew of the rather rugged-minded young fellow who had been her brother's friend: Clyde must have been desperately wounded, or perhaps he had been killed outright. But in that case where was his body?

There is nothing more wearing and nerve-shattering than continued silence, in a case of this kind. Jim returned, preoccupied by the events of his evening. Helen continued to think over and over again the little round of baffling thoughts. Clyde hadn't done it. Or had he? He had run away, or perhaps he had been killed. She reached a point where she would gladly have dismissed the whole terrible affair from her mind, but by this time she had lost control of her image-forming machinery. Vivid and terrible pictures presented themselves, in swift and continuous succession.

It was at breakfast time, next morning, that she first became aware of a change in her husband's manner toward

her. Jim was very quiet, but his eyes from time to time sought her face. She met one of those lingering glances, and suddenly her heart missed a beat. What did that expression mean? There was something sultry and unpleasant in it. She sat looking steadily at Jim. He smiled and resumed his eating. But his smile wasn't a pleasant one, and he uttered not a word to explain it.

Here was a change of thought, at any rate. Helen suddenly began to ask herself if Jim could suspect anything. Suppose he hadn't been at a board meeting last night. Suppose he had been watching her. But he had come home in his usual after-business mood. No, he had been all right till now. Helen stole a glance at him from the corners of her eyes. He was stealthily regarding her.

"What's the trouble, dear?" she asked, her voice cool and pleasant in spite of her disturbance.

"Nothing!"

He was certainly angry or suspicious about something. She tried to think of possible explanation other than the logical one. She could think of nothing.

But Jim was not going to explain. He maintained a sulkily silence throughout the remainder of the meal, and went off to his office without another word. He didn't kiss her good-by, and that was final proof, if she had needed any.

Throughout the day she kept to her rooms. She left a door partly open so that she could hear the telephone. Occasionally it rang and she hurried to answer it before one of the maids could do so. Various acquaintances called. Helen each time excused herself on the plea of having a headache. She both hoped and feared that Inspector Forbes might call her, but no word came from the police.

By afternoon her headache was a very real affair. She felt sick and dizzy. Aspirin didn't help, so she sat by the window and looked wearily out over the lawn. A robin family, consisting

apparently of two harried parents, two overgrown and very greedy children, with spotted breasts, and a bachelor uncle, helped her center her attention on something outside her swirling anxieties. The bachelor uncle evidently disapproved of the way in which the younger generation was being brought up. On one occasion he hopped up behind one of the gobbling children and, unperceived by either parent, appropriated a fat angle worm which had a moment before been thrust into a gaping pink mouth. Then he administered his idea of a peck and turned his back. Helen smiled wanly.

The robins flew away and long shadows began to form across the close-clipped turf. Evening was at hand. She felt all of a sudden that she couldn't stand another moment of this silent, mocking house. She must get out or she would smother. She went quickly down into the hall and let herself out.

A half-hour walk immensely refreshed her. She came slowly back along the quiet evening street. As she went up the steps of her own house, the front door swung open before her, and Jim Riddel stood looking out and down, his lips parted and quivering, a pasty-green shadow tinging his usually ruddy cheeks.

"Come in here!" he said. "I want to talk to you!"

Helen paused, then came up the remaining steps and entered the house. Jim slammed the door.

"This way!" he said, his voice trembling.

He went before her into the east room. As Helen crossed the threshold, Jim again closed the door, this time shutting them both into the room, overlooking the garden. For a moment she thought they were alone, but next moment she saw the maid, Beatrice, standing meekly in a corner.

"I want the truth about this business out of you!" Jim said.

He had switched on a light, and by it she saw that he really was green—or yellow. Certainly, there was a tinge of color in his face he had never seen there before. For an instant she was so interested in this phenomenon that she hardly heard his question—or statement.

Actually, his teeth were chattering. He stared at her, his eyes wide and unnatural.

"Will you talk?" he snarled.

Offhand, Helen Riddel would have said that such a situation at this would have frightened her. Confronted by it, however, she unexpectedly found herself tingling with anger.

"Are you sick, Jim?" she asked. "If you are, I'll overlook what you've said."

"Overlook it?"

He began to laugh. His voice was metallic and high-pitched; in a woman the seizure would have been called "hysterics."

"Stop it!" Helen commanded, stamping her foot. "What is Beatrice doing here?"

Beatrice looked slyly at her mistress and then at Jim Riddel.

"I think I ought to go," she murmured, her voice as soft as a spring breeze.

"Not much you won't! Not till you've told my wife what you told me. If you've lied, I'll strangle you! Go ahead, spill it out!"

"Ask Mrs. Riddel if I've lied," the maid said quietly. "Ask her about the man who came here night before last. She talked with him for a moment in this room, and then she took him out when you came home. He was there when you came home. He was there while you ate dinner, and, after you'd gone out for the evening, Mrs. Riddel went out to him again."

Jim made a fizzling noise, as if he had drunk too much lemon soda. Helen looked at him with arched brows. Then she turned back to Beatrice.

"Go on!" she commanded coldly.
"Finish your story!"

"Yes, finish it!" Jim grated. "I see it's all true!"

"Mrs. Riddel went out to the summerhouse as soon as she was sure you wouldn't come back. She wasn't there long the second time, but she just came back to the house long enough to get her coat and hat. When you called, she was still away. I lied to you, sir. And my conscience has been bothering me ever since."

Helen smiled. The little trouble maker! Beatrice was having the time of her life! But, save for minor inaccuracies, which were not worth calling attention to, her story was correct. And it did make things look bad. Poor Jim!

However, a woman, even a very nice one, can say, "Poor Jim!" and proceed to carve Jim's heart out and hold it, palpitating, before his face. Helen was enraged, but her anger took a different form from her husband's. It made her cold as one of those frosted pipes in a butcher's window. Her voice was low and steady.

"You poor child," she said, smiling at Beatrice. "How you must have suffered!"

"I tried to do what was right, but I shouldn't have lied," the girl murmured, stealing a look of malicious triumph at her mistress. "When that gentleman called for you last night——"

"Last night—again?" Jim shrieked.
"You didn't tell me that!"

"You didn't give me a chance, sir! You got in such a passion I couldn't make myself heard!"

"What a delightful tête-à-tête you two must have had!" Helen observed. "Where did it take place—in the kitchen? I should imagine that would be the proper setting!"

"Never mind where it took place! What have you got to say about it?" Jim panted. "Come, I'm waiting!"

"Don't let me hinder you," his wife

said with an acid sweetness that made his lips twitch. "Keep right on waiting, Jim! If you fancy I'm going to take part in any such sordid affair as this, you certainly have gone crazy!"

She felt as cool and collected as she had ever felt in her life. She walked past her husband, who was standing with his feet braced apart, near the door; and, without another word, went into the hall and along toward the front of the house. She opened the street door, stood for a moment looking into the darkness, and then went down the steps to the walk.

Of course, that kind of calm couldn't last. She suddenly found herself crying. She drew out her handkerchief and dabbed at her tears. What should she do? What could she do? If she had only told Jim in the first place, everything would have been—— But it wouldn't. Everything would have been all wrong, just as it was now.

Of course, Jim's mind was thoroughly poisoned, and he was burning up with jealousy and the rage it kindled. But he would have been unreasonable and impossible, even if she had taken him into her confidence right to begin with. And her conscience told her that she had done nothing wrong, from beginning to end, in all this wild, crazy series of misadventures. She was simply caught in the wheels of a great, stupid machine, and was being torn to bits.

A lethargy of despair succeeded the tears and turmoil stage. She walked on and on, not realizing the direction her feet were taking her until suddenly she saw in the obscurity of an alley she was passing a twisted, evil face. She stared back, startled and frightened. Then she was hurrying on, but now she was vividly aware of her surroundings. She was in a street occupied by cheap restaurants, cheap clothing stores, the doors of which were still open for business, and pawnbroking establishments. Furtive steps came on behind her. She

passed villainous-looking men, many of them Orientals. Her lips parted, and she looked wildly about for a cab.

As she reached the corner, she saw before her, on the farther side of the street, a brick building. Her mind seemed to swing round and adjust itself. She knew now where she was. Fear and abhorrence, which are as strong attractive forces as are hope and approval, had drawn her back to the neighborhood of the murder. It was over there, in one of those mysterious upper rooms, that Theo Bursley had been killed. She paused, her eyes swinging up. And then she started and cried out, for a hand had been laid on her arm.

"You shouldn't come here alone, ma'am!" Inspector Forbes said with obvious disapproval. "Were you looking for me?"

"No—yes—I don't know why I came!" Helen whispered. Tears again welled into her eyes. "I just had a terrible scene with my husband," she added, impelled by something strong and dependable in the face of this police officer to tell her troubles.

"He doesn't know anything about this business?" Forbes inquired.

"Well, Jim is so unreasonably jealous. He knows, when he's in his right mind, that I love him and him only. But if any little thing he doesn't understand happens, he seems to go crazy. The maid talked."

"Maids always do. So you had a scene with hubby, and decided to make things better by walking, alone, down below the dead line! It's lucky I came along just when I did. I'll take you home, and you stick there till you hear from me. As for Jim, I'll look into his case. I don't promise you anything, mind, but I rather hope to be able to put a bee in his bonnet!"

In pretty much of a daze, by this time, Helen Riddel allowed herself to be assisted into the inspector's car and driven home. Jim was nowhere about

when she entered the lower hall. She went to her room. The house was silent. She was apparently quite alone in it.

She locked her door, undressed quickly, and went to bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TUB.

PREVIOUS to his accidental meeting with Helen Riddel, Inspector Forbes had spent a busy day. The peek which the medical examiner had given him through the microscope had set him on a new track, but, at the same time, he had to keep tabs on all the leads he had uncovered before. For one thing, he wanted to lay hands on Clyde Donovan. And that silly young fool had taken himself off so completely that Forbes couldn't get so much as a whisper from the undertow respecting him or his whereabouts.

"If he didn't kill Marx, or Bursley, what is he hiding out on us for?" the detective asked himself discontentedly. "And if he did kill him——"

Well, in that case young Doctor Giddings had better go back to Berkeley and take another summer course in criminology!

"The trouble with that lad is that he puts all the real work on me," Forbes thought. "He says, 'Look at this! And after you've looked at it, go out and pick up your man!' Well, that's what I get paid for."

During that eventful day, Inspector Forbes hired himself an assistant. One of his difficulties lay in the fact that the quarter below the dead line was largely occupied by Orientals and other foreigners. Forbes was no linguist. To assist him in threshing his carload of straw, he chose a yellow-faced youth, very Chinese in general appearance and features, decidedly American in dress and appurtenances. His clothing was modish, and he carried in his vest pocket

more fountain pens and pencils of patent makes than Inspector Forbes had ever heard of.

The detective decided on this assistant late in the afternoon. He had had several others in view, but had dismissed them after a short trial. He and Charley Hin, the successful appointee, talked for a time in a basement restaurant. Yes, Charley had known this man, Marx. So had the others. Did he know anything in particular about him? Anything, for instance, that would account for his murder? The almond-shaped eyes looked cryptically into those of Inspector Forbes.

"A death by violence is in the stars, and in the palm of the hand," he said in his low, resonant voice. "When the soul of a man who is to die by the knife is born into this world, the ghosts of his ancestors bow their heads—for they know that already the hour and the moment are appointed!"

"Now that's nice and helpful," Forbes muttered. "But what does it mean?"

"The words of the wise are not to be interpreted by fools!" his companion serenely said.

"Oh, yes? Present company of course excepted! All right, suppose you come up and take a look round the rooms. We might see something together that I've missed."

He led the way out of the basement and along the street. Two flights up, and Inspector Forbes drew a key from his pocket and fitted it into the lock. The policeman had been sent back to his former station.

Nothing inside the death room had been changed, save for the disappearance of the body. Inspector Forbes' steady eyes rested on the face of Charley Hin. The Chinaman looked impassively round the room, then produced a cigarette, tapped it on his polished nail, and lighted it.

"See anything suggestive?" Forbes asked.

"A grain of sand and a drop of water suggest the universe," he was told.

Inspector Forbes had begun to flush. A spark came into his eyes.

He said nothing, however, but stood for a time again looking over the room. After that he led the way across to a door at the rear, opened it, and stepped into a lean-to shed, connecting with some rickety back stairs. This door had been double bolted on the inner side, at the time the body was found, but to-day Forbes had begun to take a particular interest in what lay beyond it. There was a narrow shelf against one wall. It was littered with broken dishes and with empty tin cans which had once held food. The floor was dirty and also was littered with apparently insignificant odds and ends. But in one corner was a Chinese tub, which had evidently been placed there to catch the drip from a hole in the roof.

Now the man from headquarters stood looking down into this water-filled container. Something glimmered at the bottom of the water.

"Come in here, Charley!" he said, speaking over his shoulder.

The Chinaman without a sound was at his elbow.

"What do you make of that?" Forbes demanded, pointing to the glimmering object.

There was no reply, other than a faint shrug.

"Oh, so that's what you think?" the detective commented. "Well, just get it out for me, will you?"

Charley Hin, without a word, thrust his hand down into the tub and brought out a small circular piece of tin. His sleeve was dripping as he handed it to Forbes, and there was a faint, mocking smile about his slanting eyes.

Inspector Forbes stood staring down at the little tin disk in his hand.

"Ah, Charley, Charley," he said softly, "a little grain of sand and a little drop of water—and my little tin

wheel, cut from the top of a salmon can! Come, we have finished here!"

They went out through the death room. Inspector Forbes closed and locked the door.

"I'm going down to headquarters," he commented. "I want you to stick around and use your eyes and ears. Report to me to-night—same place I picked you up before. Have you any questions you want to ask?"

"The fool asks, the sage sees," Charley Hin replied.

"Which means 'No!' All right, to-night at eight!"

Inspector Forbes went directly to the headquarters building, where he summoned into his little office an astute-looking young man who often did the society end of difficult cases.

"Here's a name and address," Forbes explained, handing the plain-clothes man a slip of paper. "I want you to look up this guy, Riddel, and see what you can get on him. I want a twitch on his nose. I want him fixed so he'll be easy to handle. He's kicking up a row in this Marx murder kick, and I've got to throw a chill into him some way. He's one of these 'insanely jealous' Johnnies, and pretty generally you'll discover they aren't quite on the level themselves. Just dig around a bit and see if he's been up to anything he wouldn't like the world to know about!"

A varied and sundry day it was, Inspector Forbes reflected when he was again left alone. Everything from tin disks to unofficial blackmail—forcing an unruly husband to get back into line. He shouldn't wonder if Huffner would get something on this guy, Riddel, he shouldn't wonder. But that was only a small detail, and the others weren't going so well. It was time for him to pull his big scene. If he could pull it to-night, he would have the thing all settled up in no time. He had most of the factors in his hand, but still he wasn't ready to go to bat. One item

more—the whereabouts of Clyde Donovan! Where had the idiot taken himself to? For a moment, Forbes had an uneasy feeling: Suppose that Donovan also had been murdered?

But he didn't think so, and in any case that wasn't a proviso he could act on. It was not for him to question why, but to keep plugging along, hoping for the best.

Late that night the two detectives he had set to watch Gwendolin St. John came to headquarters in a taxicab, bringing the actress with them.

"She tried to run for it, inspector," the elder of the pair explained. "We let her go as far as the railroad station, then tagged her and brought her in!"

"Correct!" Forbes replied. He stared through steely eyes at the flushed and angry woman. "So you were headed for out, were you?" he added.

"I'll make you pay for this!" she said, giving him look for look. "I'll make you wish that you'd never heard of me!"

"If I were to believe every party that tells me that, I'd figure I ought to have been born deaf!" the inspector assured her. "Are you ready to talk?"

"I've told you all that I know!"

"Lock her up," Forbes said, turning on his heel. "If she raises a holler about a lawyer, book her as an accessory before the fact in the Marx murder."

That shook her, he saw as he darted a last look at her. But she wasn't ready to come clean yet. Let her think it over a while in her cell. He wasn't quite ready for her story, anyhow. He knew about what it would be, when she told all of it.

The great building quieted down, and the sound of traffic from the avenue in front became but a subdued murmur. Forbes stifled a yawn and consulted his watch.

Nearly midnight! And he had slept but little the night before and the night

before that. If only that fellow Donovan could be picked up!

But, at last, he went into the property clerk's office, where there was an army cot and a blanket. Inspector Forbes lay down in all of his clothing, except his hat. He fell asleep, hoping to hear his name called, to learn that the missing link in his chain of evidence had been found. But now the headquarters building was as silent as a cemetery at midnight.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ARREST.

FORBES was up at dawn and had breakfasted at the all-night restaurant across from the station. Then, until time for the day shift to come on, he talked with the night captain and with the burly corporal in charge of the switchboard.

Huffner, the detective Forbes had sent out to investigate Jim Riddel's record, came in early, with a crafty, satisfied look on his face.

"I got him, inspector!" he said. "If friend wife knows what he's been up to these last few evenings, I miss my guess!"

"Not another dame?" Inspector Forbes asked.

"Well, yes and no. You see this bird, Riddel, is on an entertainment committee for the wholesale men's clothing merchants, and they've been getting a show ready for the out-of-town buyers, who are due to-morrow night. That is, the show is billed for them. And it's a snappy revue, take it from me."

Huffner went into details. Forbes listened and nodded.

"That ought to be about right," he commented. "I'll just drop in and have a talk with our friend."

He found Jim Riddel already seated at his desk, plowing through a stack of letters to which he was dictating replies. The man from headquarters came into the private office with a slow and im-

pressive step. His formidable gaze transfixed the business man.

Riddel hastily dismissed his stenographer.

"What is it, officer?" he demanded, after Forbes had shown his shield.

"Why, mister, it's about an entertainment you commercial gents have been rehearsing—behind locked doors—for the last few evenings. A report has been turned in on it: something about a young woman who does a dance on the table, and afterward passes around something that isn't sweet cider to the guests. You remember that theatrical gent that spent some time down at Atlanta for putting on the wrong kind of a dinner?"

Jim's eyes bulged. He sat slumped back in his chair, staring glassily at his visitor. He had begun to perspire.

"For Heaven's sake, officer, isn't there some way this thing can be hushed up?" he inquired, his voice raised hardly above a whisper. "If my wife was to hear of it—"

"Oh, you're a married man, are you? Well, that doesn't make it any better. You ought to be ashamed, skipping around down there and trying to ogle this toe dancer. Hush it up? What do you mean, hush it up? Are you trying to bribe me?"

