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by Anthony Wynne

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Flynn's Weekly Detective Fiction

WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR

Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

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Flynn's Weekly Detective Fiction

VOLUME XXVII SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1927 NUMBER 1

The Italian woman struggled to free her arms

THE HORSEMAN OF DEATH

By Anthony Wynne

FROM WHENCE SPRUNG THAT SINISTER AFFINITY BETWEEN THE MASTER AND THE BEATING HOOVES OF AN UNSEEN HORSEMAN RIDING TO THE TOWER?

CHAPTER I

DOOM—OR THE MAN

"MURDER is a word with an ugly sound."

Barrington Bryan's dark face wore a faint suggestion of a sneer as he spoke. He lay back in the armchair in which he was seated, and watched Sacha narrowly. He saw the last traces of blood ebb from her cheeks.

"*It is not true.*"

Her whispered words sounded loud in the intense silence. Far away, in Park Lane perhaps, they heard the rumble of an omnibus. Barrington raised his shoulders in a slight shrug.

"God knows," he said, "you had excuse enough. Orme might have driven any woman to murder. He must so have driven any man as hopelessly in love with you, his wife, as Dick Lovelace."

The words fell with calculated deliberation, like blows. Sacha sprang to her feet and stood facing her tormentor. Her eyes, suddenly, were filled with wild fear.

"Dick had nothing to do with it. I swear that Dick had nothing to do with it. Oh, God!"

Barrington leaned forward. His dark eyes glowed now, and the cruel expression on his face was intensified.

"It doesn't matter in the least what you swear," he declared coldly. "Facts are facts."

Sacha tottered and grasped the back of a chair to support herself. In an instant he had come to her side.

"It is in your power to save him," he exclaimed in low tones. "If you marry me, nobody will ever know—anything."

She did not reply. She stood with her eyes half closed, like a tall lily which the winds have bruised. He glanced admiringly at the frock she wore, a calyx of tissue of gold about the white petals of her shoulders.

"Well?"

"I—I can't marry you."

"You mean that you have promised to marry Dick Lovelace?"

His tones thrilled with passion. His rather cold face had assumed a brutal expression. She did not speak.

"You shall never marry him! My God, Sacha, I will have no mercy if you refuse me. No mercy—no pity. Within a single week the death of your husband will be the talk of the whole world—"

He stopped suddenly. The girl had sunk down on her knees on the floor. The light from the electric lamps kindled the living gold of her hair, so that he gasped at the sight of it. He bent over her and whispered in her ear:

"I love you, Sacha, as I have never loved any woman in my life."

Again she remained unresponsive. He reached out and took her hand. He repeated:

"It is in your power to save him."

Suddenly she stood up. She faced him again, and he saw her lips were bloodless.

"Why should you wish to break my heart?" she asked simply. "To kill me?"

"My dear Sacha, it is my heart against yours."

He laughed as he spoke, adding, "Hearts are not so easily broken as you think."

They heard the sound of a car approaching along Green Street. The car came to the door.

A moment later the buzz of the bell announced a visitor. Barrington started.

"Who can that be?"

He strode to the window and raised a corner of the blind. Then he turned back to Sacha.

"Well," he demanded, "which is it to be— Yes or No?"

He drew close to her. She raised her eyes to his eyes, and saw, written therein, the doom of the man she loved.

She bowed her head so that he might not read in her face the desperate resolution to which she had come.

"I will marry you," she whispered.

They heard steps ascending the stairs. The door of the little drawing-room was opened. A maid announced:

"Mr. Dick Lovelace."

CHAPTER II

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR

DICK LOVELACE entered the room quickly. He saw Barrington Bryan, and immediately stiffened as a man stiffens at the sight of a snake. He came to Sacha and took the hand she extended to him.

"Forgive me," he apologized, "for this intrusion, but Lord Templewood is seriously ill. May I see you a moment in private?"

His voice had a hard, strained ring, as though, already, the presence of Barrington had poisoned all the anticipated happiness of his visit. His cheeks, Sacha noticed, were paler than usual.

"Of course, we can go to the dining room—"

The girl's voice faltered in spite of herself. She glanced at Barrington, whose expression had become bitterly hostile as she spoke.

"You will excuse me?" she asked.

He bowed, and turned away, so that

Dick might not have the chance further to ignore his presence. They left him with the blind in his hand, looking out into the wet street. Dick closed the dining room door behind him in a manner which proclaimed eloquently his desire that it should remain closed for ever against the man upstairs.

"Your uncle's mind," he announced abruptly, "is giving way."

He was standing in the middle of the floor with his slouch hat crushed in his hand. The hard light was still in his eyes. Sacha came to the mantelpiece and rested a bare arm on it. She did not speak.

"Dr. Andrews of Redden says that a specialist must be called in at once—to-night. He thinks that Lord Templewood may have to be certified as insane. As Lord Templewood's agent, it was my duty to come to you."

Dick's tones had become sterner as he proceeded, perhaps because he recalled the fact that, though he had written to Sacha already about her uncle's mental condition, she had not answered his letter. His voice held an accusing note as he added:

"You are what lawyers call his 'next of kin.' Your consent to the certification may be necessary. I think you must accompany me back to *The Black Tower* to-night, after we have seen the specialist, Dr. Hailey of Harley Street, and asked him to come down to Leicestershire at once."

He paused. She realized vaguely that he was challenging her. She dared not meet his eyes. A sense of weakness, profound and overwhelming, caused her to turn away from him and set her elbows on the mantelpiece to keep herself from falling. He mistook that movement, perhaps, for emotion caused by his bad news.

"Ninon Darelli, the medium, is with Lord Templewood," he stated. "She has not left him for three days now. He will scarcely permit her out of his sight though, I think, to do her justice, that she wants to get back to London to her clairvoyant business. He says that her presence alone saves him from the horseman whom he hears every night galloping up to the door of the old house."

Sacha started. Then she turned and contracted her brows as if to recall thoughts already gone straying. She murmured:

"The Horseman of Death?"

"I believe that is what he calls it, yes."

She nodded. A strange excitement glowed in her eyes.

"He comes when somebody, some member of the family, is going to die," she declared, as though she were stating a fact which might not be doubted.

Suddenly she came to Dick and laid her hand on his arm.

"Oh, please go yourself and get the doctor," she whispered, "oh please, please—"

Her voice broke on the last words. He looked down into her upturned face and caught his breath in a gasp of amazement and horror.

"Sacha, what is wrong? Oh, for God's sake, tell me what is wrong!"

"Nothing is wrong. Only—only I am a little tired—"

She moved away from him again. She tried to master herself and smile, but the result of that effort was so piteous that she abandoned it. He stood a moment, watching her with eyes which were full of sorrow and bewilderment and pain.

"Sacha, dear," he said gently, "will you tell me why Barrington Bryan is here to-night?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"He called to see me. After all, he is our nearest neighbor at Redden."

The pain in Dick's eyes deepened. He caught his breath in sharp repudiation.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "you know enough about him—about his character—to realize that—"

He stopped suddenly.

There was a sharp knocking at the door of the room.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUR WAS AT HAND

SACHA ran to open the door. She seemed to have become endowed, suddenly, with a new strength. Barrington Bryan was standing behind it. He was wearing his overcoat, and held his hat in his hand.

"Forgive me," he said crisply, "but I have an appointment which I must keep."

He was frowning, and he glanced angrily in the direction of Dick Lovelace. It was obvious that his appointment interested him much less than the fact of Sacha's presence in this room with her lover.

"Dr. Andrews of Redden," the girl exclaimed, in breathless tones, "has sent for me to go to *The Black Tower* to-night! My uncle's reason has given way."

There was a note of pleading in her voice, which caused Dick to set his teeth. Barrington's frown grew more pronounced. He advanced a little way into the room.

"What good can your going do?" he demanded.

"Dick says that my consent may be necessary if—if he is certified."

Sacha's voice shook. In her eyes, which were turned to Dick, there was a desperate appeal that he would maintain his self-restraint.

"Oh, very well." Barrington appeared to hesitate a moment. Then he turned toward Dick with a new recklessness gleaming in his dark eyes.

"Mrs. Malone has just consented to marry me," he announced. "In the circumstances, I am naturally reluctant that she should go away—"

He got no farther than that. Dick's face had become so ghastly in its sudden pallor that, instinctively, he shrank back toward the door. Sacha came quickly between the two men. She laid her hand on Barrington's arm.

"I will let you know what happens."

He did not seem to hear her. He turned on his heel and strode out of the room. They heard him open the front door and descend the steps. The little gate clanged.

"Is it true, Sacha—what he said?"

"Yes, Dick."

She faced him with a new, strange wildness in her eyes. He saw that she was trembling, but he saw also that the color had flowed back, in full tide, to her cheeks. He misread that sign, taking it for relief that her secret had been told. She caught her breath in a gasp.

"I'll go and get ready," she declared.

Upstairs, in her drawing-room, she wrote a letter. She put it in an envelope and sealed it. She addressed it to "The Coroner, Redden, Leicestershire." She put it in her desk.

Ten minutes later, she and Dick reached Harley Street. The servant who opened the door of No. 22 announced that Dr. Hailey was at home.

Her first sight of the doctor caused Sacha a sense of wonder. He looked so big and so kind, like one of the good giants of her fairy books. His expression, she thought, was as gentle as a woman's, and as full of understanding. Dick handed him the letter he had brought from Dr. Andrews, and they stood in silence—a silence which had not been broken since they left Green Street—while he read it.

When he had finished reading the letter, Dr. Hailey raised his eyeglass to his eye.

"I think," he said, "that, in the circumstances, I had better go down to Leicestershire at once. I suppose you are returning to Redden to-night?"

Dick assented. "I am taking Mrs. Malone down with me now. I ought to explain, perhaps, that I am Lord Templewood's agent."

"And Mrs. Malone is his niece?"

"Yes." A look of bewilderment came into the young man's eyes. "You know Lord Templewood then?"

A faint smile appeared on Dr. Hailey's large and genial face.

"Oh, no; but it is obvious, is it not? Lord Templewood, Dr. Andrews says, is a bachelor. On such occasions one summons only very near relations." He added: "I shall follow you as soon as my car is ready."

Sacha scarcely spoke a word during the long drive in the rain, and Dick did not try to make her speak. His misery and his indignation against her were too deep to be spent in the small change of talk.

A flickering lamp in the village street of Redden gave her a momentary sight of his face, and she saw that it was hard and stern as it had been in the dining room in Green Street. She caught her breath in a gasp of pain. It was terrible to do what she must do, alone, under the lash of his scorn.

Next moment, the car came to the lodge gates of *The Black Tower.* They were shut. Dick blew his horn, and after a short interval a figure appeared from the cottage.

"It's all right, Robson. Mr. Lovelace—"

The big iron gates, which looked as though they had been designed for a prison, fell slowly back. The coupé moved forward. When it came abreast of the lodge-keeper, Dick announced that a second car might be expected any moment.

"Shall I need to shut the gates, sir, in the meantime?"

"Yes. That is his lordship's special order, you know."

The coupé drove on into the mysterious darkness of the long avenue.

Sacha told herself that her hour was at hand.

CHAPTER IV

THE HORSEMAN OF DEATH

DR. ANDREWS of Redden met Dr. Hailey at *The Black Tower,* and then left to attend to an urgent case. Sacha accompanied Dr. Hailey to her uncle's room to which Dick had already ascended. She started at the sight of the wan face which confronted her. Lord Templewood, who lay fully dressed on a couch, looked like a man who has only just succeeded in escaping from a critical illness.

And yet his voice, when he greeted the doctor, was strong and clear. The brain-storm from which he had suffered earlier in the day had by no means exhausted him. She saw that his gaze was as resolute as ever.

She stood near the window of the room while the doctor spoke to his patient. She could hear what was being said, but her mind wandered incessantly, as it had been wandering all these last hours, and she scarcely comprehended the drift of the conversation.

If only she could tell Dick the truth! If only his safety, his very life did not depend on her silence! She raised her eyes to his face in a swift, furtive glance, and saw the deep sorrow and disillusionment which were imprinted on it. That expression stabbed her with new pain.

Then her gaze traveled to the face of the Italian woman, Ninon Darelli, the "medium," who was her uncle's companion. Those strange, inscrutable features expressed no human emotion. If she but held the secret of that indifference!

The room was very warm, and yet there seemed to be a chill in its stuffy atmosphere. She wondered if that were due to the gas fire or merely to her own overstrained nerves. It was strangely silent, too, in spite of the voices of the doctor and his patient. What were they talking about? She listened and heard the drip of water in the moat below the window. What a terrible night!

"I assure you, doctor, that spiritualism saved my reason."

She sighed. Her uncle was recounting that old story, which she had heard so many times, about how his dead *fiancée* had been restored to him in innumerable *séances.* Her name was Beatrice. "My angel Beatrice." She had been killed in a hunting accident at nineteen.

How terrible to be dead so young, Sacha thought, suddenly. Poor Beatrice, with her love all young and wonderful round about her! Her grave was in the churchyard at Redden. It had a white marble cross at the head of it. There was an inscription, too, telling how she had died. The thought came, swift and unbidden, that perhaps her uncle if he recovered from this illness, would erect a cross on her grave also.

But no; that would scarcely be possible in her case. Sacha shuddered. People who took their own lives, she knew, were not buried within the churchyard walls. There had been the sad case of the gamekeeper at Redden Hall, Barrington's keeper, whose death was really due to a broken heart because one of the village girls jilted him. If only men and women could escape from their feelings!

Lord Templewood began to speak again. Sacha broke off her own thoughts and listened, because his voice sounded gentler than usual. He was talking about Beatrice still! Oh, dear, could he not leave her to be dead in peace!

"She was everything to me—everything—everything. Her death—for so I called it in those darkest days—left me utterly desolate. Believe me, doctor, I had serious thoughts of taking my own life."

His voice faded away. Sacha moved a few steps nearer to the couch. All her faculties, suddenly, were strained to breathless attention.

"As I know now," Lord Templewood continued, "I should have defeated my own purpose if I had yielded to that impulse. It is a law of the spirit world that each of us must abide the will of Our Father. There was revealed to me a better way—"

He began to cough. Sacha came to him and rearranged the pillows. She glanced at his pale, wearied face, as she did so. She remained standing very close to the couch on which he lay, when she had completed her task, so that she might not miss a word.

"You mean your study of spiritualism?" Dr. Hailey asked.

"Yes." Lord Templewood raised his thin hand in a gesture almost of benediction. "Ninon has given me back all, and more than all, that I have lost. Not one of the other mediums possesses a tithe of her divine gift. I know, for I have been seeking my angel Beatrice for more than twenty years. Only in this last year have I come as near to her as we were near to each other in our earthly relationship."

Again his voice weakened to silence. Sacha glanced at Ninon and saw that her expression of inscrutability had not changed. Nor had Dick's expression changed. She thought that he had been looking at her, because his eyes fell when she raised her head.

Could it be true what her uncle had said about the law of the spirit world against taking your own life? But her uncle's case was different from her case. No one had forced him to be separated from the woman he adored here in this present life. Dr. Hailey's voice came to her.

"You have been very happy, then, during the last year?"

He spoke quietly, but he appeared to watch closely the effect of his words. The effect was startling. Lord Templewood sat up and the last traces of color ebbed from his parchmentlike cheeks. He glared wildly about the room.

"I would have been happy, had it not been that powers and principalities of evil are massed against me!" he cried in hoarse tones, "as, from the beginning, they have always been massed against—"

The words died in his throat. His body grew rigid, as if suddenly grasped in mighty, invisible hands. His eyes stared with new horror.

"The Horseman!"

Sacha held her breath. From far-away, as it seemed, and faintly, there came the sound of galloping hooves.

The sound grew louder. Lord Templewood sprang to his feet and struck at the empty air with his hands. The pallor of his cheeks was replaced by a dusky hue, as though he struggled desperately to free himself from his unseen antagonist. His labored breathing mingles its harsh rhythm with the rhythm of the hooves.

They watched the dreadful encounter spellbound, while the galloping drew ever nearer, till it seemed to have come to the very edge of the moat.

Dick sprang to the window, and threw it open. He turned back suddenly to the room with a look of utter bewilderment on his face.

The galloping had ceased.

Lord Templewood sank down, limp and trembling. He began to moan, softly and pitifully, like a child in pain.

Sacha came to him.

At the same instant a cry pierced the heavy silence. She turned and saw the Italian woman struggling to free her arms from the grasp in which Dr. Hailey had secured them.

CHAPTER V

INTO THE NIGHT

"THE woman, my dear Mrs. Malone, is an impostor. That trick of the galloping horseman is as old as spiritualism itself. It is childishly easy when you know how to perform it."

Dr. Hailey adjusted his eyeglass, and contemplated Sacha's beautiful, distressed face with kindly concern. He added:

"I did not fully expose her in your uncle's presence, because the poor man has built his life on his faith in her powers. His mind could scarcely endure the shock of learning that she has been deceiving him."

They were seated in the great hall of the castle. Sacha drew her breath sharply and clasped her hands together in a gesture of deep uneasiness.

"But I don't understand," she cried. "What reason can she have for torturing my uncle in this dreadful fashion?"

"I don't know. I should like to know."

Dr. Hailey extracted a silver box from his pocket and took a pinch of snuff with great deliberation.

"With your consent," he said, "I shall stay here for a day or two, until Lord Templewood is better. I have already suggested to Mlle. Ninon that her affairs in London demand her attention urgently."

Sacha rose to go to bed. She turned to the staircase and went a few steps toward it. Then she came back to him again. She asked:

"It is not true, then, that my uncle has been able to communicate with his dead *fiancée?*"

Dr. Hailey's large face became vacant suddenly. He contracted his brows.

"On the face of it, no," he declared. "Ninon Darelli is a fraud. And yet it is not quite safe, I think, to conclude that, because she is evidently capable of deception, all her actions are necessarily of that character.

"It may well be that she really does possess in a high degree what is called 'psychic power,' though I am not going to say that I put any reliance on such a gift. The story of spiritualism, as perhaps you know, is the most amazing mixture of palpable fraud and passionate sincerity."

She left him and climbed the stairs to the room which she always occupied on her visits to *The Black Tower*. She lit the gas fire and sat down before it. She was shivering with cold, and her head throbbed dreadfully, so that the thoughts which she meant to summon to her help were hopelessly scattered. If only she were not so great a coward!

She tried to think of death as she had been taught to think of it when she was a child, as a gentle falling on sleep, a mere passing from earth to heaven. But that beautiful vision wore no longer its first allurement. Her mind pictured, instead, the darkness and coldness of the Redden churchyard, where she had seen them bury her young husband beside the grave of the poor Beatrice.

She recalled that scene now with amazing clearness. Everybody had been so full of sympathy for her, and she had not desired or required any sympathy. Did not life, with his young glory, wait, impatient at her side? All that she was burying was her grief and her disillusionment—her bitter shame and degradation. And yet Orme had sometimes been kind to her, when he was not drinking. And he had been so full of the zest of his fierce living!

Well, now, at any rate, he had his revenge of her.

She bent forward, gazing vacantly at the blue flames. They would not be able to bury her beside Orme, because his grave was in consecrated ground! She would be buried in that patch beyond the churchyard wall, where they had laid the poor gamekeeper who died of a broken heart.

She remembered how Barrington had laughed at her when she told him that he was breaking her heart. To-morrow he would know that she had not spoken lightly—that, for the sake of her lover, a woman will gladly give up her own life.

What if Dick should be like her uncle, and try to find her in the darkness, as her uncle was trying to find his Beatrice!

She got up suddenly, and turned out the fire. She came to the door of the room and opened it. She stood listening. There was not a sound anywhere, except the drip of the rain. She walked a little way till she reached the end of the corridor opening on the gallery.

She could see the door of Dick's bedroom from here. She stretched out her hands to him and whispered his name; the thought that her death would make him safe gave her new strength and new courage.

She suddenly told herself that she would go on whispering his name after she had

shut the door of her room—until her lips could no longer speak any sound.

She ran back to her bedroom and closed the door. She came to the fireplace, and bent down swiftly, with outstretched hand. She turned on the gas. A faint hiss came to her ears like the hiss of a viper when it is about to strike. She rose to her feet and began to undress with feverish haste. Already the horrid smell of the escaping gas was in her nostrils.

She turned suddenly with a cry of dismay. The door of the room had been opened.

Ninon Darelli was standing on the threshold.

CHAPTER VI

THAT WHICH IS SILENT

SACHA could not remember, afterward, exactly what happened when Ninon Darelli found her in that gas-laden atmosphere. Probably her brain had already begun to yield to the deadly vapor.

Her first clear recollection was feeling a cool hand pressed firmly on her brow. For some reason, that touch exasperated her. She shrank away from it and then, with suddenly restored energy, jumped out of bed and faced her rescuer.

"What do you mean by coming into my room like this, you—*cheat?*"

The dark eyes of the medium flashed for an instant and then, immediately, grew listless again. She shook her beautiful head sadly.

"I am sorry for you."

There was just a trace of a foreign accent in the tones. Sacha saw that the girl's expression was very gentle. The spasm of anger which had prompted her bitterness passed as quickly as it had come, and as inexplicably. She moaned:

"Now I shall have to start all over again, from the beginning. Oh, God, and I have no courage left."

She flung herself down on the bed, and began to sob violently, so that her whole body was shaken. In their fierce reaction, her nerves wrought a terrible punishment. Ninon, a slight figure in her white, furred dressing gown, stood beside her, holding her wrist until the storm had begun to subside.

"Listen to me," she whispered at last, "and I will tell you something. It was because I dreamed about you that I came here—just in time. It is not the will of the Great Spirit, you see, that you should pass over to-night."

Her accents were low and melodious. She added:

"*The man you love is in danger, from which only you can save him.*"

She spoke these last words like an oracle speaking the message of Heaven. The effect on Sacha was instantaneous and overwhelming. She sat up with staring eyes already red with her weeping. She seized the hand of the medium.

"What do you say?"

Ninon repeated her message in the same tones.

"In my dream," she whispered, "there came to me the poor girl, Beatrice, who was betrothed to Lord Templewood."

She stood, a figure of mystery, gazing fixedly at Sacha, who regarded her with deepening wonder. It seemed impossible to doubt her sincerity. And yet there was the incident of the galloping horseman to sustain all manner of doubts.

"If I could only trust you," the girl moaned piteously.

Ninon raised her shoulders in a gesture of contempt.

"I know. You are thinking of the doctor, who is stupid, like all doctors. I will tell you." She paused and drew a deep breath. "If I had not been with you in that room," she said at last, "you would not have been able to hear the sound of the hooves.

"After the doctor had laid his hands on me, you could not hear the sound any more. But, for all that, there was no trick. I did not make the sound which you heard; I am a medium. The truth is that you were able by my help to listen to that which is silent—"

A strange, distant look haunted the girl's eyes as she spoke. Sacha felt a swift uneasiness, like the first stirrings of fear. Her scruples began to melt away.