He looked so fiercely at Jim Riddel that the latter for a moment turned his harried eyes aside.

"Really, officer," Jim muttered, "I don't know what to do! I didn't see any harm in the thing. These buyers are all out-of-town men, and they expect us to put on something snappy for their entertainment. I take the full responsibility for this feature you object to. There's nothing wrong about it, as far as I'm concerned, I assure you. I've hardly spoken to the young lady."

"Hardly spoken to her?"

"Well, I had to explain to her what we wanted."

"You explained about the costume

and the stuff on the table, I suppose? What does your wife think of it all? Doesn't she object?"

Jim mopped his face on his handkerchief.

"I don't trouble my wife about business affairs," he explained. "She wouldn't be interested."

"Well, I guess I'll go around and talk with her about it. Women have a kind of intuition in these kind of things, and, if she gives you a clean bill of health, I'll be inclined to drop it."

Inspector Forbes knew that he was running close to the wind. Of course, these old coots were putting on a show that would undoubtedly shock sensitive-minded elderly people, but there was nothing intrinsically wrong with it. If he pushed the thing too far, he was apt to be called up before the chief to explain. Well, then, he must substitute suggestion and innuendo for harsher methods.

Jim Riddel said:

"I'd rather you didn't bother my wife with this, officer. I'd rather she didn't know anything about it."

"I'll think it over," Inspector Forbes replied. "I ought to talk with her, but I'll see what can be done. Just keep this under your hat, and I'll do my best for you."

And there was another detail out of the way, he mused, as he went down into the street and climbed into his car. Jim would be in a condition of uncertainty. He wouldn't know whether or not Helen had been informed of his recent activities as an entertainer.

"With that bee buzzing around in his bonnet, he won't have much spunk left to chevy Mrs. Riddel," the detective decided. "I don't think he will make any more bother."

Inspector Forbes returned to his office and gloomily read the notes on his desk. He listened to the reports of some of the men who had been sent out to pick up Clyde Donovan. Nothing had been

heard of the fugitive. Apparently he had left the city.

Forbes took up the search in person that day. In company with Charley Hin he visited every obscure lodging house in the quarter below the dead line.

From time to time the two men looked cryptically at each other.

"You think I won't catch him?" Forbes demanded.

"When the sage pursues, he sits with his eyes closed," the Chinaman replied.

For an instant there was almost a sneer about his thin lips.

"Meaning he uses his head instead of his feet?" the inspector said softly. "And you think I'm not smart enough to do that, Charley Hin? Do you remember the tub, and the water, and the little tin disk?"

The pupils of Forbes' steely eyes contracted for an instant to pin points. He stared down at the man at his side. Then they were walking on, down a street faced by Chinese houses, with carved red-and-gilt balconies.

But Donovan had apparently stepped off the earth into the fourth dimension. Forbes called headquarters from time to time, but nothing had been heard of the missing man there. And so the day passed, and evening again was descending over the city. The two men so oddly paired, had eaten and drunk together. They spoke but little, but something—an unspoken but mutually understood tie—held them with their shoulders almost touching.

As dusk thickened into darkness, Inspector Forbes paused and stood thinking.

"Hin, my friend," he said after a time of frowning consideration, "I have a feeling that some folks would call a 'hunch,' to-night. I believe we're close to the end of our search. Come, what is it the Frenchmen say? 'Look for the dame'? Let us look up the woman in the case! Into the car with you!"

In the police car they drove across

the city. Forbes parked beside a church and climbed out.

"Come!" he said again.

The Riddel house was around the corner, but, as they were quietly approaching it, Inspector Forbes suddenly saw a figure slide from one clump of shrubbery, over at the right, to another. Some one was approaching the side window, looking upon the lawn.

"Come!" he said for the third time. But now he spoke through his teeth. "After him, Hin!"

The race perhaps is not always to the swift, but, on the present occasion, Inspector Forbes' long legs were a deciding factor. He was good for a sprint, he knew, but his wind wouldn't hold out for any Marathon. So he put his heart into the matter, and, in less than thirty seconds after he had spotted that mysterious figure, slipping from bush to bush, he had collared it. Forbes was puffing, but he held his prisoner by the shoulder and slid his free hand to his gun.

"It's quite all right, officer!" the black-haired, rugged-faced man before him said. "No need for that! I'll come along peaceably!"

"Your name is Donovan?"

"I'm Clyde Donovan. I was coming in after I talked with Mrs.—after I got through with one little detail—to give myself up!"

"You took your time about it," the man from headquarters grumbled. "But I have you now. Do you want to see my warrant?"

"No need for that," the younger man said quietly again. "I'm willing to come with you."

CHAPTER X.

FORBES EXPLAINS.

FIVE people sat in the room in which Theo Bursley had been murdered, and a sixth stood with his broad shoulders against the door leading into the hall. Charley Hin's chair was placed

against the other door, the one leading into the little lean-to porch connecting with the back stairs.

"Don't let any one out there, Charley," Inspector Forbes said. His hand groped at his back. Yes, the hall door was bolted. "And now, Miss Gwendolin St. John, or whatever your name really is, we're ready to listen to you!" the detective added.

Gwendolin St. John sat in a corner. At her left was Helen Riddel; at her right the jaunty-looking young medical examiner. Now she raised her sullen eyes and stared at Forbes.

"What do you want me to say?" she demanded.

"The truth. That yarn of yours about having been at the Bijou all evening won't wash, you know. You sneaked out the stage door when the watchman was sitting near the street, and you went out by way of the alley. You came straight over here; it took you less than five minutes, for you were in a hurry. You came up here. Now you tell it!"

The actress' lips were twitching, and there was an unhealthy pallor upon her cheeks. Forbes stood studying her. She wouldn't hold out.

"If I tell the truth, will you let me go—to-night?" she demanded, her voice low and unsteady.

"Tell your story and we'll see. I'll do my best for you. If you don't come clean, I'll hold you for the grand jury. That may sew you up for weeks, or even months!"

She shivered, as with actual cold. For an instant her eyes shifted to the rear door, guarded by the seated Chinaman.

"All right," she said. "But if you think I killed Marx, you're crazy? Why should I?"

"He was handling a blackmail job for you? He was what might be called your 'agent'?"

She hesitated, then nodded. Clyde Donovan, seated across the room, stared

and slid to the edge of his chair. He seemed about to break in, but a warning glance from Forbes checked him.

"If you want to put it that way," Miss St. John muttered. "I'd tried to get a little money out of this young fool, but I couldn't quite get him to come through. He was scared, but his family keep him on short allowance. Marx said he could make him pay, if he had to steal the money. I had to have it."

"For dope!" Inspector Forbes thought. But what he said was, "All right. What did you come up here for?"

"I hadn't heard from Marx for some time. Naturally, I didn't trust him. I got to thinking about it. I was hard up and I made up my mind I'd tell him either to come across with some money or give me my letters back."

"How many were there?" the detective inquired.

"Eight—counting the one you have."

Forbes looked at Clyde Donovan. Donovan looked steadily back.

"Go on!" the inspector commanded. "You came here—about what time?"

"I should think you'd know that with all your smartness! It was just half past ten when I got here."

"Go on. You came up, and what did you see?"

"I saw Marx, lying below the drop-light—dying!"

"Dying?" The detective's voice was sharp. "How do you know that?"

"I've seen people die before. He was breathing about once every ten seconds, and there was a rattle in his throat."

"What did you do?"

"Well, what could I do? I couldn't bring him back to life. I crossed to that box couch and looked into it. But the papers were gone, all of them."

Again, for an instant, Inspector Forbes and young Donovan exchanged glances. Then the man from headquarters was staring at the St. John woman.

"Was the door open when you came in?"

"No, but it wasn't locked."

"And that door over there?"

She glanced uncertainly at the rear door.

"I think both of those bolts were fastened," she said. "But I wouldn't swear to it."

"All right, go on. When you didn't find the papers in the couch, what did you do?"

"I got scared, all of a sudden. Marx had quit breathing, and his eyes were half open and half shut. He was kind of grinning at me, and I ran for it."

"Out into the hall, down two flights of stairs, into the street! Now, did you see any one while you were going down?"

The actress turned and pointed steadily at Clyde Donovan.

"He was coming up as I went down!"

"Coming back up here? You're sure?"

"Yes. He stopped and looked after me. I know because I turned at the foot of the steps and looked back up at him."

Inspector Forbes nodded and turned his unfriendly glance upon Donovan.

"Now, you!" he said grimly. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

Clyde shook his head.

"Wait a moment," said he. "Let's get this straight. This young woman was in the blackmail business herself? She was in with the fellow I beat up?"

"You heard what she said!"

Clyde looked angrily around at the faces turned upon his own.

"Will some one kindly kick me?" he inquired. "I'm the biggest dub in captivity! All right, inspector, what is it you want me to tell?"

"I want you to tell everything that happened here, the night of the murder. Remember, you are not being offered any kind of immunity——"

"Immunity your grandmother!"

Clyde broke in impatiently. "I didn't kill him if that's what you mean. And this young woman didn't either, eh? What a fool I am!"

He shook his head, but resumed before Forbes had a chance to prompt him.

"I came up here on some private business which doesn't concern any one but me. I had my opinion of this fellow, Bursley, or Marx or whatever his name was, before I came. But he made some remarks directly he learned what my business with him was that were enough to fry the back of your neck! You see, he had a gun in his pocket, and he felt safe. So he told me what he thought about me, and he went on to say some other things."

A flush had started up in the speaker's cheeks. He snapped his fingers, looked angrily at the detective and continued.

"I didn't let him get far. There are some things no man is going to say around me without having a fight on his hands. I jumped him, and he jerked out his gun. I hit it with the flat of my hand and knocked it under the bed. Then we had it right. He was wiry and full of tricks. He tried to gouge my eyes and to sink his teeth into my throat. It was like fighting an ape or a baboon. But I worked away at his ribs, and he began to slow down. Then I let him have it over the ear, and we went down in a heap."

"And then you stabbed him? Or did you get the letters first?"

"Aw, forget it!" Clyde Donovan requested wearily. "I didn't stab him. What the deuce would I do that for? I'd taken him to one honest beating, and I had no trouble finding the letters. That was all I wanted with him!"

"You took the letters! And after that?"

"I went down into an alley and burned them. It seemed to be the only thing to do, as I didn't have time to

sort out the ones belonging to—the ones I had come for from the others. I didn't want to be lugging other people's love notes around with me. I figured whoever had written them would be best pleased if they were turned into ashes, so I looked after that. And then I went back to Bursley's room, just as this—this woman has told you. I wanted to be sure I hadn't missed anything. I noticed the scared look on her face, as she came down. She kind of shrank against the wall, and then she went as fast as she could. So, when I got back upstairs and found some one had got to him while I was away, and had killed him, I thought of her!"

The speaker paused to give Gwen-dolin St. John a scathing look.

"If I'd known the kind of woman she was," he added indignantly, "I wouldn't have bothered to take myself off!"

"So that's your line! You ran away to save the lady? How did you think that would help?"

"Well, I dropped my cigarette case, which I was pretty sure you could trace. I had a notion to put my name and address in it to be sure, and I thought you'd figure I did the killing, and look for me. That would give her time to clear out!"

Inspector Forbes had flushed at mention of the planted cigarette case. His steely eyes were more unpleasant than usual as he held them unwaveringly on Clyde Donovan.

"Well, you're not as smart as you probably think yourself," he commented. "You dropped your cigarette case on purpose or so you say; but you also dropped one of Miss St. John's letters, and I found it and picked her up. If she's done the killing—but wait a bit!"

On a low bench against the west wall of the room stood a bulky something covered with a newspaper. Inspector Forbes stepped over it to and drew the papers away. The Chinese tub, still filled with water, was revealed.

"Donovan, there's something in that tub that I want," the inspector said. "Just fish it out and hand it to me, will you?"

Clyde Donovan stared, stood up, and approached the tub. He peered down into it, then, with a frown of bewilderment, drew his sleeve above his elbow and dipped his hand down into the water. He drew out a small, shining tin disk and turned with it to Forbes.

"Though what the deuce you wanted with it," he muttered, "I don't see——"

A chair turned over with a crash. One of the seated figures was up, was jerking at the rear door. Charley Hin moved so swiftly that he was in the shed before Forbes could do anything to stop him.

But next moment the Chinaman was back in the death room. He ran with amazing speed straight for the inspector. In his right hand was a wicked-looking knife.

Inspector Forbes should have been prepared for just this, but the startling quickness of his attacker's movements took him by surprise. The Chinaman struck; Forbes cried out in a thick, protesting voice. Then they were tangled together, were flailing about the room, falling over chairs, bumping into walls, stampeding the two women.

Shouts and pounding of feet sounded from the rear stairs. Four plain-clothes men were precipitated into the room as if they had been fired out of a trick cannon. But Hin had freed his knife hand and had drawn it back for a final, fatal blow. The detectives would have been too late to rescue their chief, had it not been for the intervention of Clyde Donovan. With a cry of dismay, he leaped across, stood for a moment sorting out the various arms, legs and heads whirling before him, and then struck. His fist landed with an audible thud, and Inspector Forbes staggered back, releasing his hold on the wiry figure of his enemy. Charley Hin dropped to the

floor and lay there, his fingers quivering, the Chinese dagger with which he had killed Marx, or Bursley, and had so nearly killed Inspector Forbes, lying where it had fallen.

The detective had been struck one glancing blow on the wrist. Doctor Giddings, cool and debonair as usual, quickly bandaged it. Then the young medical examiner stood looking down to where Hin, securely handcuffed, was lying. He drew up the Chinaman's sleeves, stooped farther and uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"There you are, inspector," said he. "Cuticle gone from both forearms. Bursley put up a fight for his life."

"I knew his forearms were scratched yesterday," Inspector Forbes grunted. He was running his handkerchief round the inside of his collar; it had been a hot fight, while it lasted. "When he stuck his hand down into the tub without hauling up his sleeve, he stopped just a moment and I could see him thinking it over. You see, I'd tried out every one else I could locate who had so much as spoken to Marx, and had them up here for the great Chinese tub scene. All the others pulled up their sleeves. Some of them tried to fish it out with a stick, but that round disk couldn't be handled that way; that's why I used it. Miss St. John, there, had a short-sleeved rig on the first time I went up to see her. She was in the clear—no scratches. Donovan was the last man on the list, though I was pretty certain it was Hin, by that time. If you'd just come forward, young fellow, so that I could have had your story to fit into the case, for the medical examiner and the preliminary hearing—but you had to go tearing off, protecting the innocent young thing you thought had done the job!"

"I thought he'd been blackmailing her, and, if he had, I'd have let them hang me rather than betray her for giving what he had coming," Clyde confessed.

"No doubt you would. Well, doc, I guess you get the trophy! It was you and your microscope that did the trick. All I had to do was to run down the one party out of a million or so that had had cuticle scratched off the forearms. And then gather in the lost sheep and get them to blat their stories. You win!"

The young physician looked reproving. "I just gave you a little technical assistance, inspector. You caught the killer!"

Charley Hin was moving about, his eyes open, his manacled hands groping toward his throat. He smiled evilly as the inspector looked down at him.

"The voice of the fool is never still," said he. "But the dagger whispers a word, and the strong man bows himself in obeisance!"

"What did you kill him for, Charley?" Forbes demanded. "Was he blackmailing you, too?"

"He stole my sweetheart—in China," Hin replied. "He was a white devil, and she was a yellow rose. Now she is dead, and he is dead, and you may do as you please with me! I have been educated in the white man's schools, and believe neither in his gods nor in my own. The words of the wise man and the words of fools are alike. For a little while they break the silence—and then both alike are still."

Forbes nodded.

"And a good thing it is at that," he commented philosophically. "It would be a bad day for the detective business if dead men began talking. All they'd

have to do with a murder kick is to bring the body of the deceased in, and let him tell the jury his story!"

Jim Riddel returned late that night, a worried look on his face. He came into his wife's room, paused as he crossed the threshold, and seemed to be studying her expression.

"Everything all right, dear?" he inquired anxiously. "I got home as early as I could. I had to talk over a little matter with some fellows."

The words stuck in his throat. He blushed till his face seemed about to catch fire.

Helen was now looking steadily at him.

"Jim," she said softly, "what did my friend, Inspector Forbes, do to you?"

"Your friend—Inspector Forbes——"

But Jim was in no condition to talk. He mopped his forehead and sank into a chair. He stole a stealthy glance at the very pretty and obviously amused young woman who sat watching him.

"Tell me, dear, do you love me?" he blurted.

"Of course! How can you ask?"

"And there isn't any one else?"

"There never has been, Jim! You have always been my hero—my sun-crowned hero!"

Jim made a rush at her and gathered her into his arms.

"I'm a fool!" he whispered. "But no more of that jealousy stuff for me! It burns me up!"

Helen smiled up at him through misty eyes.



BUSY DAYS FOR THE POISONER

A MAN who was arrested a few months ago on the charge of poisoning a night watching of a New York laboratory has been found to be a chronic poisoner. Apparently, the poisoning business became a never-ending source of delight. He admitted to having perpetrated twelve of these atrocities, and not only admitted but boasted of it. His manner when arraigned before the judge was nonchalant and undisturbed.

His Date With Death

THERE WAS NO ROOM IN HIM FOR HATE OR MALICE.



By Clinton Dangerfield

Author of "That Legal Crime," etc.

SHELTER, temporary safety and fire Claibourne had, but no food. He faced the grim necessity of going down into the plain to seek supplies, at the risk which it involved.

He drank again from the spring near him, tightened his belt an inch more, made his way down the mountain, and thence into the foothills, six feet of lithe, young manhood, a lonely but gallant figure, firm-lipped, the gray eyes steady and piercing.

The sun was now near setting. The friendly shades of night would, he hoped, enable him to secure needed food from some prosperous kitchen.

He pushed on, keeping what cover he could find—for, although he had secured a suit of ordinary clothing, he was a marked man. Over him hung the sword of the State's price on his head, for this day had been appointed as Claibourne's date with death. He had broken jail last week, through unexampled courage and ingenuity. He had good hopes of making a seaport and starting life again where he'd be unknown. Hope is uncrushable at twenty-two.

He moved on, watching the road which he paralleled, but dared not follow, listening with strained ears for the slightest sound of men. To him they

were no longer men but a wolf pack trailing him.