"Will you tell me," Ninon continued,

"how I could have known that you meant to take your life to-night, if I was not able to speak to the spirits who know all things? It is not likely, on the face of it, that a young girl who has been called to the sick-bed of her uncle will use that chance to commit suicide."

"No—that is true—"

"And then this message about your lover. It must be a true message, since it has stirred your heart so deeply. Yet, for myself, I do not know, even, who your lover is, though I may perhaps suspect because of my knowledge of this house—"

She stopped speaking. Her expression was full of wonder now, like the wonder which rests always in the eyes of wild creatures. Sacha murmured:

"It *is* a true message."

"And yet Mr. Lovelace, for that is whom I have guessed to be your lover, is not in any danger at all that I can think of."

The tones were casual, almost indifferent. They conveyed the suggestion that Ninon was accustomed to being made the recipient of information which she could not understand. She sighed, and turned from the bed.

"I have given you the message," she declared finally.

She moved to the door of the room, and seemed to be about to go away; but when she reached the door, Sacha's voice recalled her.

"Oh, please," the girl cried, "will you stay with me and help me? Mr. Lovelace is in such terrible danger."

CHAPTER VII

FOOTSTEPS

NINON came back to the bed and took Sacha's hand in her own hands.

"I am very tired," she explained gently. "To-night, I cannot help you, though I would like to help you. There is only one thing that I can do, and that is to give you a little medicine which, sometimes, I take myself. You will sleep, then."

"What, a sleeping draft!" Sacha's voice expressed bitter disappointment. She added: "I don't think any sleeping draft is strong enough to drive away my fears."

"Not a sleeping draft."

Ninon bent over the girl and once again gazed fixedly into her eyes. Sacha was aware, suddenly, of a sense of relief, such as she had not known during all the dreadful hours since Barrington Bryan came to her house in Green Street—a swift, compelling sense which wooed her faculties to tranquillity. She closed her eyes.

"Very well," she murmured; "if you think it will help me—"

Ninon rose from her seat and went silently out of the room. She returned in a few moments carrying in her hand a tiny silver box which gleamed brightly in the lamplight. Sacha was awaiting her return uneasily. At the sight of the gleaming box, she uttered an exclamation of fear.

"Not an injection of morphia!"

"Oh, no."

Ninon set her box down on the mantelpiece, and opened it with deft fingers. She extracted a small cylinder of glass and then a long needle which gleamed as brightly as the box gleamed. She fitted the needle to the point of the syringe. Then she crossed the room to the washstand and poured a little water into the tumbler with which it was furnished.

"It is not morphia, I swear it," she stated.

Sacha was sitting up again. She followed every movement of the medium with restless attention, but she did not utter any further protest. The strain of the last hours had exhausted all her nerves, so that she could no longer think clearly on any subject. Only the fear which clutched at her heart held her from utter oblivion.

Ninon carried the tumbler to the mantelpiece and set it down there. She took a tiny pellet from a phial which was contained in the lid of the box, and dropped it into her syringe.

Then she filled the syringe with water by gently drawing back its glass plunger. She rotated it slowly between her fingers until the pellet was completely dissolved.

Then she came to Sacha, and bade her lie down again and close her eyes.

"It will hurt you a very little," she warned, in low tones.

Next moment Sacha felt a sharp sting on

her forearm, and then a duller pain, which seemed to vanish almost as quickly as the sting.

"That is all—"

Ninon returned to the mantelpiece, and put her syringe back in its box. She shut the box with a click.

"You feel better?" she asked.

"Oh yes, much better."

Sacha was smiling now, and the look of weariness had vanished miraculously from her eyes. Her cheeks were no longer drawn and haggard. She sighed, as those sigh who are rid of an overwhelming burden.

"I feel wonderful—just wonderful."

She stretched out her hands to Ninon who came and clasped them.

"Oh please, please forgive me for my rudeness when you came at first."

The girl did not reply. She had stiffened suddenly, and was listening with every sense strained to the utmost.

Sacha listened also.

They heard slow, heavy footsteps approaching along the corridor.

CHAPTER VIII

"YOUR BEATRICE"

THE footsteps came to the door of the room and stopped. Ninon's cheeks had grown dreadfully pale. She whispered:

"It is Lord Templewood.

She moved away from the bed and stood looking wildly about her, as if seeking for some means of escape. She wrung her hands in her dismay.

"He must not find me here. To-night I am too tired to help him. Oh, you do not know how terrible is his anger!"

Her voice shook; all her self-confidence had vanished. Sacha slipped out of bed, and ran across the room to the door. She turned the key in the door.

The lock had not been used for a long time. It grated noisily. That sound roused the silent visitor to sudden activity. He struck on the panels with his fist, calling:

"Sacha—Sacha—" in shrill tones.

Sacha switched out the light, and then came back to Ninon.

"Get into bed," she whispered, "and cover yourself up. I am not afraid of him—"

She was completely self-possessed now, a being, as it seemed, transformed. She waited while the girl at her side obeyed her and then returned to her place behind the door. Lord Templewood knocked again, this time with great violencee.

"Open," he shouted, "open, Sacha, for God's sake!"

Sacha switched up the light. She glanced at the bed and then, with a swift movement of both her wrists, unlocked and opened the door. The sight which met her eyes as she did so, caused her to gasp in amazement and horror.

The front of her uncle's pyjamas was covered with blood. Small trickles of blood were running down his neck from a wound in his throat. And yet his eyes were quite vacant.

With a thrill of wonder, she realized that he was asleep.

He stumbled into the room, and must have fallen, had not Sacha caught him in her arms. Half-carrying, half-supporting she brought him to the armchair beside the fire and set him down in it. Then she ran to the washstand to get a towel to bind about his neck.

She was standing there, at the washstand, with the towel in her hand when, suddenly, she knew that he had risen from the chair, and was following her on stealthy feet.

With a movement as swift as that of a wild animal, she turned and faced him.

And then she saw that he was holding an open razor in his right hand. What was he going to do?

Even in that awful moment, Sacha's newfound strength did not desert her. She drew back a little way, smiling.

"Please go back to your chair—"

Lord Templewood started at the sound of her voice, but she saw that his eyes remained blank, like the eyes of a dreamer turned inward on his dream. He raised the knife, and the light flashed on its blade. She heard him murmur, more to himself than to her, the name of his dead *fiancée* Beatrice.

That name came to Sacha as a gift from heaven. She realized suddenly that, in some mysterious way, in his dream, he was confusing her with the girl he had loved and lost. She extended her arms to him, and cried in low tones which pleaded with the silence:

"Oh Gerald, Gerald—you would not hurt me. Do you not know me? Look, I am Beatrice, your Beatrice, who was lost."

CHAPTER IX

WHAT USUALLY HAPPENS

THAT name, uttered in those tones, smote Lord Templewood like a sword. The strength seemed to go out of his tall body. He reeled, and caught the rail of the bedstead to support himself. The razor fell from his hand to the carpet.

"Beatrice!"

In an instant, Sacha was beside him. She put her arms round him to hold him up. But, with a gesture of supreme repudiation, he flung her away from him.

"My God, no!"

He was still holding the rail of the bedstead. His cheeks were flushed; his eyes seemed to have become bloodshot. Sacha felt herself start with amazement as she looked at him. She was aware of a queer "sense of recollection," as if, long ago, she had played a part in this very scene which must now be reënacted.

So strange, and so commanding was that feeling, that she awaited the next words he should speak to her in a tension that was almost painful. They fell from his lips with overwhelming bitterness.

"Never again. For you there is no forgiveness."

His eyes were fixed on her face. In their dimness, but half-veiled by sleep, was such misery and regret as she had never before seen in any human eyes. Instinctively she shrank away from him. What secret was this, of his heart, which her necessity had surprised?

Had his love of Beatrice, then, even that great love, been crossed with pain and disillusionment? She glanced at the red scar across his throat, at the pitiful bloodstains on his nightclothes, at his withered, clutching hands so lately turned against his own life.

The powers and principalities of evil, of which he had spoken to the doctor, were, surely, gathered against him now in overwhelming array. Sacha felt a new sense of compassion for him. If only she could arouse him from this nightmare in which he dwelt with so stubborn a persistence. She took a step toward him, and began to speak his name.

But, at that same moment, she saw Ninon Darelli raise herself in the bed. Ninon's voice came to her across the silence.

And, at the sound of Ninon's voice, so rich, so full-toned, Lord Templewood's sleep was resolved. His expression changed, passing from dull despair to beatitude. He allowed Sacha to lead him back to his chair.

Ninon rose and came beside them. She whispered to Sacha that now he would be easy to manage, because his fit was spent.

"If you will get the doctor, I will stay with him. Already, as you see, he is falling into a natural sleep."

"What does it mean?"

The medium's eyes darkened. She shook her head.

"Each time," she said enigmatically, "it is the same. Always—the same."

Sacha managed to rouse Dr. Hailey. She gave him an account of what had happened. He came at once to the bedroom. A single glance at Lord Templewood's throat revealed to him the fact that the wound was a mere scratch. He called Sacha out of the room.

"May I ask why that woman was in your bedroom to-night?" he queried, in his gentle tones.

"She came herself, after I had gone to bed."

"To explain that she was not the impostor I had proved her?"

"She did explain that, yes."

"Hm!" Dr. Hailey thought a moment. "I suppose your poor uncle tried to summon her, and discovered that her room was empty. He would naturally conclude that you had ordered her off the premises."

Sacha sighed deeply.

"His brain has given way utterly, I am afraid," she said.

"And yet there was method in his madness." Dr. Hailey's large face expressed the perplexity he felt. "As I told you last night, this spiritualism business is the foundation of his life. If he really did believe that he was about to be certified as a lunatic, and so separated from his Ninon, suicide would seem the only avenue of escape left to him. His failure to kill himself, clearly, unhinged his nerves. That is what usually happens."

CHAPTER X

A VISITING CARD

THE promise which Ninon Darelli had made to Sacha was fulfilled. Her sleep, after her uncle had been carried back to his bedroom, was deep and dreamless.

But when she awoke, it was as if she had not slept at all. Instantly, the fear which had driven her to the very gates of death clutched once again at her heart. She rose and walked to the window of the room. Her head ached and her mouth seemed to be dry and burning. All that calm, wonderful confidence of the night before, which had saved her from her uncle's maniacal fury, had deserted her utterly.

And the danger threatening the man she loved was not abated by a single jot.

She held her hands to her brow, trying to clear her thoughts. Ninon Darelli had told her that she alone could save Dick. But how? How? Fresh doubts of the medium crowded in now on her mind. It was so easy to make statements of that kind; indeed, they were the stock-in-trade of every vulgar fortune teller in the land.

On the other hand, Ninon had come to her bedroom at the moment of crisis. And Ninon had certainly been aware that Dick was in great danger. The injection, too, which she had administered, had wrought all, and more than all, that she promised of it.

If only, now, she could obtain another injection!

She rang the bell, and told the maid who answered it to prepare her bath. The maid informed her that Mlle. Darelli had already left *The Black Tower* to return to London.

So there was no chance of getting another injection! And she did not know Ninon's address in London. A sense of despair came to Sacha, of weakness and great exhaustion, such as she had never before experienced in her life. She sank down in the armchair, and covered her face with her hands.

Would it not be better to tell everything that she knew about that awful night when her husband was snatched suddenly from his wild business of living? Would not the truth save Dick, even though appearances might be against him? But no—what she told would not be believed.

That had been the whole strength of Barrington's blackmail of her.

She glanced up with haunted eyes. She must marry Barrington then, as she had promised, seeing that the other way, which she tried to follow, was closed against her. She began to sob and was not able to control her weeping.