Yet it wasn't a man that halted him. It was the sudden sight of a roadside placard nailed to a white oak. Nothing about the reward, but showing, in sprawling handwriting, a message at which the fugitive stared in mingled astonishment and fury.

Absorbed in the paragraph written there, he did not hear the approach of two horsemen until they were almost on him. But he was so swift and so silent in rushing back to his cover in the green Kentucky copse that he gained a hiding place in time.

The riders halted at the writing and read it in evident astonishment. One of them frowned as he exclaimed:

"I don't see why Claibourne should poke his neck any further into the noose by carrying off Lucy Whitwire!"

"Must be plumb off his head about her," returned the other. "Darn pretty! Ain't she, Tapsalter?"

"Lucy Whitwire," said the first speaker, a heavy-set, middle-aged man, "is lovely, in an unusual sort of way. Her hair's the palest gold. Her skin's translucent with just a faint wash of rose on the cheeks. Her eyes are blue, but it's so pale a blue that it's just a pastel color, barely blue at all. And yet the eyes are beautiful and fringed round with great long, soft lashes. She has a very pretty humility in the way she drops her lids. Flatters a man. Her mouth's that Cupid's-bow business. Her hands are small and sort of fluttery, like little butterflies. She's a peg to hang dreams on."

The other stared.

"You always talk queerly, Tapsalter," he said. Then as Tapsalter gathered up his reins, "Wait till I fix this stirrup leather. Wasn't this Shelton Claibourne engaged to Kate Seymour?"

"Yes," growled Tapsalter, "and she'd have stood by him through thick and thin. But Lucy Whitwire, engaged to

Claibourne, broke her engagement with the first hint of suspicion that he was a murderer. She never even waited for the decision in court. Of course, her father had been against it from the first and Lucy never would have been engaged to this fellow, Shelton Claibourne, if it hadn't been that Claibourne owned as strong a will in his way as Whitwire did in his. Their wills balanced about even for Lucy! But with love in the balance, the scales went down on Claibourne's side."

"On the other hand," remarked the other, "when he was arrested, the scales went down on her dad's side, didn't they?"

"Yes," said Tapsalter. "She wrote Shelton Claibourne a sweet little note saying that she knew of course he wouldn't want her dragged into anything like that. You might say that Shelton Claibourne was lucky to get free of her!"

"How could he be lucky about anything when he's a hunted fugitive up in the hills—a man who should have been hung to-day and only cheated the gallows by a margin so narrow it was something like a miracle! The devil with this leather! It's plumb rotten!"

"You ride with too short a stirrup—throws a steady strain on the strap," said Tapsalter. "Claibourne's like me—a long stirrup rider. I hope he gets through to a seaport."

"Then he'd better not fool around with Lucy Whitwire," retorted his companion. And the two rode on together, leaving the man in the copse mutely staring after them.

Lucy Whitwire!

Yes, they had described her rightly. She was a feather, and no more, whirled on the wind of other people's wills. And in order to win Lucy's moonlight-and-lily loveliness he had turned away, like a fool, from the less ethereal beauty of Kate Seymour. Kate of the steadfast eyes and of a constancy so great that,

when the storm rose against Shelton Claibourne, it was she who had visited him and had tried to console him.

Neither girl could ever be his now. He no longer desired Lucy. He recalled with amazement his infatuation for her. And any hope of life with Kate would have been too fantastic to contemplate. For he was a hunted fugitive who had barely escaped the noose for the present, and might yet be taken in its hideous circle.

He stared again at the written placard. Lucy! Carried off! This thing had happened to her. There was at least one man whom she had wrought to a desperation ready to take any chance—Jim Brocklehurst.

A cruel savage, suspected of crimes which might land him in jail for the rest of his life. Fox clever, for he had forged Claibourne's handwriting, had loaded on Claibourne all suspicion!

Lucy! What better did she deserve? The dream was ashes. Let her go! Madness to think of her! Madness to waste pity on her merely because she had once been "the peg on which to hang his dreams."

What if chance had given him, Shelton Claibourne, knowledge of—

Hang it all, he must get about his business of obtaining supplies. This was life, to be caught in the clutch of circumstance, to be broken on the wheel of accident. Let her take her share of it!

As the shades of night darkened around Shelton Claibourne in his search for food, lights began to appear here and there in the fine mansion of John Whitwire—prosperous Kentucky tobaccoist and influential citizen.

Gas and electric lights hadn't come in yet. Yellow kerosene lamps were the source of illumination. One of the largest of these blazed out from John Whitwire's private den. A match had been put to it by Whitwire's crony,

Peter Tapsalter, who had just arrived and was waiting for his friend to come in.

Tapsalter was a man who took life easily. He sat there smoking placidly, but listening keenly.

Now he heard on the driveway below the drumming rhythm of a horse approaching at a hand gallop. And, in a few moments, John Whitwire strode in, haggard and dusty.

He closed the door behind him. Tapsalter did not rise. He only said very quietly:

"Got your wire and came at once. I hear you've been in the saddle day and night hunting her. No luck at all?"

Whitwire flung himself into a chair. He sat erect even in his grief. A finely chiseled, impressive-looking man! Piercing-eyed, with a gaze as hard as a hawk's! His words filtered through his closed teeth biting down on his rage and despair, as he answered:

"No luck at all. She's gone! That devil, Claibourne, has found a way to knife me in the back! I'll never see Lucy again! Look here!"

Tapsalter took the paper, glanced at it, and returned it to Whitwire, saying slowly:

"Yes, I saw one just like it on my way here. It's evidently been posted in duplicate. Are you sure that's Claibourne's handwriting?"

"Of course I'm sure. I've seen his signature many a time on his letters to Lucy. But if the placard were printed it would still be genuine, for Claibourne would have dictated it!"

Whitwire sprang up as he spoke. He walked about in great agitation.

"Lord!" he said thickly. "My Lucy at the mercy of a man who escaped with the noose almost around his neck!"

Tapsalter said slowly: "Yes, he'd have been hung all right if he hadn't escaped. Even 'the pardoning governor' wouldn't pardon him. And yet, somehow, I never could quite figure that.

So many people think Claibourne innocent. He——"

But Whitwire interrupted him passionately:

"Shelton Claibourne's son! Claibourne, the second, worse than even his father was!"

"Whitwire," Tapsalter said, frowning, "you never were quite normal on the subject of the Claibournes! You've got a hate hang-over that's worse than any whisky hang-over I ever saw. Lots of people believe this Shelton Claibourne to be innocent. But you only see in him an enemy's son. You only see in him the breed of a man who took Ellen Bracebridge away from you and married her. Because of this fugitive's mother, you aren't quite normal where these Claibournes are concerned!"

Whitwire whipped fiercely round on him.

"Is this any time to be preaching to me?"

Tapsalter thrust his hands into his pockets!

"Don't be an idiot," he said. "I'm not preaching. I'm trying to make you feel that your girl, Lucy, could be in worse hands than Shelton Claibourne's."

Whitwire cried out, his fingers balling into fists:

"How could the whole thing be worse? This is the day on which Shelton Claibourne was due to be hung. Instead of that, he's up in these inaccessible Nightmare Mountains somewhere with my girl. Tapsalter, do something! Can't you? For Heaven's sake, is there nothing you can think of?"

"I'll go and wire for a brace of dogs I heard of yesterday. Maybe they can pick up the scent. Until then——"

He snapped off the sentence, and both men whirled at the sound of a low but dominant voice from the door:

"Reach, gentlemen!"

Their hands went up, for there at the closed door stood the man who had a date with death—Shelton Claibourne.

Their hands had gone up instinctively. But now they saw that Shelton Claibourne's hands were empty. His voice, as low but as dominant as before, broke a trifle mockingly on their ears:

"I merely wanted to keep your hands in the air long enough to let you get used to my presence, gentlemen. I have no gun!"

Whitwire's revolver leaped out. Shelton Claibourne smiled a little contemptuously.

"I wouldn't bother with that sort of thing," he said. "You can kill me any time you like. An unarmed man is no danger to you. But let us talk first. I came here about Lucy. I didn't write that note. That was posted by the man who really got your daughter and fixed the blame on me. A pretty shrewd trick, chalking it up to the revenge motive that I might have against you because you have never been my friend and have always opposed my engagement to Lucy."

His eager glance went directly to Tapsalter.

"You, Mr. Tapsalter," he continued, "discussed this matter with a friend of yours when you passed the placard posted near a thick copse. I was there, listening. I'd already seen that placard. And I wish I'd never seen it. For I've had a devil of a fight with myself. On the one side I already had safety. And on the other, there was Lucy in the hands of this man."

"In the hands of what man?" Tapsalter demanded sharply.

Whitwire seemed beyond speech. His gun hand had fallen to his side, and he was listening in a confused astonishment.

"What man?" repeated Tapsalter insistently.

"The man," answered Shelton Claibourne, "who has always been suspected through this whole county of illegal practices; even suspected of counterfeiting. And yet nothing has ever been

proved against him. Do you know who I mean?"

"Jim Brocklehurst!" exclaimed Tapsalter. "And you claim *he* forged this message in your handwriting?"

"Tapsalter, if it were not so, would I be here?"

Tapsalter cursed.

Claibourne's gaze flashed to Whitwire.

"Don't misunderstand me, John Whitwire!" he said. "I haven't come to you for the love that I feel for Lucy now. I've ceased to love her. But I can never forget all she stirred in me when we were engaged. A man's first dream of love is never forgotten. For the sake of that dream, I've risked everything to come here because this was the one place in which a man, Lucy's father, would be driven by love of her to trust me with horses and guns and help, secret help."

Whitwire was dumb. The fugitive rushed on. "I want you, Whitwire, and I want *you*, Tapsalter. But first of all I want food and drink. And then the three of us will take her to-night from the hands of Jim Brocklehurst. I know where he's got her hidden. There's only one place where he could put through a thing like this. He has an ally up there in the hills. Lucy'll be forced into marriage there to-night. Brocklehurst won't find that hard. Whatever the strongest mind nearest her wills, she does. But maybe we'll get there in time, Whitwire, to give her back into your hands, still Lucy Whitwire."

Whitwire gasped. Every word that this fugitive spoke was weighted with truth. Haggard from lack of food, scratched with briars, dusty with crawling on his hands and knees through bushes where he must have cover, unarmed and condemned—Shelton Claibourne held in the hollow of his hand the two men listening to him.

Claibourne continued sharply: "You, Tapsalter, go down to the kitchen and

fetch for us here coffee and food. Lock the door after you when you go out, so that no one can get in here. But hurry!"

Tapsalter went. He sped to the kitchen. And, in his going, he muttered to himself, jumbled sentences and strange oaths.

An hour later three men were far into the foothills that prefaced the mountains rising in grim majesty above them.

They were headed for a woods road which twisted up into those heights where the law lost interest and did not try to penetrate. They rode three blooded Kentucky horses, and they were about to rise into realms where nature still claims her own and bars out with jutting boulder and closed forest the intrusions of civilization. A strange forest country of good and of ill, in which the good predominates and yet suffers with indifference the existence of crime, holding that each man's home is his own castle and therein he may do what he pleases. So long as he does not intrude upon the castle of his neighbor, he is safe.

Those three riders—the impeccable citizen John Whitwire, his respected friend Tapsalter and the fugitive who had that day a date with the noose—had not yet gained the woods road when they heard the bang and rattle of steel-tired buckboard, the rapid trot of harnessed horses.

Shelton Claibourne spurred his horse into the darkening safety of a little ravine hidden from the roadway by a thick screen of brush. Yet, when the buckboard halted before the other two riders, the fugitive was not a yard away from the sheriff of the county who snarled out:

"Who's there?" And then, "Oh, it's you, Mr. Whitwire and Mr. Tapsalter?" The sheriff's tone changed into respect and sympathy. "I suppose you're on the same errand as myself, hunting that es-

caped murderer—Shelton Claibourne. He's put the cap on the climax by abducting your girl! I never heard of such gall in a criminal! Have you any clew?"

"No," said Whitwire, "no clew."

His tone was monotonous. He felt strangely shaken. A sudden doubt had come over him about Shelton Claibourne. Perhaps Lucy was already this fugitive's wife and he himself was being trapped into the mountains to be murdered! A thousand grim suggestions darted through his mind, and, for a second, he was torn by conflicting distrust and suspicion. Then the sheriff said:

"I've had a tip, Mr. Whitwire. A sure tip. Claibourne's headed for the junction. He's aiming to swing a freight there. And I'm aiming to be there in time. You can come with me, if you like, and leave the horses. Or you can turn back and ride at your leisure. Ain't no use in your going on here!"

"Thanks," said Whitwire in the same blank voice. "I'll turn back and ride at my leisure. I hope you get him, sheriff."

"I hope I do," said the sheriff. "I never heard of such a thing. Gallows' food like him going off with a girl like your Lucy. So long."

The buckboard was gone. The condemned man rode out from the little ravine. The three resumed their journey.

In a hundred yards they turned into the woods road, which was overgrown with bushes. The road was still used occasionally, but the forest dwellers who used it drove their heavy wagons over the brush and weeds.

Higher the riders rose and higher.

The moon climbed with them as they went. And the thoughts of Whitwire were like the night—patches of white and patches of black. For black hate of Claibourne rode in Whitwire's heart,

and white hope that he might still save his Lucy, his idolized daughter.

Another hour passed. And, suddenly, Claibourne checked them.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "I hear a man singing. And you can tell by the way the sound shifts that he's patrolling a cliff under the house in which we'll find Lucy. Since there are sentinels out, the wedding must be going on now!"

"Kill him!" Whitwire said in a low, hoarse and murderous tone. "He'll give the alarm and we'll loose everything. Kill him!"

"No," Claibourne retorted. "Life is as sweet to him as to you and me. I'll get him in a way that won't do him any great harm. You stay here with the horses."

He tossed his own reins to Whitwire and disappeared into the underbrush, making a steady and extraordinarily noiseless way toward the sentinel.

Claibourne came out on the ledge just above his man. But the fellow by that time had ridden up the road a little way. There he halted, yawned, seemed half minded to go farther still.

Then he turned his horse, grumbling aloud to the night, cursing his luck that he had been set upon this solitary job when, up at the outlaw den above, feasting and drinking were going on!

Nothing is so bad that it can't be worse. Freedom of movement and a cigarette, the sentinel had. But now, in the midst of his cursing complaints, there suddenly descended upon his shoulders, dropping like a cougar from the overhang, something which tore him with irresistible strength from his horse, pulling him down to the ground and sending the terrified animal galloping wildly off into the night.

But the surprised sentinel did not succumb tamely.

He was a big man and a powerful one. Moreover, as the two pitched to the ground together, a writhing heave

of the outlaw's body had brought him on top. The destinies of that night trembled in the balance as the two men were molded together in a composite form of fighting fury.

They rolled and surged there, writing the tale of their struggle on crushed scrub and loosened soil. Then suddenly one figure arose, partly, still kneeling on the chest of the other, keeping the man under him down by iron fingers locked around his throat.

Claibourne whistled. Whitwire and Tapsalter came at a gallop.

Three minutes later the sentinel was looking back on his former occupation as something he had totally failed to appreciate! For instead of being able to shift up and down the road as he pleased he was hog tied! A stick with a handkerchief wrapped around it had been fastened in his mouth by the simple device of knotting another handkerchief on the stick and then passing the cloth around his head. Unable to yell, unable to move, except with the most painful floundering, he heard the hoofbeats of three horses die rapidly away.

His horse had been caught and tied where it could carry no alarming tidings.

A few yards more and Claibourne said coldly they must leave the horses and go up the zigzag path which would bring them out near a part of the house little likely to be used, since the scaling of the cliff on that side was no easy matter.

"I'll lead the way," he said. "You follow."

"But, Lucy," protested Whitwire. "We can never bring her down those rocks."

"No," said Claibourne tersely. "We'll bring her around the safer way. We can afford to do that then, for the whole place will be in confusion. And Tapsalter," he added, "can take the horses around to where the safe road comes down. Just follow this dry creek bed,

Tapsalter, and you'll come to it about two miles down."

Tapsalter nodded, and, in another moment, was moving off on his own mount, leading the other horses.

Facing the cliff which was to be scaled, Whitwire groaned aloud:

"Oh! We can never make it!"

"Cut that," said Claibourne impatiently. "Thoughts like those are a chain drag on a man's hands and feet. We shall make it! Say that to yourself!"

"Claibourne," began Whitwire hoarsely.

The other man flashed round on him and said curtly: "What? Don't burn up our time here for nothing. Don't just stand there and talk."

"No," said Whitwire. "No, you're right. Let's go on."

Claibourne led the way.

There was a cool confidence in his movements, a reassurance in his steady voice that occasionally called softly down to the older man behind him; it enabled Whitwire to do the thing he had always feared—swarm up the face of a broken cliff where a false footing or the loosening of a shrub in some cranny might mean pitching down to the earth below.

Whitwire had almost a phobia against this kind of thing, and cold perspiration sprang out in beads on his face as he toiled upward—the dewy damp of terror.

It seemed to Whitwire a century before finally he saw the man ahead of him vanish over the top of a sort of shelf and then beheld the hand of Claibourne reach down to assist him.

He grasped it eagerly, and now they both stood on the top together.

Jim Brocklehurst, a study in red, stood before the half-drunken justice of the peace whom he had purveyed for this occasion.

Red was Brocklehurst's hair and nearly

as red his large, coarse face, which yet had a certain handsomeness in its shaping. Red-brown were his eyes, fierce and compelling. Reddish tan were his big hands hanging by his side—hairy and spatulate hands. There were scarlet flashes in the tie that he wore to enhance his personal appearance on this occasion. It went well, he thought, that tie, with his blue suit! He smiled at the justice, and the smile showed a row of big white teeth, flawless and glistening.

Beside him stood the girl whom he had coerced into this marriage. Exactly as Shelton Claibourne had foreseen, this lovely feather tossed on the current of men's wills had not the personality to save herself from any man's persistence.

She was of the kind that in great cities go down into the dregs of life—the kind that a higher class saves by incessant watchfulness and chaperoning. Yet, after her fashion, she felt rage and despair over her situation. She realized that the dominant and mesmeric will of the man beside her was too strong to fight. And yet she said to herself that he was coarse, common, horrible.

If she did not have courage, she had taste. And in her pale way she hated him as they stood there—and hated the wedding guests behind her—nearly a dozen lawless men. Some of them were counterfeiterers; several others were thieves who preyed on the cattle and stock in the valley below at scattered intervals. And still others were men who had taken refuge up here either from the law or from the personal vengeance of some of their own kin.

This gathering constituted the element which the better class of the forest dwellers left strictly alone.

The wedding guests were all in a good humor, from Parsin, the knife thrower, to Upwether, the giant, who was the crack shot of the assemblage. Theoretically they should all have laid aside their weapons for this occasion. But they were men whose weapons were part

of them, as much so as their hands or their feet. They were still armed.

Though in liquor, the justice, renegade as he was, felt uneasy. He said:

"Jim, you sure this is all O. K.?"

"Lucy," commanded Brocklehurst's compelling voice, "tell him you want to marry me!"

She struggled to utter a denial, but his fierce clutch was on her wrist. She felt the red fire of his eyes plunging in electric, positive waves through her negative mind. Acquiescence was torn out of her instead of denial.

"I want," she faltered, and the justice could scarcely catch her faint tone, "to mar——"

The word broke in its inception, and she stiffened inside the arm which Brocklehurst passed around her. Flashing a quick look at her, he saw that her features had changed. Her eyes were dilated, her mouth slowly opening as though the lips parted for a scream.

While his eyes were on her face, Brocklehurst heard behind him a rush of sound, the blended confusion of curses involuntarily reeking out from half a dozen throats.

With catlike quickness, his head turned over his left shoulder in hurried surprise. But he stared into the gaping faces of his guests, who weren't looking at him but at something beyond!

Brocklehurst whipped back and saw that he, the justice, his men, were all under cover of two guns in the steady hands of the man whose name he had used in abducting Lucy Whitwire.

For a moment he thought that his own vision had deceived him. The feeling was so strong that he exclaimed:

"Claibourne! You! It can't be!"

As the words left his lips, Lucy, galvanized into action by a pair of eyes which were not Claibourne's, darted from under the arms of her bridegroom, rushed to the left, and sprang into the eager clasp of her father.

Whitwire snatched her up. He flung

round and disappeared through the back exit, obeying Claibourne's orders, already given. He went with a swift celerity of movement that made Brocklehurst feel that he himself might have had a drink too much. But his jaws clenched on the cold reality, for Claibourne's voice rang through the room:

"Reach, every man of you!"

Every hand went high. But one man in the group brought something in his hand as it rose! Parsin, the knife thrower. His glittering blade flashed through the air, missed Claibourne's bare head by the merest fraction, and buried itself in the wall beyond, where it stuck, quivering and humming.

Shelton Claibourne laughed.

"A man only has so much bad luck," he said, "measured out for him. Outside of that you can't hurt him! I saw who threw that. What if I picked you off, friend, in return for that little compliment?"

"No—no! I was rattled. I didn't aim."

"Well," Claibourne interrupted, his eyes flashing back to Brocklehurst's red face, "throwing a knife in the face of a gun is at least a man's act. It sets a man a lot sight higher than the fellow who forges my name to cover kidnaping a girl! You're a cur, Brocklehurst!"

"And you're a fool that don't know enough to keep his neck out of the rope," retorted Brocklehurst, who in no way lacked for courage, although like the others, his hands had gone above his head. "What I did showed some brains. What you've done here to-night—saving from her own squeamishness a girl who never cared enough for you to stand by you when you were in trouble—shows that you're just plain loco, Claibourne. And you'll never get away from this house alive. You've got the drop on us now. But you can't keep it on every one all the time."

"Not get away from here alive?" said Claibourne, and there was a sudden chill

laughter in his voice. "Well, let's see, Brocklehurst, what sort of a prophet you are!"

As he spoke, Shelton Claibourne fired. The big kerosene chandelier dropped to the roar of his gun. The room was plunged in darkness and became instantly a maelstrom of confusion and oaths.

Brocklehurst reached the back door almost as soon as Claibourne did. But his activity was unhealthful for his welfare. For, as he reached for the door-knob, the fist of Shelton Claibourne caught him in a driving blow which dropped him unconscious to the floor. In the next second Claibourne was through the door, had turned the key on the outside and was gone.

Past star after star, the silvery moon climbed in cold beauty. Now and then a cloud drifted across her face and invisible fingers seemed to tear it aside again. When she began to sink toward the western horizon, almost into the arms of the coming day, Lucy herself was sound asleep in her pretty bedroom.

While she slept, safely and luxuriously, three figures rose from a table at which they had eaten and drunk in secret.

As they rose and went to the fireplace, each dropping into a chair, Whitewire said slowly, offering cigarettes to his guests:

"Claibourne, I've been counted a sane, level-headed man. But in that ride from Brocklehurst's den there in the cold moonlight, with my girl behind me and you at my side, I think I realized at last what letting an idea run away with one means. I've been a one-idea man, Claibourne, and I just about believe that the fellow that's that can't be balanced. I've made money and I have influence. I can be diplomatic and I can be kind. But all those things in my life have been subsidiary to the one big idea. You know what I mean—that idea?"

Claibourne shook his head, but the listening Tapsalter nodded slightly.

"Hate!" said Whitwire. "It began with your father, Claibourne. Your father was a bad man clear through."

"Admitted," said Claibourne coolly. "He was a bad man clear through and so was your own dad. Both of us sprang from the loins of men without scruples, hard as steel and mean as lynxes. But no man's mind is a replica of his father's."

"Reasonable," said Whitwire slowly. "Reasonable and right. But to me you were the reincarnation of my enemy. You can't imagine, Claibourne, what a replica of him you are. You've got his gestures, his eyes, his tone. And I said to myself that you were just a picce split off from his soul as far as your mind went. And when I found that you loved my girl, I came near killing you; I had brooded so long.

"Your father was dead, in a sense, yes. Underground. But here he was again in another form. In the first form he had taken the girl I loved and wanted to marry. In the second form—you—he was about to take the girl I loved because she was my child, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. I suppose you can't understand, Claibourne. I suppose you, although you are your father's son, have never hated. Answer me, do you know what hate means?"

"I know what fury means," said Claibourne grimly. "And I know what despair means. But, in the sense in which you describe hate, becoming the chief thread in your whole life, I know nothing of such a thing as that. It seems to me that sort of hate is something that hurts the hater worse than the hated."

"Don't be too sure about that!" Whitwire returned with equal grimness. "If I had not hated you as I did, you would have been a free man now. You would never have been condemned. You would never even have been arrested!"

Tapsalter uttered an inarticulate exclamation. Claibourne started up.

"What?"

"Sit down," said Whitwire. "Sit down and let me finish while I'm still under the influence of what you've done to-night."

Claibourne dropped back into his chair. Whitwire went on:

"I had in my hand evidence which was brought to me by a man who was killed the next day in an automobile accident. That evidence would have cleared you and will still clear you."

"Clear me?" gasped Claibourne. "You mean that?"

"Yes! Don't interrupt me! You may break the spell yet in which I see myself as I have been. Before or after you were condemned, I could have saved you. Worse yet, I am a friend, a close and intimate friend, of the governor. He was about to pardon you. But he thinks a lot of my opinion. I turned him at the last minute. I tightened the noose around your neck. So far as I am concerned, in intent I killed you."

As he spoke, Whitwire rose, walked to his safe, opened it, came back again, and threw on the table beside Shelton Claibourne a packet. Tapsalter, staring, remained silent.

"There is your evidence," said Whitwire. "I shall go with it to the governor, and I'll tell him in the morning the same tale I have told you and Tapsalter here to-night. I'll hide you here until you're pardoned. You will have to incur the ignominy of a pardon when you are, as I know, guiltless. Yes, the governor will pardon you, Claibourne. But you, who out of your generosity have turned a searchlight on my own soul, you who have acquired freedom by being too big for my hate to crush, you will never be big enough to pardon me!"

Silence fell in the room. Claibourne was struggling with the emotion of a joy so tremendous, so wildly stirring,

that it might almost be said to have repaid him for all that he had gone through.

He knew now what most of us can never know—the halcyon joy of restoration. And for a little while in that silence there was in his mind a gladness so great that when he rose and walked to one of the windows he staggered slightly, drunk with the wine of unexpected freedom.

Then, from the recesses of his soul, from those depths where live in all of us hates and jealousies, there flared up inside of him a red fire of fury before which his joy receded.

How unnecessary, how cruel, how unspeakably vicious, low and mean, how hideous beyond words had been the injury done him!

His hand grasped the window sill and closed on it till the knuckles whitened.

But this mood also passed. That in his soul which enabled him to save Lucy

now enabled him to save himself from becoming in his turn what the humiliated and repentant man near him had been all his life—an embittered hater.

The fire of desired revenge died in Shelton Claibourne. He turned toward Whitwire and said simply:

"I do understand what you have been, Whitwire. You weren't normal. Perhaps from now on you will be. When you have done what you will do—clear me and set me free—if we cannot part friends, we can at least part as those who bear no malice toward each other."

Whitwire's glance fell. He said humbly: "I hadn't deserved so much."

Shelton Claibourne glanced toward the east. Morning was deepening into day—a new day of freedom, of justification. Reflected in the rosy sunrise colors still tinting the sky, he saw no longer the moonlight loveliness of Lucy, but the glowing, steadfast eyes of Kate Seymour.

**"BAD MAN'S BLACKMAIL," by Roy W. Hinds, coming
NEXT WEEK.**

KILLS WIFE TWICE

WHAT amounted to a double killing occurred recently in Florola, Alabama.

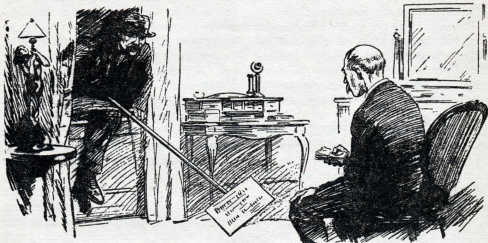
A man wished to get rid of his wife. He said that they were of different religions and could not agree, but whether this was the only reason police could not ascertain.

The husband gave his wife something to drink which contained poison and then took her for an automobile ride. It was not long before she died of the effects of the poison administered. In order that no one would find out that he had murdered her, the wife killer decided to be doubly sure. He ran the car to the edge of a steep embankment and jumped clear just before it went crashing over. Then he ran down to the wreckage, crawled beneath the debris, and, when the catastrophe was discovered, it was at first presumed that the wife was killed outright while her husband escaped injury.

Although it might easily happen that one party emerges uninjured while the other dies, the police in this particular case were suspicious. A number of things pointed to reasonable doubt that the affair had been a genuine accident. After a long grilling, the murderer confessed.

Mr. Philibus— Thousand-dollar Man

MR. PHILIBUS PROTECTS THIS GENTLE CREATURE
BY USING HIM IN HIS OWN TRICK.



By Leslie Gordon Barnard

Author of "Green-handed!" etc.

TILTED comfortably back in a chair in his hotel bedroom, Mr. Philibus read an evening paper and chuckled to himself. His most recent exploit was still news. Quite a daring affair; almost more venturesome than should be undertaken by a gentleman with a passion for liberty of movement.

Moreover, it was now a full week since the coup had been pulled off. And here, not a stone's throw from the scene itself, sat the perpetrator calmly chuckling over his success.

Setting aside the paper, he descended in the hotel elevator and walked calmly through the crowded rotunda, exchanging a wink with the telephone operator,

who did not discourage the attention, and a cigar with the house detective, who liked good brands and felt very friendly toward this respectable middle-aged guest.

Mr. Philibus, exposing the headlines concerning himself, tapped the paper to call the detective's attention to it.

"Surprised you haven't nabbed the reward offered," he said laughing. "This bird likely enough is hanging around places such as this. I should, in his shoes. Much safer than making a get-away!"

"Naw," said the house detective. "These birds ain't got the nerve for that. Believe me, this bird you speak of is half a continent away."

"With your experience," said Mr. Philibus mildly, "doubtless you are correct."

"I just wish," said the house detective quickly, "he was hereabouts. That thousand bucks would fit very pretty in the pocket of yours truly!"

Mr. Philibus considered this.

"Well, now," he said, "on second thought, I'm not quite so sure I'd care about that reward. Old Grewgerry is offering it himself, you know!"

"Sure! Why not? Ain't he the guy that got the loot stole off him, and got biffed up pretty bad himself. Fetched him a pretty crack in the eye, this crook did, and beat him up plenty, besides taking enough from his safe to make any man mad!"

"After all," said Mr. Philibus quietly, "is anybody very sorry for Grewgerry? If that man had all the oil, produced or prospective, out of the oil wells he's foisted on a dizzy public, he'd not have enough to anoint his ugly bald head!"

The detective laughed.

"He's a smooth one all right," he declared half admiringly. "Keeps within the law, though. That's brains, that is! You got to hand it to him for that. He's kep' himself out of jail nicely."

"And sent better men to jail," said Mr. Philibus evenly. "And sent widows to paupers' graves, and children on to the streets with his pretty schemes. I'd like to see the man who would take his dirty money!"

The detective chuckled, but his eyes gleamed a little.

"Well, take a good look, mister!" he suggested.

"At you?" said Mr. Philibus grimly now.

"At me!"

"You'd take his filthy money?"

"For a thousand dollars," said the other, "I'd not care to say what I'd do!" He laughed again. "He must want this guy pretty bad to go a thousand!"

"I fancy," said Mr. Philibus dreamily, "he's a little put out!"

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised. I know him. He often comes in here, and I've heard him boast nobody can get the better of him. Gosh, here he is now!"

Mr. Philibus veered round. A podgy, ill-shapen figure, evidently only recently out of medical care, had entered the rotunda. Mr. Philibus' eyes narrowed. He could wish now he'd given the fellow a richer dose. His pride had certainly not been taken down. Grewgerry swaggered in with three friends as if he owned the hotel. They came to a halt not far from where Mr. Philibus stood.

"Personal grudge?" Grewgerry was saying. "Maybe he had! Lots of people fancy they have something against me. Wonder why?" Four tones of laughter merged. "Naw, I'm not afraid of a repetition. The fellow's the other side of the country by now. Yellow, these chaps. If he hadn't had me at a disadvantage, I'd have laid him out proper. You could see he'd have run if I'd had half a chance. No, sir, you'll not see Josiah J. Grewgerry bitten twice in the same place!"

Mr. Philibus sneezed.

"What's that?" The detective swung around. "Was that you?" The little group round Grewgerry had turned also.

"Sneeze!" said Mr. Philibus. "Hasn't a man a right to sneeze in a free land? Woof!"

Mr. Josiah Grewgerry and his three friends went to the cigar counter, equipped themselves with the fattest and best, then adjourned to a quiet portion of the lobby, where they kept an anticipatory concentration on the door. Every time it revolved to usher in a newcomer, they were all attention.

"Maybe," said one of them, "he won't come, Grewgerry!"

"Come?" Grewgerry laughed. "You couldn't keep this hick away with a ten-foot pole with a spoke on the end. No,

I reckon he's so overcome with the honor of dinin' with four leadin' representatives of big business he can't get the studs into his soup-and-fish shirt, if he has one!"

A tall, sallow member of the party laughed.

"By the time we get through with him, he'll not have any kind of a shirt left!"

"There he is!" said Grewgerry.

"That?"

"The same!"

"Weeping willows, isn't he a perfect lamb!"

The man who approached now, to whose timid advance Grewgerry moved forward with smiling countenance and welcoming hand, was perhaps four feet nine inches tall; being thus cast by nature, he had achieved through the fifty or more years of his life a habit of looking up hopefully at his taller fellows. The skillful gentlemen who portray in cartoons Mr. General Public must have gone to him for the pincenez, the sad mustache, and other essentials of that composite character.

"Mr. Blaine," said Grewgerry expansively, leading him forward, "meet Mr. Waldenus. Waldenus, Mr. Blaine, the gentleman from the West I was speaking about. Graham, Mr. Blaine. And Porter! Have a cigar, Mr. Blaine. No? Well, I don't know as I blame you. Funny habit before dinner. Perhaps we might as well go on in, gentlemen?"

Little Mr. Blaine, who looked equally ready to bolt and to accept and enjoy his moment of bliss in this distinguished company, adjusted his shirt studs nervously, after the manner of a man who is not sure when they will pop and expose the honest wool beneath, and was shepherded into the glitter and expensive simplicity of the dining room.

Grewgerry, handling even the amazing head waiter as one accustomed to obeisance, winked at Waldenus.

Little Mr. Blaine, still agitated about the propensities of his studs, sat down on his chair, his face—full of a painful ecstasy—not very high above an array of silver and cutlery calculated to terrify the stoutest heart.

"You left your wife well, I hope, Mr. Blaine?"

"Thank you, Mr. Grewgerry—yes!"

"You are fortunate in having a wife, Mr. Blaine, whose instincts are progressively businesslike. I have explained to you, gentlemen, I think"—he waived a hand at his company—"that Mr. and Mrs. Blaine have come into a nice little legacy, and intend to invest it with discretion and profit. They noticed the offering of Commonlite Unlimited Oil and at once recognized its supreme attractiveness. That Mr. Blaine should come all the way here to look into it personally is gratifying. One's faith in human perspicacity is shaken so often by people who rush madly into speculation.

"Look," said Mr. Grewgerry shaking his head sadly, "at the awful debacle of the stock market! And have some hors d'œuvre, Mr. Blaine. Terrible how some people rush into danger that way. Now take oil—an essential industry—a bed-rock industry. There," said Mr. Grewgerry, emphasizing the position with a sardine, "there's the property; it can't run away, it can't dissolve; all you got to do is get the oil out of it and a ready market's waiting. You can see that, Mr. Blaine!"

Little Mr. Blaine, worrying an olive with a fork, chevying it with the tines around the side of his plate, race-course fashion, agreed that he could see, that indeed anybody could see. Just then Mr. Grewgerry, having a passion for them, swallowed the sardine, but just a little of the oil remained. Mr. Grewgerry, being quick on the uptake, pointed out, humorously, the symbolism of even this.

"Oil!" he enthused. "You can't es-

cape it! Soup, Mr. Blaine? Let me recommend the pôtage!"

The symbolism of the soup, Mr. Grewgerry left untouched. He went on, through several courses, to point out Mr. Blaine's excellent chances of getting in on the ground floor; then, leaving all this material to sink into Mr. Blaine's head, which was capable of much absorption that way, he spoke with the three gentlemen of developments likely. Mr. Blaine might be excused if he felt he was being privileged to listen in at a directors' meeting of the Commonlite Unlimited Oil.