Unless, indeed, there was anything in what Ninon Darelli had told her.

That hope gleamed suddenly with new brightness. In spite of what Dr. Hailey had said, there could be no harm in asking the help of this woman. After all, she could not fail to help. At the very worse, things could not be blacker than they were already. And Ninon did certainly possess strange powers. It might be that what she had said about Beatrice was no more than the simple truth as she had experienced it.

Sacha started in recalling the name of her uncle's *fiancée*. Was it the presence of Ninon in her room which had brought to her mind the idea of pretending to be Beatrice when her uncle was threatening her?

That might explain the curious sensation she had felt of having acted the same part often and often before; for Ninon had said that all his outbursts were similar to this one. Suppose that the spirit of the dead Beatrice had entered for a moment into her body and spoken with her voice! Just as, perhaps, the hooves of the Horse-

man of Death had been heard by means of Ninon's body.

Sacha rose with a new excitement burning in her eyes, and then, with an exclamation of delight, lifted from the mantelpiece a tiny visiting card which had been left there since she went to sleep. It bore the name and address:

MLLE. NINON DARELLI

2000 Brook Street, W.

CHAPTER XI

THE SOUL OF A MEDIUM

NINON DARELLI'S flat was on the first floor. Sacha was shown into a waiting room which was furnished so austerely as to suggest an apartment in a convent.

She glanced about her in surprise, with which a sense of relief was mingled. Not thus, in her experience, did charlatans and impostors furnish their houses. The plain gray walls and bare, polished floor, the chairs upholstered in black leather, the steel fender, shining dully in the diminished light, bore silent witness to the sincerity of this girl. Sacha found that witness unexpectedly convincing.

Nor was this impression removed by the appearance of Ninon herself, or by the furnishings of her private room. The austere note of the waiting room characterized this apartment also. Ninon was dressed in a frock of pale green material, which enhanced her girlishness rather than the psychic qualities of her beauty. She looked almost gay.

"So," she said, in her musical voice, "you have come to me after all. I am glad."

She waved her visitor to a deep sofa, which extended across a corner of the room, and sat down near her on a narrow divan.

"Tell me," she invited, "what I can do to help you."

Sacha was conscious already of the wonderful sense of relief which this girl had bestowed on her the night before. She lay back on the soft cushions and closed her eyes.

"I have come," she said, "to thank you. That first. Last night I slept so soundly that all my troubles seemed to have been blotted out."

"Ah, my medicine did not fail then."

"Your medicine is the most wonderful, the most blessed in the whole world."

Ninon sighed. "I will give you some more of it presently," she promised; "but first I wish to ask you something, and to tell you something. And I will begin by telling. It is about your uncle, Lord Templewood. Last night was not the first occasion on which he has tried to take his own life—"

She spoke quickly. She glanced at Sacha, as if to note the effect of her words. Sacha's expression was unmoved.

"It is always the same. First he sleeps; then he walks in his sleep. And then there is that terrible business of trying to kill—"

Ninon broke off and shuddered.

"Last night," she whispered, "I was so tired that I thought I would not be able to call his Beatrice to him. I was dreadfully frightened then, because if Beatrice does not come, he grows violent."

"So it was you who called Beatrice!" Sacha exclaimed. "I felt sure of it."

"Of course. When she—his Beatrice—spoke to him, it was your lips which spoke, but the accents of the voice were not your accents. Do you know what that means?"

Ninon's tones had grown suddenly peremptory. Sacha shook her head.

"No."

"It means that you also have the soul of a medium, a little of that soul, at any rate."

She rose as she spoke, and crossed to a table in the far corner of the room. She took a black box, like a large jewel-case, from the table, and brought it to Sacha. She set it down on the arm of the sofa, close to where the girl was sitting. She opened it. A ball of crystal was revealed, set on a pedestal of black velvet.

"It is possible," Ninon said, "that if you look for a time, you may see."

Sacha glanced at the shining ball, with its mysterious deep lights, and then turned away from it. She raised pleading eyes to Ninon's face.

"Will you not give me the medicine now," she begged. "I am so tired."

Ninon went to fetch her syringe. She was in the act of administering the dose, when the bell rang sharply. A moment later, Barrington Bryan strode into the room.

At the sight of the cruel little needle gleaming on Sacha's white skin, he uttered a cry of dismay.

CHAPTER XII

A GIRL ON HORSEBACK

"WHAT are you doing?" Barrington demanded, in tones the anxiety of which he was not able to control.

He addressed himself to Ninon. She did not so much as look up from the task on which she was engaged. With a swift movement, she drove the plunger of the little syringe home, so that a small lump, made by the injected contents, appeared on the skin of Sacha's forearm.

She withdrew the needle, and laid her finger on the puncture which it had made in the skin.

"Say, what is that stuff you have given her?"

"Some medicine."

Ninon's voice was soft and melodious as ever. She rose from her knees, and turned to greet her visitor.

"Since you have come," she said, "you had better stay. Mrs. Malone, whom I think you know, is going to try her powers as a gazer into the crystal—"

Her eyes and her smiling lips challenged the man and quelled him. A look of fear dawned in his face.

"Oh, very well," he said, "if you wish it; though I had business to discuss with you—about the Friday Club."

Ninon turned to Sacha, who was still gazing fixedly at the puncture mark on her arm, so that she might avoid meeting Barrington's eyes.

"Let me arrange you comfortably," she said.

She brought a small table, and set it in front of the girl. Then she placed the case with the crystal on the table. She motioned Barrington to be seated, and sat down herself.

"Look at it steadily," she instructed, "and then allow your thoughts to drift anywhere they like. Don't try to concentrate your attention."

Sacha bent forward over the shining glass. Her cheeks were bright again, and the careworn expression had vanished from her eyes. Her long lashes swept her cheeks in delicious composure.

"Shall I tell you what I see?" she asked, in quiet tones.

"No, no. It is not necessary."

Silence wrapped them about, so that the traffic in Brook Street became a vivid background to their thoughts. Ninon closed her eyes and began to breathe deeply in a slow rhythm. She had thrown her head back against the chair on which she was sitting, and her delicate throat was revealed, with its swift, earnest lines and curves.

But Barrington had no eyes for that delectable revelation. His eyes were on Sacha's face, framed in its living aureole, and grown wild, with a new, mysterious beauty. He leaned forward in his chair that he might, the more greedily, imbibe the wine of her beauty.

And so he did not perceive that, from beneath half closed lids, Ninon was watching him even as he was watching Sacha. He did not see that her little hands were clenched tight, until the knuckles were bloodless.

Sacha's voice broke the spell of the silence.

"*There is a girl on horseback,*" she whispered, "*riding up to the door of The Black Tower—*"

She was silent during many minutes after that, but Barrington saw the expression of her face change gradually, from repose to anxiety. He strained forward still closer to her, gripping the arms of his chair with his two hands.

"*Now she is talking to a young man in my uncle's room. Oh, dear, it must be my uncle to whom she is talking. And he is so terribly angry with her—*"

Sacha clutched at the crystal, and drew it nearer to her eyes. Her breath came sharply, as if she were weeping.

"*Oh, dear, he has wounded himself! Look! Look! Ah!*"

She uttered a scream and stood erect

with staring eyes. She flung the little table violently away from her.

The crystal fell to the floor with a dull thud.

CHAPTER XIII

INJECTION OF MADNESS

NINON came and put her hand on Sacha's arm. She called her by name. The girl started and then, like a sleeper awakening, drew her hand across her brow. She murmured:

"I have had such a terrible dream."

She sank back on the sofa and closed her eyes again. In an instant, as it seemed, she was sleeping soundly. Ninon brought a rug and covered her. Then she turned to Barrington.

"You see. I have done more even than you asked me to do."

There was a note of challenge in her voice. He caught his breath in a gasp.

"It is horrible."

The girl's dark eyes flashed dangerously.

"So—you are sorry for her, are you?" she sneered.

"God knows—yes. I am sorry for her."

He did not raise his head. Ninon stood looking at him with frowning brows.

"You love her, eh?"

He started.

"No—of course not."

"Of course not—since you love me."

A bitter laugh accompanied these last words. Ninon's anger was rising very quickly. The man looked at her and recoiled from that pale fury.

"Don't be a fool, Ninon. You know that I love you. You know that I have always loved you."

He put out his hand to her, but she eluded his hand. She nodded, as if she confirmed the forebodings of her own mind.

"Always. It is true. Until this girl of white and gold has come to you. But now—"

She snapped her fingers in his face, and the sound was sharp and vehement, like her anger. Barrington wilted before her anger.

"You will ruin everything with your jealousy," he exclaimed, in faltering tones.

"I do not care. No more. I do not care."

"Listen to me." He put his hand out again, and this time succeeded in grasping her wrist and drawing her toward him. "My nerves are weak to-day. I have had a touch of my war fever. The sight of that needle of yours made me feel ill. See, I am shaking now."

He stretched out his disengaged hand before her, showing her its unsteadiness. In an instant the hardness vanished from her eyes.

"I am sorry."

She turned to him with a new gentleness in her expression.

"You love me?" she pleaded, in accents that were piteous.

"Always."

He bent and kissed her lips.

"And now," he said, in quick, anxious tones, "tell me what has happened—everything."

For answer she pointed to the couch, and laid her finger on her lips.

Sacha had begun to move uneasily in her sleep.

When Sacha awoke, Barrington took her back to her house in Green Street in a taxi-cab. Neither of them spoke at all during the short journey. He accompanied her into the house.

"I certainly did not expect to find you at Mlle. Darelli's," he remarked, in tones the anxiety of which he failed to dissemble. He added: "We are partners in a night club, called the 'Friday.' I had come to talk business with her."

He lit a cigarette with shaking hand, as he spoke. Sacha invited him, with a gesture, to be seated.

"I went to Brook Street," she declared, in bitter accents, "to ask Ninon Darelli to help me."

She raised her eyes as she spoke, and faced him. There was a new challenge in her eyes.

"Really?"

"*To help me against you.*"

Barrington inhaled a long whiff of smoke, and expelled it slowly. He seemed to be trying to pull himself together.

"I thought," he said, in rather un-

certain tones, "that we had settled that matter for good and all."

"So did I. That was why, last night, I shut the door of my bedroom at *The Black Tower,* and turned on the gas. But for the fact that Ninon came to my room at the last moment, the matter would have been settled—for good and all."

Her tones were casual, but they wrought a startling effect on her companion. He sprang to his feet, and stood in front of her with whitening cheeks.

"My God, no! It is not true!"

"It is true."

He controlled himself with a strong effort.

"And then she gave you her dope!"

"She gave me a dose of medicine which she takes herself sometimes."

Barrington flung his cigarette into the fireplace.

"Horrible, horrible," he cried, in accents of consternation. Suddenly, a flush of anger mounted to his cheeks.

"Did you actually think that if you killed yourself Lovelace would be safe?" he demanded. He added: "Let me warn you that you were wrong. There is only one way in which you can make him safe, and that is by marrying me."

"Or killing you."

The man started. Again his cheeks blanched.

"It is Ninon's dope," he declared, "which has made you crazy. Her dope burns in the brain like fire." He took a step toward her. "So we begin again at the point where we left off. Either you marry me, or your Dick Lovelace pays the penalty."

Sacha did not flinch before this onslaught. Her pale loveliness, as he gazed on it, maddened him. The fear and dismay which he read in her eyes added, somehow, to her attractiveness. He promised himself that, in spite of anything which Ninon Darelli might do, he would possess that shrinking form which was so much more ravishing than all the Italian girl's passion.