There was quite a bit of talk about the ground floor. Mr. Blaine could not help being impressed. Nobody mentioned the basement, nor yet the blue sky that was above if you flew high enough.

"Café noir, Mr. Blaine? Now here's the agreement, if you'd care to glance over it. Quite usual and ordinary. And if you'll just sign—here——" He glanced up. "What's that, boy?"

"Call for Mr. Blaine!"

"In a moment," said Grewgerry, frowning.

"It's urgent, sir! This way, please!"

Little Mr. Blaine, being easily led, succumbed to this uniformed urge, and followed in bewilderment, still clinging to his napkin as to a life preserver. A stout, pleasant-featured gentleman met him in the shadow of a palm in the lobby.

A colloquy, which Mr. Blaine could not hear, ensued between the boy and this pleasant-faced gentleman.

"I got him, sir. They were just getting him to sign something!"

"Good grief! He hadn't——"

"No, sir. I stuck by until he came along!"

"Good lad! Got any use for a couple dollars? And not a word to any one, see? I'd not like to appear in it. These fellows keep more or less within the law!"

"Very good, sir!"

"Hello, did you drop that?"

"Where, sir?"

"Over there by the pillar!"

The boy stooped and picked up a small envelope. It was marked, "To the House Detective!"

"I should give it to him!" said Mr. Philibus. "Somebody must've dropped it—perhaps purposely. Don't mention I suggested so. I don't think he likes me so well!"

The boy grinned, and was off like a shot.

"Bright lad!" said Mr. Philibus.

"Ah, Mr. Blaine, I'm sorry to keep you waiting, and indeed to disturb you at dinner, but I happened to be dining near your table to-night, and I wondered if you'd forgive my having a word with you!"

The bell hop, meanwhile, crushing the two-dollar bill affectionately in his hand and transferring it to a slit that evidently made connection with a pocket, set out immediately on the house detective's trail. He was a bright boy, quick to make money and slow to spend it, who could size up the financial intentions of a patron with amazing technique, who knew the value of a frank eye and a silent tongue, who could teach diplomats the nice nuances of accommodating oneself to compromises, and who, in due time, if not hung, would doubtless rise high by other means.

"Letter for you!" he told the house detective, who was passing a friendly and boastful word with a telephone operator who, just having turned over her duties to a successor, was powdering her nose and remembering that the house detective—even if he had a largeish nose and a small mind—was a man, and seemed willing to spend money on a girl, if encouraged. His name, of course, was against him. One could go only so far with a man named Croocrab. Mrs. Croocrab? The little Croocrabs? Not if she knew it!

"Where'd you get it?"

"Found it on the floor!"

"Floor? Where?"

"The lobby. Over that way!"

"How did it come there?"

"Ask it. I saw it and picked it up!"

The blonde was becoming impatient. Blondes can be like that. They like gentlemen to be gentlemen.

"Guess I'll move along!" she said.

"Hold up!" cried Mr. Croocrab, "Sorry, kiddo—just a matter of business!"

The blonde pouted. Properly done, it was effective. Mr. Croocrab felt his heart turn over. He forgot the letter; or rather held it, fiddling with it playfully.

"Girlie," he said, "I'm a plain-spoken man. I don't mind saying I like you!"

"Well, I'd hate to have you say it if it hurt!"

"Don't be snappy with poppa!" said Mr. Croocrab humorously. "Baby, if I could only cop that coin I was talking to a guy about to-day we'd step pretty, you and me. A thousand bucks! There's the paper, see? Good description of him. Black hair and mustache—black as the devil—fair size, scar over right cheek curved like a crescent! Can you beat it? That's a give-away—a scar like that. Was he within a hundred miles, I don't mind sayin' I could spot this bird like a shot. But there's no luck that way.

"Some dick with half my brains'll get that coin way out in the woollies. Chap I was chinnin' with to-day, says: 'What if this bird was right in the hotel, it'd be a good place to hide.' That's brains, eh? The way some people let their chins wag would paralyze you. Baby, I'm a man of few words. 'Deeds, not words,' is the motto I was brung up on since infancy. Baby, if I ever land anything like this"—he hit the paper—"you and me'll step a cake walk to the altar, and shuffle names!"

The blonde's eyes were fixed upon

him with the horrid fascination of one seeing visiting cards with "Croocrab" on them. The vision held her silent for the moment. Mr. Croocrab continued: "If I could lay a single finger on this bird he'd look cheap—cheap all right."

Mr. Croocrab's finger, as it happened, was at that moment poking open the letter he had forgotten. It was a mechanical movement, as was the pulling forth of the letter inside.

A queer look overcame him. He paled. The words moved before him like living things:

Watch your step! The thousand-dollar-on-his-head man is in your hotel. If you want to be in on this, look for instructions under the fifth palm in Peacock Alley.

ONE INTERESTED IN YOUR CAREER.

It was on delicately scented paper. The hand was apparently a feminine scrawl. Mr. Croocrab felt at once elated and faint. He waved a hand at the blonde.

"Gotta go!" he said chokingly. "See you again, girlie! I'm on the trail of money."

He moved off.

The blonde flirted her head.

"Yeah!" she said to her reflection in her purse mirror. "On the trail of money is good. The big boob got a letter from some dame! Crab is good! He's fishy all right!"

The house detective, however, had no thoughts to waste on her now. A thousand dollars was in prospect, and the prestige which such a capture would give him. Desire ran ahead of his intelligence. This might very well be a poor joke on some one's part. It was like a treasure hunt, being sent to the fifth palm in Peacock Alley. The alley, as it was popularly known, ran from the end of the lobby, in narrow splendor, to the dining room. On either side were luxurious chairs and couches on which one might sit, at meal hours, and watch the great and the near-great

parade like peacocks to be fed by a keeper.

Finding the fifth palm, Mr. Croocrab had little difficulty in discovering a further note, thrust out of sight, but easily revealing itself to the initiate.

He tore it open and read:

Room No. 314. Knock before entering and watch for further instructions. One thousand dollars hangs on it. AN ADMIRER.

Mr. Croocrab, placing his large nose against the paper, sniffed, again identifying that delicate scent. An admirer? Some lady who desired to help him? Straightening his shoulders, and putting on an air of extreme efficiency and courage, lest the lady be watching from some seclusion, he strode down Peacock Alley, and sought the room clerk.

"Who's No. 314?" he asked.

"314? Just taken!"

"Name?" demanded Mr. Croocrab hoarsely.

"Name of Blaine!" said the clerk.

"Why, what's up?"

But Mr. Croocrab had departed. He was heading for the elevator. Just taken! There must be something in this, after all.

He stepped into a waiting elevator.

"Third floor!" said Mr. Croocrab imperiously.

Little Mr. Blaine sat on the least comfortable chair in a room so luxuriously appointed that at first he could do nothing but stare at the splendor, and murmur to himself:

"My gumdrops, if only Martha could see this! My gumdrops, if it don't beat all!"

Behind this perhaps superficial wonder whirled a maze of conflicting emotions, which, not being able either to catalogue or subdue, he pushed from him. In the last ten minutes things had happened to him. Here he was in undisputed possession of this splendid room, and his bag, his galoshes, his umbrella, his second-best suit, his picture

of Martha—tinted—his nightwear and his toilet accessories were all in a fifth-floor room in Brown's Commercial and Family Hotel seven blocks away.

He could still hear the quiet, convincing voice of the pleasant-faced gentleman, stating:

"Mr. Blaine, you will forgive my interference in your affairs, but you are about to be fleeced by men too crooked to be crooks. I don't ask you to take my word; I do ask—but are you rooming in this hotel?"

"No, sir!" said Mr. Blaine weakly. "I'm at Brown's—"

"Oh, my dear sir! Oh, my dear sir," the pleasant gentleman had protested. "Won't do at all. You must move in here immediately. You must meet men like these on their own level. A man of your intelligence, Mr. Blaine, will see that at once. Let me recommend either room 514 or 314. All the upper fourteens have a good view; I'm in 415 myself. I'll wait here while you book it! And do make haste! There's not a moment to lose!"

It was useless for Mr. Blaine to protest. His protests against life had never been heeded much. And this nice gentleman was evidently his friend.

"You book," said the gentleman, "right over there! And say nothing why—except that you are changing your hotel. They'll send for your things later, if you wish. But hurry please! These gentlemen who wish to fleece you will be out of the dining room any moment, and you must be prepared to meet them in a proper background. A man of your evident intelligence, Mr. Blaine, can see that right away!"

Properly pleased at this fair estimate, Mr. Blaine suffered his feet to carry him to the desk.

"514?" said the room clerk. "Um—taken, I'm afraid. 314? Yes, that's a good room; nice view as you say. And vacant. You want your luggage sent for?"

He struck a bell. Mr. Blaine, placing on the page of the register open for him a signature that would have wiped out his and Martha's savings had he written it a short time before when requested, meekly followed the boy to the elevator. He looked round for the pleasant-faced gentleman who had tipped him off to this, but could see him nowhere. A slight perturbation filled him, a hesitation, but, with this unformed juvenile barging on ahead, there was no drawing back.

So here he was!

It was all very confusing, but not finally unpleasant. He only wished Martha could see this room. A gentle breeze of early summer moved to him through the open window, which had two advantages: a far view over a public square now spattered with lights in the dusk, and the iron security of a fire escape that continued up above, and led down below. Martha had said to be sure and locate the fire escape first off, and to have his trousers and slippers handy at night.

The soft wind came pleasantly in at the window. And then, suddenly, unbelievably, and terrifying, it was borne in upon Mr. Blaine that something more than early summer air had come in the window.

"Make no outcry!" said a cool voice. "Not a hair of your head will be hurt if you keep cool and do as I say!"

Mr. Blaine, stricken beyond the point of vocalization, his few hairs standing up on his baldish pate, gave a look, and fainted away. And, at that moment, a gentle knocking sounded outside his door.

The knuckles of House Detective Croocrab having achieved nothing by gentleness became more insistent, and, this failing, he called the floor manageress and opened the door with the master key.

Imperiously bidding the lady of the keys to stand aside out of danger, Mr.

Croocrab made a cautious but impressive entrance, to find, as he thought, a little and most unimpressive man asleep in a chair. A moment later, the true situation was revealed.

"Water! Brandy! Stimulants!" ordered Mr. Croocrab with quick intelligence. "Now, hold on, the guy's coming round!"

Little Mr. Blaine blinked up into the face of the detective, and seeing what he did, was about to faint away again, when the sight of the floor manageress with a glass of water revived him. Mrs. Scruton, the manageress, reminded him of Martha. She was at once efficient and homely.

Mr. Blaine made sounds in his throat. Eventually, he managed words: "A man!" he said. "Through the window! Off the fire escape!"

Mr. Croocrab caught the victim ungently by the shoulder.

"Quick! Describe him!"

"Dark!" said Mr. Blaine, waving his hands as if to push the mental vision away. "Very dark. And a terrible scar on his cheek! Horrible!"

"Lovely!" amended Mr. Croocrab eagerly. He dashed to the window. Against the steel blue of the sky the fire escape hung in uncompromising ugliness; perhaps it struck Mr. Croocrab as sinister, for he hung back, then, very cautiously peered out. Sufficient light enabled him to see that nothing noteworthy menaced one in the length between here and the roof, so, cautiously, he swung a leg out, and let his body follow. Little Mr. Blaine, staggering forward, but remaining at a discreet distance, stood watching this exit, and wringing his hands.

Encouraged by the fact that no shots or other dangers met him, Mr. Croocrab—not liking the darkness below—chose to go above, and if there had been any hesitation in this course, it would have been swept aside by a sudden call from above him.

"Help! Help! Help!"

Startled, he turned his eyes upward and beheld, from a window above, a tousled head outthrust.

With instant courage, Mr. Croocrab responded. Running up the intervening flight of iron steps, he flung himself into the room through the window opened widely to him, from which the human presence had now gone. As he effected his entrance, he heard the slam of a door, and was confronted with a gentleman in pajamas and dressing gown, who cried:

"Gone!"

"Gone?"

"A dark man with a scar. I saw that very clearly as he passed that mirror there. He came in the window."

The detective raced to the door and flung it open.

"Which way?"

"I couldn't say. He slammed the door right in front of me!"

Mr. Croocrab, running up and down a little like an overheated hen, made investigation hither and yon, inquiring of maids, of elevator boys, of bell hops, then returning, inquired:

"What did he do? He came in the window——"

"And went directly to the door. I'd got into my night things a bit early, and had been lying on the bed a few minutes before all this happened! I——"

"Why!" cried Mr. Croocrab. "It's you!"

"Sure, it's me!" said Mr. Philibus with ungrammatical humility, and then, aggrievedly: "If that isn't the guy that the thousand dollars is offered for, I'll eat my dressing gown! I told you, didn't I, he might hide around here?"

"Yeah," said Mr. Croocrab ruminatingly. "So you did. How did you get that way?"

Mr. Philibus looked the detective squarely in the eye.

"Between you and me," he confided, "I saw something that looked like him

once before I spoke to you that way, only you know how it is—it's hard to believe that kind of thing. But I thought it was no harm hinting it to you. Say, this place seems full of crooks. I saved a little country chap from your friend Grewgerry just now! Got him away, and suggested he take a room here. He's in 314 or 514—one or the other. I'm going to watch out for him, see. I'm going to keep my eye on him. What's the matter?"

Mr. Croocrab choked.

"314?"

"Is that where he is?" asked Mr. Philibus.

"That's where the dark guy with the scar's just been in to scare the wits out of him!"

"No!" cried Mr. Philibus. "Is it possible? Poor little fellow! He'll think I'm putting one over on him. How did you know?"

"Got a note. From a lady, I guess!" said Mr. Croocrab. "Tipped me off to go to 314. There's something," he declared intelligently, "fishy about this!"

Mr. Philibus threw up his hands.

"Fishy! It beats Hannah! The place must be full of crooks. Look here," he said eagerly. "Can I help you? I've laid eyes on this dark chap with the scar, and, after all, there's a thousand in it for some one."

Mr. Croocrab nodded hesitantly. He was seeing the little blonde below stepping with him to the altar, and he didn't like the idea of a fifty-fifty split with this chap. However——

"All right!" he said. "What had we better do first?"

"That's for you to say," said Mr. Philibus graciously, conceding Mr. Croocrab's professional status. "But I feel I ought to look up little Mr. Blaine in 314 and apologize or something. What a thing to happen!"

"I'll go with you!" said Mr. Croocrab.

"Do you suppose Grewgerry's putting

one over or anything?" asked Mr. Philibus. "I don't trust that man! Even that reward. I'd like to see the color of his money."

"That," agreed the detective, his eyes gleaming, "ain't so bad an idea either! He's a slick guy, all right."

Mr. Grewgerry and his companions, having been left at the table by Mr. Blaine at the moment when the latter was ready for the plucking, had their moment of nervousness. The idea that anybody in this world, save those seeking a victim, should want little Mr. Blaine was preposterous. Their eyes, at first concentrated dismally on the dotted line still lacking the signature of Mr. Blaine, were raised at last in speculative inquiry.

"He'll be back!" said Grewgerry.

But, uncomfortably, they watched the door. "We'll go and see," he added at last. They searched the lobby. They made inquiries of a clerk. "Why, yes, sir. Mr. Blaine has gone up to his room!"

"Room?" repeated Mr. Grewgerry, his brows agitated. "His room? Why, he's stopping at—"

"He has just booked here. Mr. Blaine is in 314, sir. Front! Boy, show these gentlemen to 314!"

Little Mr. Blaine was still undergoing severe palpitations of the heart when his visitors were announced. He regarded them as a man might creatures of his past suddenly summoned up. Mr. Grewgerry, with his acute perception, leaped at once to the only logical conclusion.

"Mr. Blaine. I am sorry. You are ill. You have been taken ill. You have had to take a room!"

"Ill?" Mr. Blaine grasped at the word. It expressed so many things he felt; at remembrance of his terrible experience, at sight of these men who would have his signature for his and Martha's money.

"Do sit down!" urged Mr. Grewgerry blandly. "Is it your heart, Mr. Blaine?"

Mr. Blaine gulped, and spoke the first words that occurred.

"I have been held up!"

"Held up?"

"A man. A terrible criminal. In my window!" Mr. Blaine waved an arm feebly. "A dark man with a scar on his face!"

Grewgerry leaped to his feet.

"What?" he roared. "Tell me, where is he? Where did he go?"

A voice spoke from the doorway; none had heard a quick preliminary knock, nor the opening of the door.

"He came up the fire escape and in my window!" said Mr. Philibus calmly. "Hello, Mr. Grewgerry. I think you're likely at any time to have to turn over that thousand-dollar reward!"

"I'd give it gladly," roared Mr. Grewgerry, facing the intruders fiercely, "to lay hands on that fellow!"

"Cash?" asked Mr. Philibus mildly.

"Cash!" roared Mr. Grewgerry.

"There's danger in it," said Mr. Philibus. "I'd like to see the color of the money before I risked my neck on fire escapes, and perhaps get plugged. Eh, Croocrab?"

The house detective's face brightened.

"Sure. That's only fair, Mr. Grewgerry. If you really mean to put this up——" He rubbed his hands a little. He felt it would be inspiring to see the actual thousand before undertaking further action. Mr. Croocrab had a great respect for his own skin.

Grewgerry glared.

"You don't trust me, eh? All right, Graham, lemme your pen. I'll write a check. They'll cash it for me below. The office know me well enough!"

The office, indeed, proved obliging. Mr. Grewgerry returned to display a thick pile of twenties and tens that made Mr. Croocrab's head swim.

"There's one thing we mustn't for-

get," suggested Mr. Philibus gently. "I'm not a prophet or the son of one, but I'll wager my last shirt to a decayed onion that crook isn't far off yet, Mr. Grewgerry. I shouldn't be surprised if he's looking at that wad of yours right now, sir! By Jove, I was sure I saw him—just now—at the window!" Mr. Philibus was both excited and truthful, having caught his own reflection there.

Every one, with instant accord, looked toward that window in which the wanted man had come. The darkness held a brooding and sinister suggestion of evil. Little Mr. Blaine made throaty cries of alarm.

"Let him just try and get it!" snapped Grewgerry. "I only ask the chance to try conclusions with him again!"