"Cannot I appeal to you as a gentleman?"

"No."

She hesitated a moment. To his surprise, a look of defiance appeared on her face.

"Very well, then," she said, "you can do your worst. I am not going to marry you."

Barrington extracted his cigarette case as though his feelings demanded relief in some material action. He lit a cigarette.

"The facts," he declared, "are these: Your husband was found dead in a field near *The Black Tower,* and his horse was found, saddled and bridled, wandering in the field beside him. The coroner's jury came to the conclusion to which those who carried the body to the field intended they should come. When a man is thrown from his horse, his head is often severely bruised."

He stopped. Sacha had advanced a few steps nearer to him. The fear which he had expected to see in her eyes was absent.

"Go on," she commanded.

"I saw Dick Lovelace carry your husband's body across the drawbridge of *The Black Tower* on his shoulder. I followed him and saw him deposit it in the field and then lead the horse into the field beside it." He added: "Because I loved you, and meant to possess you, I remained silent about what I had seen."

"Who is going to believe such a story?"

The girl's tones vibrated with her defiance of him. He rose to his feet.

"Those who examine the wounds on your husband's head will believe it," he declared. "Medical science nowadays does not hesitate to wrest its secrets even from the grave, and it is well able to distinguish between one kind of injury and another."

At last he had achieved his object. Sacha's coolness deserted her. She shrank away from him and clutched at the mantelpiece. She sank down, helplessly, on her knees on the hearthrug. He saw her cover her face with one of her hands.

He stood, with his lighted cigarette between his fingers, watching her. But, nevertheless, he failed to see that her other hand was clutching at one of the fire irons. His cruel smile played freely now about his lips.

"I forbid you," he declared, "to go

back to Brook Street, to Ninon Darelli, or to have any further dealings with that woman."

He turned from her and moved toward the door. Halfway across the room he stopped, and once again faced her.

"On my next visit," he remarked, "you will, I hope, receive me a trifle more graciously."

He resumed his walk.

Sacha measured, with frenzied eyes, the distance which separated her from him. Her grasp tightened on the fire iron at her side.

The next instant she had overtaken him with that terrible weapon raised in both her hands.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREATER POWER

BARRINGTON swung round, warned, by some uncharted sense, of his danger. He faced the girl with a stifled cry of horror on his lips.

With a swift movement, he wrenched the poker from her hands, and sent it clattering against the wainscoting.

"*You little devil!*"

His eyes were glaring. Sacha felt her strength ebb away from her. She tottered, and would have fallen, had he not caught her in his arms.

He carried her to the couch, and laid her down on it. Her eyes were closed, and her face was so pale that her skin seemed to have been turned to wax. He bent over her, and could only just detect the sound of her breathing. He dipped his handkerchief in a rose bowl which stood on a small table, and pressed it against her brow.

She opened her eyes. A look of bewilderment appeared in them. She sighed deeply, and then tears began to course down her cheeks.

"Oh dear," she whispered, "what have I done?"

She sat up suddenly with wide horror in her expression. She seemed to be looking for some one. Barrington put his hand on her shoulders.

"It's all right," he said, "Don't worry."

His voice seemed to reassure her. She began to cry. She cried hysterically for many minutes, during which he stood looking at her, with great uneasiness in his face. At last, when she had grown a little calmer, he said:

"It's that dope which Ninon Darelli gave you this afternoon."

His tones proclaimed the fear which still clutched at his heart. The girl ceased her weeping, and looked up at him.

"No," she said, deliberately, "I really meant to kill you. If you hadn't turned, I would have killed you."

"Because you are under the influence of some hellish poison—*hashish* probably. And also because you are under the influence of that woman—" He bent closer to her, and lowered his voice. "Was it this—that she showed you in her crystal?"

"No."

He caught his breath in a gasp.

"Ninon Darelli is the most accomplished dope fiend in London," he declared. "She is also a hypnotist. A girl such as you are is mere wax in her cunning hands."

Sacha sighed again. She passed her hand wearily over her brow.

"Do, please, leave me now," she begged him piteously.

Her eyes were almost expressionless, as though, still, her thoughts were wandering in another world.

"I can't leave you. It is too horrible. If I leave you, you will go back to her. That is what always happens. That is what she is counting on."

He hesitated a moment, hoping evidently, that she would answer him, but she remained motionless and silent.

"Let me take you back to Redden—to your own house, if you do not wish to go to *The Black Tower*.

"No—no—no!"

"Sacha, for God's sake, think what has happened. Think what may happen in the future."

Suddenly she sprang to her feet. Her eyes blazed with repudiation of him.

"What can possibly happen in the future which will be worse than that which has happened already?" she challenged.

"Many things. The loss of your reason, for example."

"That would be a blessing—the greatest possible blessing—"

He controlled himself with an effort.

"Ninon Darelli," he said, "has reasons for trying to get you into her power. I warn you that she is without mercy to her victims—"

"Like yourself."

He set his teeth. He turned from her and walked to the window.

"At least," he declared, "I have the excuse that I love you."

"And I have the excuse that I do not love you—that you are blackmailing me into a marriage against which my whole soul revolts."

The defiant note in her voice had become dominant again. She was still, apparently, under the influence of Ninon's dope. He made up his mind that it was useless to stay with her any longer.

CHAPTER XV

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

He left the Green Street house on foot, and turned toward Bond Street. If only he had foreseen that, in her first agony, Sacha might turn to suicide as a way out of her difficulties! That folly had delivered her, bound hand and foot, into Ninon's hands.

A grim smile curled his lips as he thought how eagerly Ninon must have clutched at the chance thus afforded her. Ninon had been desperately jealous of Sacha from the moment when he had first broached his plans—in spite of all the assurances he had given.

A woman's instinct, he reflected bitterly, is seldom at fault where her rivals are concerned. Ninon must have seen, in Sacha's eyes, some indication of the despair which possessed her; Ninon's wonderful power of thought-reading, no doubt, brought her instantly to the truth.

He came to Bond Street and lingered a moment to glance at the display of neckties in a famous haberdasher's window. But he looked without seeing. An exclamation of rage escaped his lips. Now, whatever happened to Lord Templewood, Ninon, and not himself, would be master of the situation. That terrible combination of drugs and hypnotism, poison of body and poison of mind, by which she had made Sacha her victim, was irresistible.

He turned into Brook Street. Five minutes later, he was accepting one of Ninon's Abdulla cigarettes and bearing, with what composure he could summon, the scrutiny of her vigilant eyes.

"Tell me what has happened," he commanded, in his crisp tones.

"Nothing has happened."

"What! Do you mean to say the doctors have any doubt about certifying him?"

Barrington's manner had become aggressive in an instant. A new anxiety filled his eyes. Ninon hesitated a moment, and then gave him an account of the events of the preceding night. She added,

"To be a medium is not easy when one is dealing with fools—like this Dr. Eustace Hailey."

"Why did you give Dr. Hailey the chance to catch you?" he demanded abruptly. "Surely there was no need to trouble about that galloping horseman."

She drew herself up.

"I am a medium. Can I help it, if—things happen?"

He made a gesture of impatience. They had quarreled too often on this topic for him to wish to reopen it. Ninon, apparently, possessed limitless powers of self-deception—like all spiritualists.

"It is damnably awkward," he declared. "And it may become a great deal more awkward still, if these doctors find out what has been going on. If we don't get Templewood out of the way at once, we shall never finger a penny of that money, and unless I can have thirty thousand pounds within the next month, I must leave the country—for ever. You understand, *for ever.*"

He emphasized the last words viciously. Ninon's cheeks paled as she heard him.

"To-day," she said, in low tones, "he has had no medicine at all. When he has nothing, his temper is terrible."

"That is not good enough. Bad temper is not insanity. No doctor dare sign a certificate of insanity on such grounds." He flung his cigarette away from him. "I

thought you said that these drugs of yours were certain in their action?"

"They are certain—but it requires a little time."

"You have had a week nearly." He drew a sharp breath. "And now you have been sent out of the house."

"I shall return to it, never fear." Ninon's voice was calm. "There is his Beatrice whom he cannot find without me."

Barrington uttered an exclamation of contempt.

"My dear Ninon, the doctors have got him under their control now," he declared. "They will know how to soothe his nerves so that there will be no more sleep-walking, no more hankering after spirits. Their medicines, believe me, are just as strong as your medicines." He added bitterly: "It is all a question of medicine."

Ninon gazed at him in silence for a few moments. Her eyes were deeply reproachful.

"It is not all a question of medicine," she said. "You are like the rest—so blind. About Beatrice I have practiced no deception, and I say to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, again, he will call for me to find for him his Beatrice."

Barrington helped himself to another smoke.

"I wish I shared your faith. To-morrow we are more likely to have Scotland Yard here making inquiries about your dope business. Dr. Hailey, as I happen to know, is a great friend of Scotland Yard."

He frowned again. Then he leaned toward her.

"What is the meaning of this affair you are carrying on with the girl?" he demanded, in hoarse tones.

Ninon did not reply, but the color rushed violently to her cheeks. She took a quick step away from him. He laughed mirthlessly.

"But I need not ask you. I know. It is that damned jealousy of yours, in case I should fall in love with Sacha after I have married her. Now, with your dreams and your drugs, you think you will be able to take her away from me whenever you choose."

He watched the girl closely as he spoke. To his surprise she did not wince under his blow.

"Because I know you," she said, in vibrating tones.

Her defiance exasperated him. He sprang up and laid his hands on her shoulders.

"I won't have it," he shouted. "Do you hear, I won't have it. Already you have driven Sacha half crazy."

Ninon escaped from his grasp with a swift, catlike movement of her body. Her anger leaped to meet his anger.

"You won't have it, eh?" she cried. "You won't have it! The pretty Sacha must not be harmed, eh? It is I, Ninon, who must pull for you your chestnuts out of the fire, that you may eat them with this girl who is so good and so sweet. And after that, eh? What is to come after that?"

"I have told you what is to come after that."

"Oh, yes, you have told me. You will get rid of Sacha." Ninon's red lips parted in a sneer, the bitterness of which made him wilt. "My man," she added, "I do not take chances when it is a pretty wife who shall be got rid of by such a husband as you. Also, I say to myself, *I will help him to get rid of her.*"

"My God, it is horrible." He drew his hand across his brow in a gesture of despair. "Do you know that, because of your crystal or your dope, or both together, already, this afternoon, Sacha tried to kill me with a poker? Had it not been—"

He stopped speaking abruptly. The ghastliness of Ninon's face made him spring to her support. He set her down in the chair he had just vacated.

"It is not true," she pleaded, "oh, no, it cannot be true."

"It is absolutely true."

She raised her horrified eyes to his face.

"But that is Beatrice," she whispered. "It was so that Beatrice struck at Lord Templewood twenty years ago, after she had confessed to him that your father was her lover. Lord Templewood tried to kill her and himself also. He has told me, many times—"

"*My father?*"

The buzz of the telephone bell smote sturdily on their ears. Ninon rose and crossed the floor with faltering steps. She lifted the receiver.

"Yes. Yes, it is Mlle. Darelli speaking. Who is that? Dr. Hailey? Oh, yes—what do you say? Lord Templewood wishes me to come back to-night to *The Black Tower?* So—so—I will come."

She hung up the receiver and turned to Barrington.

The look of fear had not passed from her eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TEMPLE OF PEACE

LORD TEMPLEWOOD spent most of the morning, following his somnambulistic attack, in bed. But, just before luncheon he rose and came downstairs to the library where Dr. Hailey awaited him. He was still very pale, but his cold, beautiful face was no longer drawn in lines of anxiety.