"And I'm here," supplemented Mr. Croocrab with due modesty. "That guy don't put nothin' over me while I'm alive and in my right mind. No, sir!"

Mr. Philibus coughed slightly behind his hand. He remained for a moment gravely in thought.

"Suppose," he said slowly, "I ask your advice, Mr. Croocrab. Suppose we were to bait the trap. If Mr. Grewgerry will risk his money for a short while with Mr. Blaine—you, of course, anticipate me, Mr. Croocrab!"

Mr. Croocrab felt flattered but dumb. Then the thing dawned on him.

He chuckled.

"That's just my idea," he said. "We'll turn over this money to Mr. Blaine—or Mr. Grewgerry will, as if it was a business deal—see—and then Mr. Grewgerry follows us out here into the hall. Mr. Blaine steps in here and counts the money careful and puts it in his pocket. If that don't bring the rat out of his hole, I'm a dumb-bell!"

Mr. Grewgerry was ready for any expedient.

Little Mr. Blaine made bleating sounds, but, a bit like a man in a dream,

accepted the money with trembling fingers, and, as they left him, sat staring at it like a wooden Indian.

"Now I," said Mr. Philibus thoughtfully, "had better go back to bed. The fellow came through my window before, and he may again. I better give no indication anything has happened. I'll just lie there peacefully again, with the window open. Croocrab, you might post somebody outside my door, in case I need help. I'll lock the door, as he might try to use my room as an escape again, but it might be as well to have reinforcements outside! Say a boy who could summon help from you below!"

"Sure," said Croocrab. "I'll put a bell hop on it!"

Mr. Philibus nodded.

"They say lightning never strikes twice in the same place, but this chap's a bold, bad un, or I miss my guess, and it's as well we should be prepared!"

"Shouldn't we have some one watching on the fire escape?" said the detective.

Mr. Philibus looked at him in patient reproach.

"If I were a crook," he said simply, "I'd postpone operations if somebody was sitting waiting to pinch me on the fire escape."

"Something in that!" agreed Mr. Croocrab quickly. "Well, we'll be all set for the first sign of alarm from Mr. Blaine! Right outside his door we'll be!"

Once inside his room, Mr. Philibus, crawling for a moment into bed, as if in support of the cause of truth and honesty, slipped presently out the far side and over his pajamas drew on an old pair of trousers, a coat and a muffler to protect his neck. Standing for a moment before his mirror, he performed an operation that a lightning-change artist—and, indeed, he was one—might envy.

A few mysterious passes with his hands, on the tips of whose fingers was a preparation of his own perfecting, made him fallow looking; a similar additional operation provided lines to his face that lent a gauntness, and a final one gave the similitude of a scar across his right cheek bone. Taking from a carefully locked but unobtrusive and rather battered suit case a hat with wig attached, he pulled it on his head and became in every sense a dark and rather sinister person.

All this had been a matter almost more of seconds than minutes; pulling on a pair of old boots over socks into which the ends of his genteel pajamas were thrust, he moved softly to the window; the bell hop might have sharp ears; there was, fortunately, no keyhole aperture for the fellow to be curious with; then he stepped onto the fire escape.

The night was graciously dark now; he maneuvered with care and arrived outside 314.

Peering through the lighted window, he could see little Mr. Blaine sitting like a rabbit paralyzed by impending danger. The ears of the little man fairly stood up, and his hair seemed on the verge of declaring a sympathetic uprising. In his hands, clutched tightly, as if it were stage money, and he a novice upon whom the curtain had gone up unexpectedly, was that fat wad of tens and twenties. One thousand dollars—Mr. Josiah J. Grewgerry's promised reward for the apprehension of a dark gentleman with a scar!

Mr. Philibus, feeling a certain tenderness toward little Mr. Blaine, hesitated in his course, then, thinking of the widows and orphans, the gentle souls of every sex who had suffered to provide themselves with handsomely engraved and worthless certificates for oil shares and Mr. Grewgerry and his associates with this thousand, he girded himself, and, stooping, picked up a

"stage prop" he had previously planted conveniently to hand under the window on the fire escape.

Little Mr. Blaine, wondering why he had ever left Martha and embarked on this city venture, conscious of the wad of bills in his hand, conscious of the support of the men who waited outside the door, was still more, and in fact supremely conscious of that window. His gaze was riveted on it.

His tongue explored the length of his dry lips. And, suddenly, his tongue seemed to get stuck, hard and fast between his lips.

On the end of a thin stick of sorts propelled by an unseen hand, a largish oblong of cardboard had appeared. It said:

SILENCE

and

YOU WILL NOT BE HARMED

Mr. Blaine's mind compassed all the events of an innocent life in a moment of time; he thought of how he had said nasty things to Martha about her married sister, and how once he had thrown shoes at a neighbor's cat, and he decided to cling to life. He stared with horror at the slow, cautious entrance of a dark man with a scarred cheek. This second sight of him was no more pleasing than the first. He was coming nearer. It was too much for Mr. Blaine. His mouth opened to make outcry; instead, some black wave smote the back of his neck and, the bank notes drifting from him to the floor, Mr. Blaine for the second time fainted dead away.

Mr. Philibus, stooping to pick up the bills, hesitated. It was easy now. Too easy! He had counted on an alarm at the least; it was desirable that others besides little Mr. Blaine should see and recognize the criminal!

Mr. Philibus looked up sharply. And, suddenly, reaching out an arm to the table near by, he swept from it the small bronze statue of a lightly clad lady bear-

ing aloft a lighted torch. She lit on the floor, with a report just like a revolver shot.

Instantly the door burst open. Mr. Croocrab, scenting both danger and a thousand dollars, led the van, but cautiously, revolver in hand.

"There he is!"

The shout came from four throats simultaneously.

The dark gentleman with the scar regarded them mockingly from the window, his head within but his body safely outside.

"Shoot!" cried Grewgerry. "Dead or alive!"

The window came down with a crash, putting only the insecurity of a pane between Mr. Philibus and his antagonists. Mr. Croocrab's revolver went up, but, before he could discipline a hand agitated by a brain swimming with thousand-dollar agitations, the pane was shattered from the outside, and through the jagged aperture came a mocking laugh.

Croocrab shot forward, Grewgerry at his heels.

"Mind the glass!" shouted Mr. Croocrab. "Oh, the devil! Stand back!"

Reaching out, he thrust the window up, springing from a further shower of splinters, cursing with emphatic protestation at a cut in his wrist. Next moment he was out upon the fire escape.

"Got away!" he moaned. "That fellow's room! Maybe he's gone that way again!"

With Grewgerry following, he shot up the escape, and in the open window of 414.

"Hello!" cried a sleepy voice from the bed. "What the——"

"The man with the scar!" cried Croocrab. "He didn't come in here?"

Mr. Philibus stared, blinking sleepily. "I'd have known if he did!" he said, grinning.

Suddenly, Josiah J. Grewgerry—who

as the world knew to its sorrow—was no fool, cried:

"I believe you——"

He did not complete the remark. Dashing to the bed, he threw back the clothes.

"I say!" protested Mr. Philibus.

Mr. Grewgerry drew back, abashed. Mr. Philibus' stout body was displayed only in futuristic pajamas. He appealed to Mr. Croocrab: "What's biting our friend here?"

"Dunno!" said the house detective blankly. He reproached Mr. Grewgerry. "You know, sir, it don't do to disturb hotel guests that way!"

"For two cents, sir," added Mr. Philibus now blinking himself properly awake, as any one could see, "I'd bash in your other eye. By the by, where's little Mr. Blaine? Have you left him to the mercy of this crook?"

Gently, Mr. Croocrab explained.

Mr. Philibus clucked a sympathetic tongue.

"Fainted? Well, now. And Mr. Grewgerry's thousand dollars gone. A nice name this hotel will get, Mr. Croocrab, if this kind of thing gets about. If I were you, I'd get Mr. Blaine packed off home. It's no kind of a place for him anyway—not with so many crooks around!"

"So many?" Mr. Croocrab was blank again.

"I saved Mr. Blaine from one already to-night," said Mr. Philibus placidly. "I got him away about the time he was going to sign his poor little legacy away for nonexistent oil. It was I, as he will, no doubt, tell you when you question him, who suggested he take a room here and go at this matter quietly. So you see," said Mr. Philibus humbly, "I feel quite guilty about what happened to him afterward!" He turned to Mr. Grewgerry, who had halted in his investigation of the room to absorb this last comment. "Is the gentleman looking for something?"

Mr. Grewgerry drew nearer the bed, and swore in an ungentlemanly fashion.

"I believe you're a crook," he began, but Mr. Philibus interrupted.

"I *know* you're one!" he said gently. "I don't like anything about you. I don't like your face. I don't like your morals. I don't like you long nose. I don't like your bald head. I don't like the way you come in disturbing a gentleman's sleep. In fact, let me warn you that, unless Mr. Croocrab takes you away, something nasty might happen to you. I can stand so much—and no more! Get out now! Go and find your thousand-dollar crook! I wouldn't raise a hand any more to help catch him—for you! Not a finger! Get out! I'm sleepy. And if you try to trick little Blaine with any of your slick work, I won't answer for myself. Get out of here!"

Mr. Grewgerry, mumbling things not nice for a gentleman's ears, withdrew together with Mr. Croocrab.

"Woof!" said Mr. Philibus softly.

Mr. Grewgerry swung around, decided he had imagined something, and, before Mr. Philibus' baleful glance, retired, closing the door. For a long time Mr. Philibus lay staring up at the ceiling and chuckling a little to himself.

Then, making sure that no one was at the window or on the fire escape, he

drew from under the mattress a coat and pair of trousers, and a hat with wig attached.

"Ruined, I'm afraid!" he said dolefully, regarding the latter. "Ah, well! Lucky," he said, "old nosey didn't look too far! Hadn't time to clean the basin up!" He went over now and took from water—still warm—standing in the basin, a wash cloth, carefully rinsing from it a dusky look that clung to it, and some stains that might easily have come from the removal of an artificial scar.

"Quick work, old boy!" approved Mr. Philibus, gazing in his mirror. "But worth it in more ways than this!"

He took from the pocket of the discarded trousers a fat wad of bills in tens and twenties.

"It's not robbery!" he said. "It's a reward. He offered it for the chance to get his hands on this awful crook who bashed him up before! But what a pity I couldn't have closed the other eye for him. Ah, well!"

Taking the money with him, he climbed into bed, shut off the night light that was burning, and pleasantly anticipated the delights of that slumber.

"As the dear old blacksmith said," murmured Mr. Philibus sleepily, "'Something attempted, something done, has earned a night's repose!'"



BIG COAT DAY

IT was a big coat day for thieves at the Carnegie Tech School of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. One thief was about to walk out with a student's coat, while another was wearing two coats and carrying a purse belonging to a young lady student in one of the pockets.

The owner of the single overcoat recognized it when he saw the thief walking toward the door. He immediately seized the man and a brief struggle ensued, the result being that the student won the fight and marched the thief to the police station. Meantime, the pal of the thief was discovered near the coat room even better equipped than his friend.



AN EXTRA TRIP FOR TONY

By C. Wiles Hallock

TONY FERRONI, the terrible wop,
 Prowling Ye Olde Antiquarian Shoppe,
 Lifted a jade statuette.
 Tony was vicious and Tony was smart;
 Tony cracked safes when he raided the mart,
 But Tony was wop, and his weakness was art,
 And jade is worth trouble to get.

Tony was proud of his jade-lifting job;
 Bragged of the trick to his pals of the mob;
 Tony was clever, but rash.
 Mobsters know how to make use of a fool.
 Mobsters don't care about art, as a rule,
 Except for its value in cash.

Tony soon found what a fool he had been;
 Tony was warned by the mob to kick in.
 What did they care about art?
 (Well, they cared some: A reward would be paid,
 No questions asked for that green chunk of jade,
 Ten grand—and no cops taking part!)

Tony kicked in. 'Twas a blow to his pride.
 Why be perverse, though? Risk taking a ride?
 Mobsters are desperate men!
 They got the reward. There the matter should drop;
 But jade was the weakness of Tony, the wop.
 Straight back to Ye Olde Antiquarian Shoppe
 Sneaked Tony, and stole it again!

He Needed It

HIS LUCKY QUARTER DOES A LOT TO SHOCK HIM.



By Dolores Du Shane

A SHUDDER swept over the emaciated form of "Foxy" Nelson as the tenth ominous stroke boomed from the courthouse tower a few blocks away. For the hundredth time that night, he rose from the rickety chair, shambled over to the grimy, broken window, and peered out. Not that he could see anything—unless it was the corner street lamp swinging crazily in the wind half a block away. A tree fell close by, followed by a roar of thunder, presaging another storm, so common at this time of year.

"Two hours," Foxy muttered. Leaving the window, he tiptoed back across the bare floor and sat down on the edge of the sagging cot, the only other furniture in the room.

His mind was teeming with vague misgivings. Had Tommy told? Was his secret safe? His thoughts flitted to another section of the city—to grim,

gray walls—a little room—a chair. Two hours from now, shortly before midnight, Tommy Walters would enter the little room and sit down in the chair. For a moment, Foxy experienced a wave of pity. Too bad! Tommy had been a good kid—never squealed through all the grilling. He would have made a swell partner; young, wiry, athletic. True blue, too! And then he had allowed himself to be caught on their first job!

"The little greenhorn!" Foxy exploded, then caught himself. Mustn't let loose like that.

He reviewed the five years he had played a lone hand without capture. Then—his meeting with Tommy, a candid youth of nineteen; the rapid acquaintance, friendship, persuasion, partnership; his careful coaching of the kid; the eventful night; the unexpected appearance of the night watchman; the bark of Tommy's gun in his panic.

Foxy mopped his brow with a soiled, tattered handkerchief as, outside, the November rain began its furious onslaught against the grimy window.

Wounded, the watchman had reached for his own gun. But too late! Foxy's .45 spat twice; the watchman fell. Foxy had then wheeled around just in time to see the kid disappearing through the door that led to the street, where, it was disclosed later, he had run directly into the arms of a policeman who had been attracted by the shots.

The little fool! Why hadn't he stuck with his partner? Foxy had explained that he, alone, knew the only safe hiding place in that huge warehouse. But no! The little fool had to bungle things on the very brink of a prosperous career. And he, Foxy Nelson, ablest "soup" man in the game, had been forced to remain in concealment until this thing was over.

He emitted a snort of disgust that ended in a gasp of dismay. Somewhere in the hall, a board had creaked. Leaping to his feet, his hand darted to his hip pocket. He drew it away, cursing inwardly. He had forgotten for the moment that his gun was reposing in a downtown pawnshop. Beads of perspiration pearled on his forehead, and he felt suffocated, fearing to breathe. This was the end. Caught like a rat in a trap.

Then he laughed. Why, that was what it was. Rats. This dilapidated old lodging house was infested from cellar to garret. He breathed a deep sigh of relief and shuffled over to the window again. A great bolt of lightning greeted him, and he recoiled in terror. Electricity! The yawning mouth of hell!

Above a loud burst of thunder, the big clock struck the half hour. Foxy tottered back and sank down weakly into the battered chair. What was Tommy doing? Was he cursing his

fate? No! Tommy wasn't that kind. Probably praying! But had he told? Had he, in repentance, confessed to the identity of his partner? Foxy's name—an assumed one—wouldn't matter. He had never been caught; never been "mugged" or finger printed. But there was the scar.

His whole left ear was gone! Amputation had been necessary two years before, when infection had set in—infection from a gunshot wound inflicted by an officer's pistol. That had been his closest escape. Yes, he had deemed it wise to remain "on vacation" until—Tommy was gone.

He fumbled in his pockets for cigarettes. Something clattered to the floor as he withdrew the package. He bent over and picked it up, twirling it in his restless fingers: his lucky coin; a quarter so old that the luster had long since worn away and the date become indistinguishable. For six long years, he had carried it and had never been caught.

He laughed. Funny how a guy would get such ideas! But the fact remained that, rather than spend it, he had foregone the purchase of cigarettes earlier in the evening. He looked ruefully inside the pack. Only one left. He started to draw it out, dropped it back, drew it out and lit it.

Deeply he inhaled and relaxed in the chair, returning the quarter to its accustomed place in the side pocket of his trousers. The nicotine soothed his frayed nerves, reassuring him. What had been the matter with him, anyway? One would think he was getting white-livered.

He leaned back and puffed contentedly. Everything would be jake tomorrow. With the coast clear once more, it would be a simple matter to get the money to redeem his gun. Then back to Zanesville, where he'd hidden for the past nine months, and that swell job he had spotted.

The cigarette fell from his fingers. The clock was striking eleven!

He sat perfectly still and counted the strokes. When it had finished, he stooped to recover the cigarette, straightened up, and stared at the door. Unmistakably, those were human footsteps had been there. Somebody was pausing outside his door. His throat constricted painfully as he strained forward to listen. He breathed a malediction against the reduced circumstances that had forced him into renting such a trap—a room with no lock on the door. There wasn't even a fire escape.

There came a loud knock upon the door.

Springing to his feet, he darted to one side, the chair held menacingly above his head. He'd never give up without a struggle. He'd go down fighting. A strangling sob rose in his throat. Why had he ever left Zanesville to come to this accursed place? He'd been safe the whole week, and now, on the very last night—

The knock was repeated. Swaying weakly, he finally found his voice.

"Who's there?"

"Say, brother! Can you spare a match?"

Foxy recognized the voice of a roomer from across the hall. Setting the chair down, he opened the door a few inches and peered out.

"Just came in," the other explained. "Went to light the gas and found I didn't have a match. Thought maybe you could spare one. Thanks. Sorry to bother you."

"S all right," Foxy mumbled as the man walked away.

He closed the door and propped the chair under the knob. Then, returning to the cot, he sank down, haggard and spent. Perspiration trickled down his lean cheeks and dripped from his chin. How crazy he'd been ever to come to Columbus! After all, he could have waited a few hours longer to see the

newspapers. They'd give more details, too, than the extras.

Eleven thirty! Standing again before the window, water splashing in through the broken pane, he noticed that the corner street lamp was out. Everything was shrouded in darkness except now and then when a bolt of lightning zigzagged across the heavens.

They probably were starting the death march about now. The crown of Tommy's head would be shaved, his trousers leg slit. Wonder if he was hysterical, as on that other night? And, most important, what would pass his lips before the switch was pushed in?