"Forgive me," he apologized, "for having refused to see you this morning. I felt that I must obtain as much sleep as possible. I have seen nobody at all, not even Ninon."

He sighed deeply as he pronounced the name of his medium. Apparently he had been informed of her departure to London. Dr. Hailey proposed that they should avail themselves of the March sunlight to walk for a little while in the grounds.

They crossed the drawbridge, which retained its ancient lifting chains, and strolled round the moat, in whose dark waters goldfish moved sleepily. Lord Templewood led the way through a bower of evergreens, to a space which had a high, wooded mound as its background, and in which a building, half summer-house and half shrine, had been erected.

The building was built at the far end into the mound which perhaps had been raised by human hands in old times. It recalled irresistibly those little temples which lie tucked away in recesses of the park at Versailles. Its owner presented it with a sweep of his thin hand.

"The Temple of Peace," he announced. "My thank offering for the goodness of the Great Spirit in restoring to me the happiness which long ago was taken out of my life."

His face was expressionless as he spoke, but his eyes glowed. Dr. Hailey watched him narrowly. Such language might or might not indicate a twist of the mind.

"Is it permitted to enter?"

"Oh, yes."

Lord Templewood took a key from his pocket and opened the door of the building. An exclamation of wonder escaped the doctor's lips. Never before in his life had he beheld so amazing an interior. The Temple seemed to be filled with dazzling light.

At the far end facing the door was a huge altar of purest marble, and on the altar a crystal globe in which points of cold fire burned with strange intensity. On either side of the crystal globe were golden candlesticks each with seven horns like the candlesticks which stood in the Temple at Jerusalem until Titus, the son of Vespasian, carried them away to Rome.

"It is beautiful, is it not?"

The doctor inclined his head. The beauty was undeniable, but it was less than the suggestion of barbaric profusion. In such a temple a warrior might hang up the plunder of his foes, whether taken worthily or by stealth.

"You hold your *séances* here?" he asked.

"No!"

Lord Templewood seemed impatient to be gone. He pointed out in his quick, staccatic accents, that the mere opening of the door automatically switched on all the lights. These, however, could be extinguished from a place behind the altar. There were no windows in the building.

Dr. Hailey leaned against the door, surveying the strange mosaic of the pavement at his feet. He touched one or two of the elements of the mosaic with his walking stick. Suddenly he started. His body seemed to stiffen. The stick shook in his hand. He turned to Lord Templewood.

"That's queer. I felt as if I had had an electric shock."

The old man did not reply.

When they came back again to the sunlight, Dr. Hailey helped himself to a pinch of snuff. Then he rubbed his arm as if it hurt him slightly.

"How are you feeling this morning?" he asked his patient abruptly.

"Well—except for this wound in my throat." Lord Templewood stood still and faced his companion with weary eyes. "You know, perhaps, already," he said, "that I am a victim of sleep-walking. Always on those occasions the same terrible experience is vouchsafed to me—the experience of attempting to take my own life. That is why it is necessary that I should keep myself constantly under the influence of narcotic drugs—"

He drew up the sleeve of his coat as he spoke, and revealed to the doctor's astonished gaze a forearm mottled with innumerable points of pigment—the unmistakable sign of hypodermic injection repeated over a long period of time.

CHAPTER XVII

BODY AND SOUL NOT HIS OWN

DR. HAILEY made no comment on this strange disclosure, except to ask the nature of the drug used. He heard, as he had expected to hear, that it was cocaine; and he guessed that the supplies of that forbidden substance were obtained through the instrumentality of Ninon Darelli.

Even so, there was nothing very unusual in such a state of affairs. The opinions which the ordinary man cherishes about "drugs," and the facts of the case as every doctor knows them, are different. There are drug addicts who have made a moderate and reasonable use of both cocaine and morphia over many years. Some of these people are to be found in Harley Street itself.

They came to the castle again. Lord Templewood announced that, after luncheon, he proposed to go motoring. He invited the doctor to accompany him.

"I always drive myself," he explained, in laconic tones. "So if you feel any anxiety, please do not hesitate to say so."

"I do not feel any anxiety."

During the meal, there was little talk of any kind. But though Lord Templewood scarcely spoke at all, he proved a gracious and attentive host. Dr. Hailey wondered more and more on what grounds the local doctor had reached the conclusion that he was "certifiable," unless, indeed, he held the view that an interest in spiritualism is a sign of mental derangement.

Then his thoughts traveled to the scene of the night before, when Ninon produced her imitation of a galloping horseman. It was difficult to realize that this calm, self-possessed man was the same individual who had been thrown into so dreadful a state of panic by that vulgar swindle. It was just possible that, in Lord Templewood's case, belief in spiritualism did amount to a monomania.

They ran out to a village some ten miles away. If the doctor had felt any nervousness about his host's powers as a motor driver, that feeling was soon dispelled. Lord Templewood drove with care and discretion. When they turned homeward again, Dr. Hailey broached the subject which he had made up his mind to discuss.

"I suppose," he said, "that in your experience as a spiritualist, you have come across mediums who were dishonest—who were frank impostors?"

"Oh, yes." Lord Templewood's tones did not invite further discussion.

"It is doubtless a great temptation—to make use of fraud when the natural powers are overstrained."

"Doubtless."

Again, it was evident that the subject was highly distasteful. The doctor made up his mind to use a more direct method.

"I took upon myself," he declared, "to order Mlle. Ninon Darelli to return to London this morning—because of that demonstration last night of the galloping horseman."

The car swerved. For a moment, it seemed that an accident was inevitable. Then Lord Templewood managed to regain control. He brought the vehicle to a standstill.

"Will you explain to me," he said, in tones of remarkable coolness, "exactly what you are suggesting—about Ninon."

Dr. Hailey thought a moment. He could not overlook the danger that if he told the exact truth, and was believed, he might shatter, at a single blow, the whole foundation of this man's life.

On the other hand, he could scarcely doubt—after what he had seen—that such a catastrophe was the very object which Ninon Darelli had set out to achieve. If she returned, anything might happen, since poisons both of the body and of the mind were at her disposal.

"I am suggesting that Ninon is a fraudulent medium," he said, in quiet tones.

"You mean that the galloping horseman had no real existence?"

"I mean that the sound of galloping was faked—there are various ways, known to every impostor, of reproducing such a sound."

Lord Templewood sighed deeply.

"You are wrong, Dr. Hailey," he said quietly. "And the proof is this. Not only did I hear that sound, I felt it."

The doctor contracted his broad brow.

"That," he said, "can be explained easily enough without invoking the supernatural to explain it. Some people are endowed with a marvelous sensitive sense of vibration. They feel every sound."

The car resumed its way, though at a slower pace. When the car came near the castle, Lord Templewood turned again to the doctor.

"I have considered your opinion," he announced. "I hope that I have accorded it its due weight. But I have not accepted it—not yet, at any rate. There are reasons why I wish you, if you will, to ask Ninon to return here—since you took it on yourself to send her away."

"What reasons?" Dr. Hailey's voice was almost peremptory.

"The fact that she administers my narcotic drugs. I have a great horror of thrusting a hypodermic needle into my own flesh. The fact, also, that she certainly is able to summon to me my angel, Beatrice."

The courteous manner of the old man was unruffled. Yet the doctor fancied he detected just a shade of anxiety in the level tones.

"May I speak a word of warning," he asked, "as a man, rather than as a physician?"

"Of course."

"Those to whom we intrust the care of both our minds and our bodies possess over us a power of measureless strength."

"I am aware of that. On the other hand, it is better, surely, to live dangerously than not to live at all."

They came to the bridge across the moat. Lord Templewood handed the car over to a servant, because the garages were situated some distance from the house. Then he asked:

"What advantage could Ninon derive if—if she did undermine my reason? I pay her well. If I were sent to an asylum, she would get nothing more."

Again that note of uneasiness was in his voice.

Dr. Hailey shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "I have been asking myself that very question for the last twelve hours, but, so far, I confess that I have found no answer to it."

"You will send for Ninon?"

"Yes, if you will permit me to send also for your niece, Mrs. Malone."

CHAPTER XVIII

"POLLY FLINDERS"

NINON came by the last train. She found Dr. Hailey and Lord Templewood seated in the great hall of the castle. She left them immediately and ascended the stairs to her bedroom. They heard the car which had brought her from the station drive away to the garages. The doctor noticed that his patient's senses were strained to follow that receding sound.

He took his snuffbox from his pocket, and helped himself to a large pinch.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed. Lord Templewood's face had grown pale; his hands were twitching. Dr. Hailey listened. The sound of a horse's hooves came very faintly to his ears.

He leaned toward his host as if about to ask him a question, but a peremptory gesture commanded him to silence Lord Templewood shrank back in his chair, like a man who hears at last the approach of a

long-expected doom. Beads of perspiration stood out on his brow. The sound of the hooves grew louder. Dr. Hailey replaced his snuffbox in his pocket, and rose from his chair.

"*Don't move—for God's sake.*"

The old man was glaring so wildly, his tones were so fully charged with horror, that the doctor resumed his seat again. The hooves clattered to the drawbridge and came thudding and stamping across it to the great door. There was a loud rapping on the door. Lord Templewood rose, as a condemned criminal may rise, to answer the summons of the hangman. He stood with bloodless lips and quaking knees, a figure of tragedy.

"Shall I open?"

"*Don't move.*"

Silence held them in a strong grasp. Then, suddenly, the thudding of the hooves on the wooden bridge began again. The hooves receded.

Dr. Hailey sprang to his patient and caught him before he fell. He helped him back to his chair, and set him down in it.

Then he strode to the door and threw it open.

There was nobody behind the door, nor could he hear any sound of hooves in the still night.

Dr. Hailey closed the door and returned to Lord Templewood, who had recovered slightly. There was a look of bewilderment in the doctor's eyes. Lord Templewood asked:

"There is nobody there?"

"Nobody."

"Did you hear the hooves going away?"

"No."

"Oh, God!"

The old man shuddered. He covered his face with his thin, clawlike hands, and remained thus during several minutes. Then, suddenly, he looked up.

"That sound," he said, in low tones, "fell on my ears for the first time at the most awful moment of my life. Twenty years ago, on the night before her death, my angel Beatrice rode to that door."

He broke off suddenly, and stumbled to his feet.

"I shall go to bed, I think."

Dr. Hailey offered his arm, but the offer was refused. Lord Templewood moved toward the stairway. Suddenly, they heard a quick step on the drawbridge. A key grated in the lock of the front door, which opened to admit Dick Lovelace. Lord Templewood turned sharply. He demanded:

"Have you come from the village?"

"Yes."

"You—you did not meet anybody on horseback?" There was a ring almost of entreaty in the tones, as though the old man clutched still at the hope of an ordinary explanation of the sound of the hooves.

"No."

Dick glanced uneasily from his employer to the doctor.

"Did you hear a horseman?"

"No."

Lord Templewood sighed deeply. He resumed his walk to the staircase, and began the ascent. Dr. Hailey followed him to his bedroom.

"If you like," he said, "I will give you something to steady your nerves."

"No, thank you."

Lord Templewood had seated himself in a deep armchair. He was leaning back in the chair and breathing heavily. "Tonight," he whispered, "*there is no question of fraud by Ninon—or anybody else.*"

"No."

"I am going to send for Ninon."

Dr. Hailey's eyes darkened. He contracted his brow.

"I can only urge you not to send for her," he said gently. "At least not just now."

"Why not?"

"Because—because I do not trust her."

The old man closed his eyes wearily.

"*You* cannot help me," he murmured.