A sudden crash of thunder broadcast its fury, followed by a wriggling streak of flames that, to Foxy, resembled a monstrous, hissing snake.

"Heavens!" he whispered. "What a night—what a way—to pass out!"

At five minutes past midnight, Foxy descended the squeaky stairs and started down the street. The worst part of the storm was over, but a keen, nipping drizzle was still falling. Foxy shivered and drew his thin jacket closer. He rapped out an oath as the water on the sidewalk seeped in through the worn soles of his low-cut shoes.

Crossing the first intersection, he saw that the street lamp—the one he had watched from his attic window—had been blown down and was lying in the street, broken into a thousand fragments. Two blocks beyond, he pulled his cap lower on the left side of his face, and turned the corner onto High. Crossing over, he started down the left side of the street toward the State House, closely hugging the stores at his left.

Fifteen minutes passed.

"Extra! Extra! Extra!"

The newsboys were appearing now like buzzards circling over a heap of carrion, their raucous yells ringing shrilly above the abating din of traffic.

"Extra! Extra! All 'bout the 'lec-trocution! Extra! Paper, mister?"

Foxy gave the boy his last nickel and turned back up High, reading as he hurried on toward deeper shadows:

Thomas Walters, twenty-year-old Cincinnati gunman, went to his death in the electric chair shortly before midnight last night. Convicted of the fatal shooting of a Cincinnati night watchman last February in an attempted hold-up, he was strapped in the chair at 11:42 and pronounced dead seven minutes later.

Foxy skimmed hastily over the details as he hurried along. Only one thing he was interested in. Ah!

Although Walters was known to have had an accomplice, due to the different caliber bullets in the watchman's body, he went calmly to his death with sealed lips regarding the identity of his companion.

Foxy caressed the newspaper and chuckled. Safe at last! Tommy had remained faithful to the end. He should have known that the kid was that kind. Yes, he'd have made a swell partner. Too bad!

He squared his shoulders and strode forward at a brisker gait. It was sweet to be alive and free. No more hiding! No more attic rooms! Back to Zanesville for him and that easy job! If only he had a smoke!

His gaze fell on a cigarette butt lying beside the curb. It was a long one—not over a third smoked. He bent over and picked it up. It was soaked. No matter; he'd dry it over the gas jet in his room. But he needed his gun. He must have money to redeem it. Maybe now on some dark street—

"Hey, there! Wait a minute!"

Foxy whirled quickly around and gaped.

"Lord!" he cried. "A copper!"

In the mad sprint that followed, the officer was no more than fifteen paces behind. Cursing viciously at this untimely encounter, Foxy sped onward, wildly, recklessly, aimlessly. A hys-

terical sob rose in his throat that was dry as parchment.

Tommy, the double crosser. He *had* told, after all. The dirty bulls had tricked him.

He knew without turning that his pursuer was gaining. If only he had his gun! Ignoring the thundering command to halt, he exerted his last ounce of strength in the desperate effort to escape. The newspaper went flying.

A dark alley suddenly confronted him, and he dived for the entrance. Behind him, as he dashed blindly through the inky passage, he heard the shrill blast of the policeman's whistle. Without pausing in flight, he turned and peered back. He groaned at his unarmed helplessness as his Nemesis came charging, a perfect target against the illuminated background of High Street.

And then another uniform appeared. A choking sob of despair escaped him. They were closing in! Although his strength was ebbing, he refused to admit defeat. Panic lent wings to his feet as he shot through the welcome darkness like a bullet. He swore aloud as he landed with both feet in a puddle and the water gushed through his soles and squashed between his toes.

He took a quick leap forward, tripped on something, and fell headlong. Reaching out, he groped blindly, frenziedly for a handhold. His hand came in contact with something and held.

The two officers flashed their lights on the prostrate form and turned it over.

"Electrocuted, by Heaven!"

"Guess you're right, sergeant. That water hole and fallen power line made a perfect contact, by the looks."

The sergeant knelt down and scrutinized the features more closely.

"Know who he is?"

"Never saw 'im before, sergeant. Didn't have anything on 'im, either; only he started to run for dear life

when I called to 'im. Thought then that he might be a yegg." He stooped and went through the pockets. "No weapons on 'im, though. Guess he was afraid of bein' run in on a vagrancy charge."

"How did you happen to call to him?"

"Well, sir, he stooped over to pick up a cigarette butt, and something fell from his pocket and rolled onto the

sidewalk. Guess he didn't see it, but I did." He reached into his pocket. "By the looks of his clothes, I figured the poor devil needed it, so I called to 'im. I was goin' to return it to 'im, but he started runnin' like the very devil was after 'im."

He held out his hand. In the palm lay a dull, obsolete quarter.

"Yeah," the sergeant growled, "he probably needed it."



SLAVE AND MASTER FIGHT

SOMETIMES a burglary job is a fifty-fifty proposition, and then again one of a pair is the boss. It was a case of a master and a rebellious slave that put the burglary job second in importance a short time ago. The affair took place in a New York apartment which the two men had entered for the purpose of robbing.

The occupant of the apartment was an elderly man living alone. The burglars had ransacked the place pretty thoroughly before he awoke from his slumbers, the hour being after two a. m. Up to that time, the loot only amounted to eight dollars and a few miscellaneous articles.

"Tie him up!" commanded the head burglar. His underling demurred. He discovered that the occupant of the apartment was old and had a withered arm. He was genuinely afraid of hurting him. He wanted to leave him alone and make a hurried exit. But his leader was not to be disobeyed. He felt he must have obedience at any cost. Accordingly, he picked up a bread knife and stabbed his partner in the side.

From that moment onward it became a rough-and-tumble fight, while the old man shouted: "Help! Murder! Police!" The entire street became alarmed. The burglars suddenly decided to unite on at least one idea, and that was to run. They dashed from the apartment which was on the first floor and disappeared around the corner. Here they ran into the arms of a patrolman who grabbed each by an arm and demanded to know why they were running.

"Can't you see?" asked the "master" burglar, thinking quickly. "We're training."

"What for?" asked the patrolman, unconvinced.

"Take a look at this bum," he answered, crooking his finger at his late antagonist. He's 'Big Jack.' from the Garden."

The policeman was still not convinced. He continued asking embarrassing questions, and his captives were squirming with real anxiety for they did not know at what moment the yelling street crowd would appear around the very corner they had come. Why were they running at three o'clock in the morning? Because the streets were clear and the air purer, was the burglar's answer, but still the officer tarried. Just then residents of the neighborhood they had so successfully eluded, came panting up and identified the men as the two burglars.

The prisoners were taken to the police station when it was discovered that one of them was wounded. He was hurried to a near-by hospital.

What Handwriting Reveals

Conducted

By

Shirley Spencer



If you are an employer and desire to place your employees in the positions in your office or factory for which they are best fitted; or if you are just about to step out into the world to earn your own living; or if crimes involving handwriting have been committed in your community; or if you want to know the characters of your friends as revealed in their chirography—send specimens of the handwriting of the persons concerned to Shirley Spencer, DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. Shirley Spencer will analyze the samples submitted to her and will give you her expert opinion of them, free of charge.

Also, coupon—at end of this department—must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read. If possible, write with black ink.

All communications will be held in strict confidence. When permission is granted, cases will be discussed in the department, with or without the illustrations. Of course, under no circumstances will the identity of the persons concerned be revealed.

Every care will be taken to return specimens of handwriting, but it is to be understood that Miss Spencer cannot be responsible for them.

P. K. M.: I wish that some of the stage-struck people could hear you say that, if you had your life to live over again, you wouldn't go in for acting. It is true that once you are in it, then the "bug has bitten you" permanently. It isn't a life of ease and glamour, is it? No, it has its drawbacks just like any other profession—and has more than many.

*fears. It's a great
at you know the
ying "I wouldn't
bit—but if I
chance all over
I wouldn't go into*

There are a good many flourishes in your writing and many "curlicues."

Love of pleasure is pretty strong. You are humorous and full of fun, so I imagine you have a good time whatever you do. Your writing runs downhill somewhat and, as I don't think you are naturally a pessimistic person, it must be that you are not up to the standard in health. Perhaps you were tired when you wrote the letter or have just used up your strength. Watch that, as you are not a strong person. Your "t" bars are not the firm, certain strokes of a person with driving power and force.

R. L. K., Illinois: Yes, accuracy and precision are certainly shown in your script. You didn't need to tell me that, though I am glad you did, as I like to have these proofs of the truth of graphology.

The even pressure, uniform letter

formations, spacing and margins, and the small writing all point to detail work and scientific mentality. You are well fitted for your work.

*accuracy and precision
adapt myself to quite
having been raised
penance, but I wish
to please tell me to
as in your opinion, you*

You have a kind nature and are affectionate but reserved. There is more power behind your will than is found with most men who devote their lives to sedentary work of a mental nature. I am sure that you could fill an executive position with success.

R. L., Pennsylvania: Well! well! well! I am rendered rather speechless before your script! It is taking me some time to get over the first impression and try to discover the *real you* down in under all that superficial artificiality.

First I must scold you about letting your ego just roam around that way. Do you mind if I am very frank with you? There is so much conceit expressed in your script that I just can't keep from mentioning it even though I know you will probably hate me for it. Just look at those inflated loops—all out of proportion—and making the impression of your personality and character pretty bad. You don't want to put your worst foot forward all the time, do you? If not, then I beg of you to become a humble, sincere, and honest person. Drop the artificial manners and the insincere pose. It does not become you at all.

A more impractical person I don't think I have ever seen, so naturally you

would detest business—and business would detest having you around, I'm sure. You are not in line for any real, constructive work, for you are not thinking constructively or trying to make the best of your mind. You are day-dreaming, imagining—oh, how your imagination does work!—but very little real, fundamental thinking or work do you do. The indolence indicated in your script is appalling!

*I feel that is a good
thing a girl can
throw up doubts
Please tell me*

I suggest that you study design. You are capable of original, creative work if you can change your character and habits.

Miss R. G., London, England: After the erratic script I just read, I find your writing like a calm after a storm. You are practical, proper, and sensible, and your emotions are disciplined and under excellent control. Not that you haven't something to you, for you have. You are one of those cool, collected persons who is efficient without being boring.

*extend your offer
a long distance reads
the coupon in the De
and being interested
venture to hope that*

The vertical writing, even pen pressure, large, rounded writing tell me that

you are good-natured, pleasant, and well balanced.

L. B., Pennsylvania: I am often asked if physical disturbances can be seen in the handwriting. The state of the nerves is reflected in one's script. If the physical disturbance has affected the nervous system, then the record is there in the script—not of what has caused it, however. Sometimes a few intoxicating drinks will so upset the nervous system that the evidence is quite visible in the script, and then again some people could dissipate and overindulge in stimulants and drugs to excess without showing any sign in their writing. It depends upon the constitution of the writer and the nature of the disease or mental disturbance and period of time involved how much the handwriting will give them away.

Dear Miss Spencer
I will not be
return this spe
handwriting but
for a letter from
at present I am

Your writing, young man, is not normal right now. I can't tell whether or not this is a temporary condition but you yourself will be able to judge that if you are aware of the condition and what is causing it. Whatever it is, your nervous system has been affected. Guard your health! The broken or fractured letters, the wavering lines, uneven pen pressure and jerky writing reveal a physical and mental disturbance.

V. S. O., North Dakota: Thank you for using the India ink. The blue ink does not reproduce well in the magazine.

I don't think that your dreams are "pipe dreams" at all. I think they sound very possible. You have practically finished your training and if you go to Chicago and get a job in the commercial art field, you will certainly be able to have your apartment and the arrangement you speak about. None of that is impossible, and I really think you should do it at once and not stay in a small place. I don't know about art conditions in Chicago, but I know there are many opportunities here in New York.

longer city, (Chic
and there get work
with extra time,
own work. I sh
flat, having two
with me during

Your writing does not show unusual skill or ability for art, but enough to warrant your going on with the work. Your years of teaching have made their mark on you so that you are more conventional and more steneotyped than the average artistic person. You can live that down, however! A little practical ability will never hurt an artist, I hope.

Remember the stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Handwriting Coupon

This coupon must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read.

Name

Address

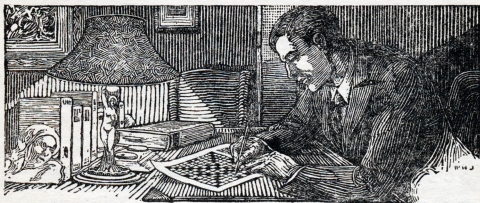
Under The Lamp

By Gerard Holmes

This department is conducted by Gerard Holmes for those of you who like puzzles. If there is any particular kind of puzzle that you prefer, please tell us and Gerard Holmes will do his best to give it to you. Also, won't you work on a puzzle of your own, send it in, and let the other readers wrestle with it?

Answers to this week's problems will be printed in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

All letters relative to this department should be addressed to Gerard Holmes, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.



EDD A. WILLIAMS, 195 "E" Street, San Bernardino, California, who submits this crypt, says its only claim to distinction is that it contains every letter in the alphabet.

1. SGR BURQFVYRC
GBAB JNF DHVP-
XKL PNHTGS IHE-
OVM T ZQBE SGR
ABW PNQ.

A code of twenty-five four-letter words may give the fans some entertainment, declares W. S. Muchler, 1205 Lingle Avenue, Flint, Michigan. Here goes!

2. PEAT CEIH XULA
WHEN ZUDA MONS
HUWA? NSAR PER'N
TLUR NSOT MODC
ZUWA. DILB FITN
WOJA TEFA TOWR
UMUC, FUBA SUHP
MEHB NIHR ORNE
ZDUC.

When you have solved this cryptogram, you will know what trade J. H. Newell, Tonkawa, Oklahoma, has

chosen for his life work. He knows whereof he speaks.

3. A B C D E F G H B A B C -
 D E Z B Y X W W X U B F W
 B T Z B S S A W F T C
 A B C D E A F S S B T C -
 R G F T E N R P O N C E X
 M X S F D B D N R L C R -
 P D E W X K P F W X M
 L R W C E F T A R W Y .

Forrest Black, 515 West Pawnee Street, Cleveland, Ohio, sends us one of his own. He admits it's foolish, so be prepared.

4. V J D V G U J D X O S S B -
 Q O S P F B A X B V K V -
 G X , V C Z F F J D X J I -
 X X Q D Z B F V T A Q
 F V U X J D V G X .

Fresh from the pen of D. C. Walker, Elkhorn, Montana, comes this message. He says, "it ought not to give any one much trouble."

5. X Y Z Y B W X M N Z X
 Z M D E X O Z W Z M O E X
 Q O X J Y N X Z F V Q W
 O W B Y V H W O V M

X J H B X J V Z Y R R O -
 X R V B X Y U H B D
 Y X J V M E V M U V Z X
 Z M O R V . X M D O X .

Answers to Last Week's Puzzles:

If you were persistent, you won out with the composition sent to us by Captain A. B. Jones, corps of engineers, U. S. army, of 3540 Hertford Place, Washington, District of Columbia.

1. "Handy Andy has gone to Andover to hand over the andirons."

Scanty use of "E" in this familiar phrase brings out unusual difficulties. Solvers accustomed to start work by application of the "etaoinshrdlu," or similar frequency tables, will find such process of no value.

From Bud Gruf, of Santa Monica, California.

2. Unrestricted sale of narcotics constitutes civilization's greatest menace.

Shall we say from our bachelor friend? J. B. Fuqua, 2910 Mercier Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

3. Matrimony is not a word. It is a disease like pneumonia or diphtheria, and it should be carefully guarded against.

Everett P. Petrie, Dominion C. B., Nova Scotia, Canada, composed this long-division puzzle.

4. JOCULARITY.

PUZZLE FANS' HONOR ROLL

Send in your answers to each week's puzzles, ye fans, and watch for your name on our monthly Honor Roll.

Notice

Every now and then, we plan to run puzzles from readers according to the State in which they live.

We know you are all proud of your native State, so say it with puzzles and let us judge which State has the most clever fans.

Headquarters Chat

CHANG, Chang, give us more Chang!

Apple, you've either got to write another story about your notorious character or tell us that he's dead. But, Apple, perish the thought that this last should be the sad, sad truth. We realize that there are some who'll think ill of us that we should harbor such a thought—that we should long to learn that Mr. Chang escaped, how he did so, and then what happened. Still, is it not wicked to wish any person dead? Then, too, that man, Chang, sure does keep moving about and never lets any one else stand still, either. And the reader, he or she, can't help hustling right along with Chang and the rest of them, whoever they happen to be; those, we mean, who have got themselves tangled up with him.

Come, Apple, is it crape, or the open road and adventure, for Chang?

Here is A. L. Carson, 482 Catherine Street, Columbus, Ohio; he's for Chang:

"DEAR EDITOR: After reading DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for six long years, I am becoming rather disappointed, more so at every issue.

"When Friday comes I dash madly to the nearest book store and buy an issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, open the cover to the contents page, and then—give you the very old dickens. Why? Because there is no story of Mr. Chang listed.

I am sure you want to give your readers what they want, so give us Chang lovers a break. Arrange to take a vote for and against this heathen and allow the votes to decide his fate. Fair, eh?

Then, in the meantime, allow us to light up the pipe, open our book to a Rafferty, or, once in a while, a Crimson Clown, story and I for one will gladly help pay to keep a certain editor on the job.

"Come on, Editor! Let's ask these folks who read Headquarters Chat how they want to vote! Make mine for Mr. Chang, Rafferty, and The Crimson Clown."

It was through your Chang, Apple, that W. Ray Burrows, 49 Troup Street, Rochester, New York, got started reading DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE. He says:

"DEAR EDITOR: I have just read Mr. Richards' letter in the April 12th Chat, and I heartily agree with his desire to see a return of Mr. Chang!

"The Chang stories of Mr. Apple are in a class with the 'Fu Manchu' novels of Sax Rohmer—fascinating, thrilling, and intensely interesting. I note that you say many readers took a violent dislike to them. All right. Do they need to be so selfish as to deprive thousands of readers who want them of the pleasure of reading exactly what they like?

"There are some stories that I like much better than others, but I figure that other people will, perhaps, like them better than I do, and read them, and pass on to others. So it seems to me you should request Apple to revive them. It was 'Mr. Chang of Scotland Yard' that first led me to buy your magazine! Furthermore, I know of many readers who feel just as I do. If there are some who threaten to quit if Mr. Chang returns, all right. I'll

wager that those who want him far outnumber those who don't.