"Let me summon Dr. Andrews. He called, it seems, while we were out motoring this afternoon."

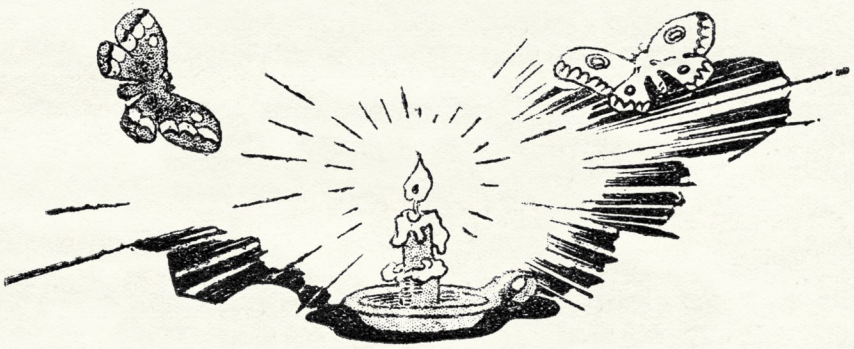
"No. Andrews cannot help me either."

There was a quick step in the corridor without. Some one knocked on the door of the room. A moment later, Sacha was kissing her uncle's pale brow and explaining, in staccatic tones, that it was her horse which he had heard on the drawbridge.

"I drove myself out from town," she declared, "but the car broke down a couple of miles the other side of Beech Croft; so I just walked on there and told them to put her saddle on Polly Flinders. When nobody answered my knock downstairs, I rode round to the stables."

Her manner was a little breathless. Dr. Hailey guessed that Dick Lovelace had told her about the disastrous effect of her coming on horseback to the *Tower,* and sent her to apologize. He glanced at Lord Templewood to see how he was taking the unromantic disposal of his fears. As he did so, a look of amazement appeared on his genial face.

TO BE CONTINUED

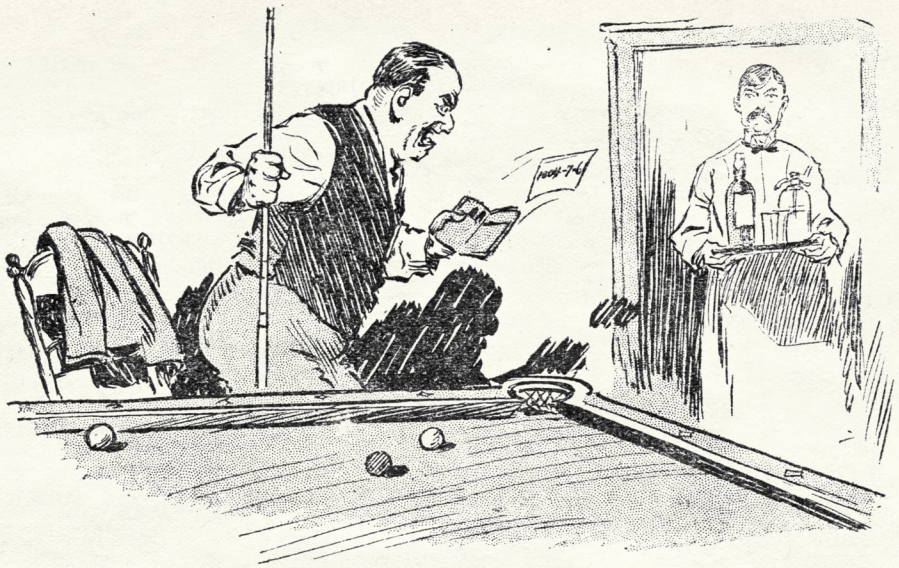


JOHN HUNTER'S name is a new one in the pages of FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION. And yet, in accordance with the magazine's policy of buying and publishing stories with an utter disregard of the author's fame or prominence, we are featuring Mr. Hunter's "A Fellowship of Evil" next week. Read it and see if it doesn't merit such treatment.

H. W. Corley is another contributor with an article entitled "Without the Fear of God." It is a crime of the sea of unusual interest.

Then there will be another adventure of The Adjusters, called "The Drayton Square Murder." Other contributions will include Don H. Thompson's short story, "Pursuit"; Lin Bonner's special article, "Cheaters"; Harold de Polo's Whitcher yarn, "With His Own Weapon"; Robert Sneddon's fact story, "The Two Mrs. Thomas"; Charles Somerville's "The Torturers"; and other stories and articles by J. Jefferson Farjeon, Graham McEnery, M. E. Ohaver, and others.

William J. Flynn



As he clicked open the case, a big white card fluttered out—

THE LIGHTNING RETURNS CO.

By Valentine

THE ADJUSTERS NEATLY SETTLE ON THEIR NEXT "VICTIM," AND THE JAWS OF CIRCUMSTANCE CLOSE DOWN WITH A MERCILESS POWER

MANY and varied now were the cases that were brought to Daphne Wrayne in her luxurious offices at 179 Conduit Street, W. For the recovery of the Duchess of Hardington's famous pearl necklace had impressed the public not a little.

In addition to which the interview with Daphne herself as published in the *Monitor* had intrigued them vastly. A mysterious detective agency that not only suggested that it might succeed where the police failed, but did as well—with a pretty society girl at the head of it, an unlimited capital behind it, and avowedly disinterested aims in front of it—held a direct appeal for the man in the street, which became stronger still when the *Monitor* added some interesting details of Daphne Wrayne's history.

She was, it seemed, the only daughter of Colonel Wrayne, V.C., D.S.O., deceased, had inherited his entire fortune, and had lived most of her life in India. Now, she was well-known in Society, with a flat in Brook Street and a house at Maidenhead. Her recreations were hunting, shooting, tennis and golf.

The writer of the article touched upon the originality of modern girlhood, speculated vaguely on who her colleagues could be, and finished up with a pretty reference to the Knights of the Round Table and the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

The public of course devoured the article with avidity—and argued hotly over it. Though on one point nearly every one was agreed, and that was that more than one master mind was at the back of this enterprise. Furthermore that whoever those

—and the men watching saw him leap back as if shot

master minds were, they were managing to keep their identities amazingly well hidden.

Daphne Wrayne looked up from her writing as, after a knock, the door opened and Carlton, the stalwart commissionaire, came in.

"Well, Carlton?"

"A Captain Marriner, Miss—particularly wants to see you."

Daphne nodded, leaned back in her chair. From her attitude and appearance she was expecting something more—from her eyes, fixed on Carlton, some procedure to which she was accustomed.

"Sea captain, Miss—coaster or tramp. Roughly dressed—seems a bit worried. Speaks slow, but looks you straight in the face."

"Show him in, Carlton."

Captain Marriner came in hesitatingly. He was a thick-set man of medium height dressed in a loose suit of blue serge. He had a tanned, weatherbeaten face, a little pointed beard, a mass of silvery hair and a pair of blue eyes that seemed to wander round the room divided between amazement, awe, and suspicion.

Certainly it was hardly like an office with its snow-white walls, on which hung rare watercolors, its big easy chairs, its softly curtained, mullioned windows, its heavy carpet that declined to repeat your footsteps, its wonderful oriental bowls of hot-house flowers.

Least of all was it like an office with that slender, fair-haired girl sitting behind that massive, paper-covered oak table with its telephones, electric bells, and nothing at all that suggested feminine interest. That girl sat now with an elbow resting on the table and one slim, white, ringless hand supporting her chin as she studied her visitor with thoughtful interest.

"Sit down, Captain."

"Thank 'ee, Miss."

He seated himself on the extreme edge of one of the easy chairs, eyes anywhere but on Daphne—twirling his peaked cap uneasily—a man obviously worried.

"So the police have turned you down, Captain?" queried Daphne quietly.

"Yes, they wouldn't—how did you know?" looking up suddenly.

A smile flitted over her face.

"No black magic, Captain. No one comes to us—at present—except as a last resource. Now perhaps," encouragingly, "if you were to put on a pipe it might help a bit."

He brightened up in a moment.

"If you don't mind, Miss—" he began,

but Daphne picked up a cigarette herself, and lighted it.

"Just tell me everything," she said as she leaned back in her chair.

"It's about two years ago," he began, "that I first 'eard of the Lightning Returns Company—"

"Run by a man called Horatio Merryweather, wasn't it?" put in Daphne quietly.

"It was. Fancy you knowin' that!"

He pressed the tobacco in his pipe down with his thumb, and went on.

"They sent me a circular and a letter 'bout the company. Goodness knows what it wasn't goin' to do. Goin' to turn us into millionaires quick—all of us. And I was mug enough to fall for it—" ruefully.

"For much, Captain?"

"Every blinkin' penny I 'ad in the world, Miss. One thousand and four pounds, seven shillings and sixpence. All my life's savings."

Daphne nodded sympathetically. But she was puzzled as to exactly what was coming.

"It all went—every penny," he went on, gazing forlornly at the carpet, as if he were still looking at his money that had vanished. "The Company went into bankruptcy and the Official Receiver 'e was goin' to do all sorts of things. But the tide seems to run sluggish in them channels."

He paused a moment, almost as if expecting Daphne to say something. Finding that she didn't, he went on again.

"Seems to me kinder wrong," puffing at his pipe, "that blokes like that with the gift o' the gab should be allowed to swindle workin' men like me and get away with it.

"The Official Receiver said it was a swindle and 'e reckoned as 'ow the Police ought to take it up. The Police said it was a swindle, but they fancied it was more in the Public Prosecutor's line than theirs.

"And the Public Prosecutor quite agreed with 'em, but 'e didn't see 'ow 'e could do nothing. So, between 'em, I 'as to go back to work again and if anything 'appens to me, my missus goes to the work'us."

Daphne sat silent for some minutes drawing abstractedly on her blotting pad.

"And I suppose you want us to get your money back for you," she said presently.

"Well, you said in your advertisement that if the police couldn't help, you could—so I reckoned you'd 'ave some way o' handling this bloke—some way of your own."

Daphne frowned. It was not often that she was at a loss how to answer, but she was now. She wanted to tell this old man that his case was an impossible one, that the whole affair had been wiped out by bankruptcy, and Merryweather himself had received an official whitewash.

Yet she found it at the moment a little difficult. She could see that he had the sublimest, most touching faith in herself and the Adjusters. And she was sorry for him.

"Will you give us a month, Captain?" she queried, frowning a little.

He got up from his chair, a broad, delighted smile on his face.

"I knew it," he said, "I told my missus you wasn't frauds!"

"We're not frauds," smiled Daphne, still drawing on her pad. "Yet we don't always succeed, you know."

But this he seemed to take merely as an excess of modesty.

"I'm quite content, Miss," he said. "I'll come up as soon as you're ready for me!"

Long after he had gone out Daphne sat drumming on the table with her fingers.

"As soon as you're ready for me," she murmured for the twentieth time. "Why didn't I have the pluck to tell him straight out that it's hopeless. And yet—"

II

IN a small, plainly furnished room in the heart of the city, four men and a girl sat round an official-looking table in official-looking chairs. At first sight you might have imagined that this was merely an ordinary office, and that the North Western Trading Syndicate — for such was its name on the outside door—was one of those many small companies with which the metropolis abounds. Certainly it looked like the board room of an ordinary office.

There were the usual pens and ink and white blotting pads on the table, and the usual almanacs on the walls, the usual directories on the marble mantelpiece with the usual solid marble clock in the middle of them.

Yet a second glance would have suggested that perhaps after all this was no ordinary office. For the girl who sat at the head of the table, though simply dressed, just as hundreds of other city girls dress, had an air of distinction about her.