"I am in favor of one serial, three or four novelettes, and two short stories in each issue. Eliminate short stories in favor of the longer novelettes. Also, I think you could enlarge the Headquarters Chat to four pages, publishing the letters—say about six to eight each week—in very small type, and making this department a more informal, get-together discussion of what we like."

Our new brain child pleases T. M. Morris, Apartment No. 3, 3640 Park Avenue, Montreal, Quebec, Canada:

"DEAR EDITOR: I received your letter, and I am glad that you are putting my Missing notice in print. You also sent a letter about your *Best Detective Magazine*. I have bought a copy, and it sure is fine. It has been quite a long time since I have read any Thubway Tham stories by Johnston McCulley. I can't help liking him; he is a cool customer. I certainly enjoy reading about him in *Best Detective Magazine*. I like every one of your authors. They are the pick of the best writers. Sax Rohmer's 'The Yellow Claw,' and 'The Butler's Ruby,' by Armstrong Livingston, were great. My chums are all going to read your *Best Detective Magazine*. It ought to go big. Yours for success."

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE is the best; her old favorite leads with Mrs. R. Novak, 334 East Eighty-third Street, New York, New York, who declares:

"DEAR EDITOR: I've never had any of my letters published, telling you how

I enjoyed your magazine for twelve years, but I feel you appreciated my writing anyway.

"This note is also to tell you how I enjoy the new publication, *Best Detective Magazine*. I read the very first one and liked the serials. If you hold the pace you've set in *Best Detective Magazine*, this big twenty-cent monthly will make a fine fill-in for those of us who so often have to wait for the weekly.

"I do like the illustrations in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE very much. The characters look as real as can be. I like that redhead, Spud McGee. Spud and his wife are good detectives. I never enjoy Rafferty—too much repetition—but the rest of the stories I do like. I read a lot, but I like my old favorite, DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, the best, and *Best Detective Magazine* next.

"Print a story from Doctor Poate soon. Is he still in North Carolina?"

"Cheerio!"

Yes, the good M. D., lawyer, and, last but not least, author, is still one of Southern Pines' leading and most beloved citizens.

Triem, pluck up your courage. You have an admirer in Clemens Windenfellen, Howarden, Iowa:

"DEAR EDITOR: I am just a beginner in reading DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, and I like it very much. The John Doe stories are especially interesting.

"I should like to suggest something, and hope you will not think it rude of me to do so. I think you ought to publish some stories which the reader would have to solve for himself."



MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, as that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help these whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," at which, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such letter or telegram is the person you are seeking.

Address all communications to Missing Department, DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

HOGAN, ALVA A.—Last known address was U. S. Veterans' Hospital, Fort Lyon, Colorado. Served on the U. S. S. "Arkansas" in 1926 and 1927. Information appreciated by Henry M. Casey, 13 May Street, North Andover, Massachusetts.

GUILD, ELMER E., DONALD M., and JOSIE BINGHAM.—My father, brother, and mother. Last heard from in 1923, when my brother and I, Mabel E. Guild, were taken from mother at Vancouver, Washington. We were placed in an orphanage. Information appreciated by Mrs. Ernest M. Vance, care of H. H. Carolus, Hartline, Washington.

BINGHAM, LLOYD L., and VICTOR P. KING.—A private and a nurse at the Vancouver Barracks, in 1923. Information appreciated by Mrs. Ernest M. Vance, care of H. H. Carolus, Hartline, Washington.

SOLLAND, GEORGE.—Served in the U. S. marines at Santiago and Puerta Plata, Dominican Republic, from 1920 to 1922. Please write to Jesse Krohn, 129 West Second Street, Watsonville, California.

BRADY, ROBERT J.—Last heard from in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Please write to May Gallagher, care of this magazine.

BROWN, ELIZA MAY, nee GARLAND.—Worked in Wyman's Restaurant in Lynn, Massachusetts, about thirty-four years ago. Information appreciated by a relative, C. E. B., care of this magazine.

WALTMAN, HOWARD.—Last heard from in Clarkston, Oklahoma. Please write to an old friend, care of this magazine.

BYRNE.—Would like to hear from any one having that name in Brooklyn, New York, or Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Please write to Owen and Margaret Byrne, care of this magazine.

RIESS, W. A. or HARRY.—Twenty-four years old. Formerly of Alabama. When last heard from was working in Chester, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by Edith and Billy, Jr., care of this magazine.

McKINLEY, JAMES.—About seventy-five years old. Brother of Mrs. Margaret O'Brien, of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Last heard from in San Francisco, California. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. J. Mahoney, Admiral, Sackettstown, Canada.

ROWE, MRS.—About thirty-eight years old. Has two sons, one fourteen and the other twelve years old. Last heard from in Clarkburg, West Virginia, two years ago. Information appreciated by P. Doyel, North Hills Golf Club, Douglaston, Long Island, New York.

RASMUSSEN, CARL.—Last heard from in Texas. Please write to A. Hartgrison, 1296½ West Houston Street, San Antonio, Texas.

RICE, T. A.—Please come home or write to your wife, Clara Rice, Capital Hill Laundry, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

VERA.—Glad to receive your letter. Helen is with us. Please write to Mother B., care of this magazine.

REEF, OSCAR J.—Why don't you come home? Please write to your youngest sister, Margaret, care of this magazine.

PULGISE, ADAM.—Information appreciated by F. B. Paris, 1809 West Street, Oakland, California.

SULLIVAN, EDNA.—Formerly of Omaha, Nebraska. Last heard from in Butte, Montana. Please write to J. J. Bruce C., care of this magazine.

SCALES, RALPH EDWARD.—Fourteen years old. Five feet six inches tall, weighs about one hundred and fifteen pounds. Has brown hair and eyes. Last heard from November 16, 1929, while he left the home of his aunt, Mrs. Helen Davis, in Anna, Illinois. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. W. A. Scales, R. R. 1, Bicknell, Indiana.

PARIS, GEORGE P.—Believed to be in San Antonio, Texas. Information appreciated by his son, F. B. Paris, 1809 West Street, Oakland, California.

AGARD, HARRY.—Last heard from in April, 1920. He was then stationed at Camp Travis, Texas. Information appreciated by Gertrude Askew, 414 East Sixth Street, Flint, Michigan.

IGO or IGO.—John Igo married Della Lennhan, in Kingston, New York. They had three children—James, Katie, and Della. John's wife had two brothers—Dennis and Joseph—and one sister, Mary. They all left New York State, several years ago, for Newark, Ohio. Information concerning them or their descendants appreciated by Michael Igo, 160 Bleeker Street, New York City.

CADWELL, LOUISE.—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, in 1926. May be in Chicago, Illinois, or in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by Mrs. Ruby Angio Womack, 419 Franklin Street, Tupelo, Mississippi.

WOODS, GRESHAM.—Lived near Royston, Texas. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. L. A. Jones, Hermleigh, Texas.

COOK, MRS. ROBERT, nee MARY WALLACE.—About fifty years old. Had a son, George, and daughter, Esther. Last heard from in Newburg, Indiana, about twelve years ago. Information appreciated by her niece, Mrs. Byers, 114 South Wall Street, Sioux City, Iowa.

SPENCER, or LINDSTRUM, HELEN or ETHEL.—Of Oklahoma. Please write to Lee, care of this magazine.

BORDGES, MELLIE.—Was in Santa Monica, California, in July, 1929. Please write to Lee, care of this magazine.

KULAH, ANNIE.—Lived in Worcester, Massachusetts, from 1900 to 1910. Moved to Spencer, Massachusetts, in 1910, and then back to Worcester. Information appreciated by G. K., care of this magazine.

MEDEKE, MRS. ANNA.—Her husband was janitor of St. Peter's Church, on East Thirty-fourth Street, New York City, for several years. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Margaret Conrad, 508 Oak Street, Porterville, California.

BAYLES, HOWARD.—Thirty-one years old. When last heard from, fourteen years ago, was in the 11th Artillery, stationed at Alexandria, Louisiana. His mother died in November, 1929. Information appreciated by his sister, Olive, care of this magazine.

SPRACKLAND, BILL.—Mother died four years ago. Got in touch with me immediately. All well in Albany. Please write to your son, Wilcox Sprackland, 3415 Fifty-eighth Street, Westside, Long Island, New York.

POTTS, JOSEPH WILLARD.—Forty-five years old. Six feet tall. Left England in March, 1914. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Florence Pusey, 5 Seagrave Road, London, S. W. 6, England.

HEYART, JOHN WILLIAM.—Was on the U. S. S. "Tennessee." Information appreciated by George Thompson, 141 Jones Street, Uthmo, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

HARRIS, OSCAR or GEORGE.—Was at Fort Morgan, Colorado, in 1914. Information appreciated by E. D., care of this magazine.

BARTON, OSCAR G.—Fifty-eight years old. Last heard from in Terryville, Texas, in 1927. Information appreciated by his sister, Margaret, care of this magazine.

KELLER, MISS TED M.—Was in Seattle, Washington, in 1921 or 1922. Information appreciated by George H. McKean, Box 801, Santa Ana, California.

GLOVER, OSCAR, or BEN PROFFITT.—Was in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1918. Remember the fall of 1910 and Wagoner, Oklahoma? Please write to Wilburn Younger, 803 West Denver Street, Muskogee, Oklahoma.

BRAWLEY, BILL.—Of Texas. Worked at Maud, Oklahoma, in the summer of 1927. Please write to Wilburn Younger, 803 West Denver Street, Muskogee, Oklahoma.

MYERS, ACE; LOVE, JESSE, and WALTON, TOMMY.—Please write to Hustler, care of this magazine.

SWANN, ROBERT.—Worked as bell boy in hotel at Sweetwater, Texas. Left there in December, 1922. Wife's name is Dorothy. Information appreciated by Husler, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Some time in January, 1888, a baby girl was abandoned in Indianapolis, Indiana. She was placed in the Indianapolis Orphan Asylum, and later adopted from there. Information concerning her people appreciated by Mrs. Hazel Stenall, 3822 West Seventh Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

ROGERS, WAIMON.—Please write to B. K., 1405 South Grand Avenue, James Court, San Pedro, California.

NOTICE.—Would like to get in touch with Mary Milvonia and her mother, Mrs. Margie Butler. The daughter is eleven years old. Has sandy hair, blue eyes, and a scar on her right arm. The mother is about five feet six inches tall, weighs one hundred, and is forty years old. Last heard from in Waldo, Florida. Information appreciated by J. F. Butler, Santa Fe, Florida.

LOUIS.—Please write to Mac, Box 33, Clatskanie, Oregon.

NOTICE.—Lydia Gubrie married Henry Tripp, in 1825. Believed to have relatives in Lockport, New York. Would like to hear from any of her people. Address Mrs. L. A. Fredenburg, 273 Hunter Street, Battle Creek, Michigan.

WILSON, JEAN C.—Small, dark complexion, hair, and eyes. Information appreciated by his sister, Dorothy, care of this magazine.

DEWHITT.—Would like to hear from any one of that name. Address Mrs. Mary Potet, 601 Austin Street, Wichita Falls, Texas.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from Joe Brown, Bill AM, Kinky Collins, or any one who was in the Sixteenth Field Artillery from 1902 to 1907. Address W. R. Burnett, 25 Opera Place, Cincinnati, Ohio.

ADAMS, JAMES.—Seventy-four years old. Has a brother, Robert, and a sister, Lizzie, who is believed to be with him. Their father was a blacksmith. Last heard from in January, 1878. May be in North or South Dakota or Minnesota. Information appreciated by Daughter, care of this magazine.

BUDDY.—It will be all right if Myrtle is not with you. Please write at once to Pal, care of this magazine.

TROUTT, MRS. JIMMIE.—Last heard from in Marble City, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by Friend, care of this magazine.

POKUS, FAY.—Lived on Waco Avenue, in Wichita, Kansas. Believed to be somewhere in Texas. Urgent. Please write to Robert Brady, 1013 Cass Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

LEE, MONROE R.—Mamma, Mildred, Lawrence, and Henry Wesley want you. The children are in the orphanage at Tucson, Arizona. Please come back or write to Leona, care of Mac, Box 4, Bisbee, Arizona.

SULLIVAN, JOSEPH.—Forty-two years old. Last seen in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Thanksgiving Day, twenty-one years ago. Last heard from in Indianapolis, Indiana. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Catherine Shannon, 2122 Herrick Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio.

SAVOY, DANIEL.—David and George are dead. Please write to your nephew, Edward B. Savoy, care of this magazine.

GLADYS.—Please come home or write to Frank Snyder, 697 South King Street, Robinson, Illinois.

CARLSON, or SOMBERG, CHARLES.—Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Albertine Medean, Route 1, Box 230, Manhattan Beach, California.

WATTS, JAMES.—Received your letter from New Gulf, Texas. My answer to it was returned. Please write to Mrs. Maude McNutt, Route 2, Box 235, Tulare, California.

HOAK, BEN.—Please write to Mrs. M. E. Schanz, 7635 Sixty-ninth Street, Portland, Oregon.

G. C. H..—Of Oklahoma. Spent the summer of 1927 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. I can't forget. Please write to Indian Runner, care of this magazine.

STEPHENSON, PAT J..—Last heard from when he was in the Field Artillery, stationed at Camp Lewis, Washington. Have valuable information for him. Information appreciated by Buddy, care of this magazine.

McKINNEY, CLYDE R..—Last heard from in Canada. Please write to your father, William T. McKinney, Box 32, Huntsville, Texas.

GERTRUDE R. or W..—Formerly of Indiana. Nineteen years old. Blonde. Weights about one hundred and twenty-five pounds. Please write to M. E. P., care of this magazine.

SMITH, CHARLES J., and children, **EDDIE, TED, KENNETH, MARQUETTE**, and **EMERY**.—Last heard from in Butte, Montana, in 1921. Information appreciated by Mrs. Mary Lacher, Burke, Idaho.

MacLACHLAN, or MacLAUGHLIN, HARRY.—Brown hair, gray eyes, five feet eight inches tall. Last heard from in Stockton, California, in 1918. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. C. J. K., care of this magazine.

JAMIESON, MARIE.—Lived on St. Patrick Street, in Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada, in 1927. Please write to Frank E., care of this magazine.

TELTZ, EDWARD.—Twenty-five years old. Spanish descent. Five feet seven inches tall, black hair. Left Los Angeles, California, in October, 1925. Believed to have gone to Texas. Information appreciated by Mrs. Rose H., care of this magazine.

WELSH, JIMMIE or NEWT.—We are leaving here soon. Have news. Please write to Dad, care of this magazine.

SULLIVAN, MICHAEL.—Lived for several years at 505 Broadway, Fargo, North Dakota. In May, 1888, went to Ireland to bring his family to America. Because of trouble between his wife and himself, left Ireland alone. Information appreciated by his daughter, Ellen, care of this magazine.

KIERMAN, HUGH FABIAN.—We will help if you need help. Please write to Moms, care of this magazine.

BRIN, EMILE.—I know all and forgive you. Harry needs you. Please write to your wife, H. B., care of this magazine.

TOTH, PAUL, and son, PAUL.—My grandfather and uncle. Left Prairie City, Oregon, twenty years ago. Last heard from in Oakland, California. Information appreciated by Mrs. Gisella Lancaster, 2627 John Street, Detroit, Michigan.

MORRIS, ROBERT.—Last seen in St. Louis, Missouri, in September, 1904. Information appreciated by his sister, Eva, care of this magazine.

HOPKINS, JOHN NEWTON.—Last heard from in California. Information appreciated by his sister, Mabel Hopkins, care of Mrs. Buckmaster, Sasakwa, Oklahoma.

CARR, LEE.—Last seen in Moro, Arkansas, in 1916. Please write to your son, Cornelius Carr, Box 32, Bragg City, Missouri.

CARPENTER, EARL.—Twenty-six years old. Six feet tall, blue-gray eyes, dark-brown hair, and weighs about one hundred and ninety-five pounds. Last seen in Missouri, Montana, in September, 1923. Was on his way to Kallispel, Montana. Formerly of Cleveland, Ohio. Information appreciated by Mary Gross, 2111 Hook Avenue, Parsons, Kansas.

FRENZ, MRS. CHARLES, nee **O'SHEA**.—Formerly of Bodai, Gowran, County Kilkenny, Ireland. When last heard from, four years ago, was living at 35 Elwood Street, New York City. Information appreciated by her nephew, Patrick Brennan, 39 Ann Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

AUSTIN, RICHIE LEE.—Last heard from in Dallas, Texas. Believed to have gone to California. Information appreciated by Miss Bert Johnson, 1314 Sycamore Street, Commerce, Texas.

WEATHERSBY, MR. and MRS. DON L..—Don's home was in Marshall, Texas. He worked as a machinist in the T. & P. Railroad shops during 1903 and 1904. In June, 1904, he married Ruth Oment, of 110 North Ringo Street, Little Rock, Arkansas. They moved to Denison, Texas, in February, 1905. Last heard from in July, 1906, when he was again working in the railroad shops, at Denison, Texas. Information appreciated by an old friend, care of this magazine.

SMITH, G. F..—Forty-six years old. Five feet eight inches tall, dark hair, blue eyes, and weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. Lived in Fairbury, Nebraska, for twenty-two years. Was in Kallispel, Montana, in the summer of 1909. Last heard from in Jennings, Kansas, in 1912. Information appreciated by B. B. Smith, care of this magazine.

FINER, EDDIE.—Believed to be in New York City. It has been thirty years since I saw you. Please write to M. D. Morris, care of Charles Rader, Baldwin, Louisiana.

DeLACK, FRED.—Please write to M. D. Morris, care of Charles Rader, Baldwin, Louisiana.

KEITH, G. C..—Thirty-nine years old. Last heard from in Rock Island, Illinois, in 1923. Father is dead and brother, L. G., is seriously ill. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Winnie Robertson, Route 1, Box 908, Fort Arthur, Texas.

PARRISH, CATHERINE.—Twenty-one years old. Five feet two inches tall, black hair, olive complexion, and weighs about one hundred pounds. Information appreciated by Mutt, care of this magazine.

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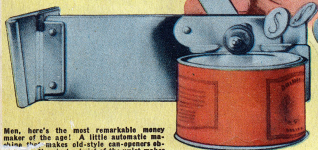
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