As she leaned forward on the mahogany table talking rapidly, you saw at once that though every one of these men was almost twice her age, yet one and all listened to her not only with interest but with deference.

And they, too, impressed you. You saw at a glance that these were no ordinary city men. The big, loose-limbed giant in the gray flannel suit who sat next to the girl, with his clean-shaven face and merry blue eyes, struck you as an open-air man—public-school, 'varsity, athlete all the time. Debrett would have summed him up prosaically thus:

James Plantagenet Ffolliot Trewitter b. 1890. Heir to Earl of Winstonworth.

"Who's Who" would have been a little more flattering, while Arsden would have spread itself upon young Lord Trewitter's athletic record.

Now he took his well-worn brier from between his teeth, and shook his head as he gazed at it.

"I'm afraid we've hit a snag, Daph," he said, "and, what's more, that we'll have to own it. Bound to come sooner or later, dear," as he saw a frown gather on the girl's face.

"It's no use trying to kid ourselves and the public that we're infallible. We're not, and there's an end to it. You said yourself that you didn't see how it was to be done. I'll go further and say that it can't be done—at least not in accordance with our Rules."

Daphne gave a laugh that was half smiling, half angry.

"Oh, bother our Rules!" she exclaimed.

"Ah, but that is what we mustn't do, my dear," chimed in the thin, bronzed-faced, gold-monocled man who was leaning back in his chair with his hands in his pockets. Any pressman in London would have identified him in a moment as Sir Hugh Williamson, world-famous explorer.

"Personally I wouldn't care a row of tusks about goin' and robbin' Merryweather of that thousand quid. And if I did time for it, I wouldn't reckon it a slur on my character. But we decided long ago that we wouldn't do this sort of thing. And I can see, same as Jimmy, that there's little hope of findin' another way.

"Ask Martin, here, for the whole bag of tricks in a legal nutshell. He'll give it to you."

Martin Everest, the famous K. C., sitting at the other end of the table, nodded sympathetically at Daphne.

"I'm afraid they're both right, Daph," he said. "It's one of those cases that will only get us into trouble." He sat forward now, hands clasped, his handsome, clean-cut face definitely serious.

"You're confusing the man you believe to be a criminal with the man who is actually one. A great difference in law, my dear!"

"But the whole world knows Merryweather to be a scoundrel, Martin," urged the girl.

"And is unable to prove it," he answered. "I can tell you, as a lawyer, that no indictment can be found that will touch him over the Lightning Returns Company. That's why I'm going to urge you to drop this case. The men we've handled hitherto have been criminals, or engaged in the commission of a crime.

"By a knowledge of both facts we have been able to trick them out of their ill-got gains—our security being *that they couldn't lift a finger against us without disclosing their own crimes.*"

"Here, unfortunately, we have no such security. We call the Lightning Returns Company a swindle, and the authorities will agree with us. But bankruptcy has closed it and the public prosecutor has tacitly whitewashed its founder. Touch one penny of Merryweather's and he'll appeal to the law—and the law will uphold him!"

He lighted a cigarette in the silence that followed. All eyes were on Daphne. It was obvious that she, as much as the others, realized the truth of what he had said—but she, at any rate, seemed half reluctant to admit it.

"Oh, bother your legal mind, Martin," she said with a little half vexed laugh. "To have to acknowledge on a simple, straightforward case like this, that we're beaten at the start—"

"That's the trouble," put in Alan Sylvester, the actor-manager, stroking his cheery, rubicund face, "Daphne hates having to own that we're beaten and—"

"What I say is, Alan," interrupted the girl, "that we've got no business to sit down and admit it without an effort. You're all probably right in what you say, but until a month's passed and no solution's forthcoming, I *won't* believe it's helpless, so there!

"And even if there is no solution," she went on, as if an afterthought had suddenly struck her, "I don't really see why—"

She stopped suddenly. She saw they were all smiling at her.

"Well, why shouldn't we?" with a little impatient gesture. "We can afford it!"

"Bad precedent, my dear," suggested Everest. "If we start paying clients out of our own pockets—nevertheless, we'll have a go at it—and see what we can do for you."

The girl nodded, but her eyes held a worried look.

"It isn't for myself," she said, "it's that poor dear old man. I hate to think of him, seventy-five years of age—just going to retire—his wife waiting for him—Darby and Joan for the rest of their days. Oh, there *must* be a solution!"

All the same, after the lapse of a week, during which she had thought of a hundred schemes and had rejected each one of them, it began to dawn upon her that what her colleagues had told her was right.

Yet she refused to give in, though by now the thing had well-nigh become an obsession with her. For hours together she would sit in her room puzzling to find a solution, unconsciously drawing figures on her blotting pad—but always the same figures—£10,004 7s 6d.

III

SHE had been doing it one afternoon and was sitting staring abstractedly at the pad before her, covered as it was with those eternal figures which now never seemed to leave her.

"You know," she murmured to herself, "I shall have to stop this. It's getting on my nerves. If I go on like this, that infernal thousand and four pounds, seven and sixpence will drive me into a lunatic—"

And then suddenly she stopped—stopped with a little quick cry wherein amazement, incredulity, hope, delight were all blended.

"Oh!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "I believe—I do believe—"

Her hand flashed out to the electric bell on her table and in a minute Carlton appeared.

"Carlton!" Daphne's eyes were sparkling like an excited schoolgirl's. "Carlton! I can't see any one this afternoon! Not a soul of any sort—no callers—telephones—or anything! Don't come near me for at least an hour. I've got—"

She stopped abruptly, flushing up in pretty confusion. Then, with equally pretty demureness, "I *believe* I've got a brain-wave, Carlton."

"Very good, miss."

As he closed the door and walked back to his table, there was something resembling a twinkle in the stalwart commissionaire's eye.

Yet on the next afternoon the Daphne Wrayne who faced her four colleagues once again in that plainly furnished office whose outer door bore the inscription "The North Western Trading Syndicate," showed not the slightest trace of excitement.

That something unexpected was coming those four men knew well enough—for they knew Daphne. Daphne never summoned them at a moment's notice like this, without good and sufficient reason. Besides, her nicely assumed air of indifference, her airy nonchalance, even though it was amusing them, was certainly not deceiving them.

So, as if by tacit consent, they all waited interestedly for her to begin.

"Well, have any of you found the solution to the Merryweather case?" she queried with a fine assumption of carelessness.

Martin Everest, leaning forward on the table, answered:

"One of us has, Daph."

"Which one?" quickly.

"You, my dear."

Her pretty lips quivered.

"How do you know?"

"We know *you!* Let's have it."

Daphne lighted a cigarette, smiled at them all now. She saw they had guessed.

"Let me put a hypothetical case to you all," she began. "Each one of you try to imagine that you are liable to some one—in equity, not law—for the sum, let's say, of £1,004 7s 6d.

"Each of you is a wealthy man, but an unscrupulous one—and because you know the law can't touch you, you tell your creditor to go to the devil"—she paused fractionally—"same as Horatio Merryweather did!"

The smile had gone from the faces of the four men. She was interesting them now and they were waiting for her to continue.

"Now, supposing," she went on, gaining confidence as she noticed how they were hanging on her words, "that suddenly those figures began to descend on you like autumn leaves. Supposing that wherever you went, whatever you did, you found them confronting you at every turn? Stretch your imagination a little, and suppose—for the sake of argument—that you couldn't get out of bed in the morning—couldn't come down to breakfast—couldn't go to your office, your club—couldn't open a letter, a book, a newspaper—couldn't move hand or foot from morning till night without those hideous figures rising up from somewhere and confronting you!

"And to add to the torture of it all, though you knew well enough who was engineering it, yet so cleverly was it done that you hadn't a hope of proving it. What would you, wealthy men to whom a thousand pounds was nothing, do in order to rid yourselves of that insidious torture that was well-nigh driving you crazy—as it would drive you crazy if properly carried out? Wouldn't you pay—and be darned glad to be quit of it all?"

At the sheer, undisguised admiration that was on the faces of her four colleagues she flushed up in obvious delight.

"Well," she said smiling, "is it any good?"

"By Heavens, Daph," exclaimed Trewitter, "it's marvelous—it's absolutely *it!*"

"And the law can't touch us," murmured Everest.

"Gee, but we'll give him hell!" chuckled Williamson.

"How on earth did you hit it, dear?" queried Sylvester."

But the girl shook her head.

"I don't think I did, Alan, it just hit me. You see, I'd got to the stage where those figures had become such a nightmare to me that I was really prepared to put down a thousand pounds out of my pocket in order to get rid of them. To apply the idea to Merryweather was a natural transition, I fancy!"

Martin Everest lay back in his chair, eyes on the ceiling, chuckling broadly.

"It was Schopenhauer who said," he remarked, "that when in doubt consult a woman. She invariably sees what lies in front of her nose, while a man misses it because he is looking ten miles beyond. We've all been busy constructing the most elaborate and ingenious financial schemes to— Daph, I congratulate you! Once more you've put us right."

"Just a bit of luck, Martin. Still, I knew you'd jump at it, and in order not to waste any time I've made a start."

"How?"

"I went straight up and saw Horatio."

Surprise now—obvious surprise on every face. Almost a shade of anxiety, too, as they gazed at her.

"Whatever for, Daph?" asked Trewitter.

"It seemed to me that it was the first thing to be done." She leaned forward on the table, slim hands clasped. A minute before she had been a laughing, blushing little girl—now she was a serious-eyed young woman who was almost laying down the law to these four men.

"In order that whatever we do shall

carry real weight with Merryweather," she said, "it is necessary to fix those figures in his brain. Everything we do from now onward is going to haunt him a million times more if he knows who is engineering this and why it is done."

"Daphne's right there," nodded Sylvester. "If you're warned of something that's going to happen, it impresses you far more when it *does* happen than if you could assign no reason for it. That was your idea, wasn't it, Daph?"

"Exactly, Alan. Therefore I got an interview with him and told him straight out who I was and why I had come."

"And what did he say?"

"What I expected he'd say. I could see that he wanted to tell me that I was a silly little girl; first, for coming up at all and putting my cards so plainly on the table; and, secondly, for being stupid enough to imagine that merely at my request he would dream of paying Captain Marriner his thousand and four pounds, seven and sixpence.

"However, being a smooth, suave sort of a beast, who treats anything in the way of a pretty girl with a kind of good-natured tolerance, he merely said: 'I'm afraid you're a bit out of your depth, little lady. I admire your nerve, but there's nothing doing.'"

"And what did you say?"

"Oh, I smiled sweetly at him and told him that there would be a good deal doing—though I'd come up to offer him the easiest way, despite the fact that I never expected he'd be wise enough to accept it."

"You were askin' for it, Daph," murmured Williamson.

"Deliberately!" retorted the girl. "I wanted to make him angry and fix the whole thing in his brain. And what's more, I did. He turned nasty then—said that the adjusters thought themselves damn clever, but they warn't as clever as they thought they were.

"I merely smiled and said that I hoped to be able to show him that they were far cleverer than he'd ever imagined. And that finished the interview. Incidentally, he's appearing at Bow Street to-morrow and we must get busy."

"What's he up for this time, Daph?"

A curious little smile played round the corners of the girl's mouth.

"The police have summoned him," she said, "for having a false number on the back of his Rolls. The defense will be that he knew nothing about it—but I'm afraid the magistrate will fine him all the same."

In the little pause that followed, the four men exchanged glances. Then Martin Everest spoke:

"Can you—by any chance, Daph—tell us what was—the false number?" he asked.

Daphne looked up, hazel eyes twinkling mischievously.

"Sure thing, Martin. It was 1004—7—6. Rayte, my chauffeur, and I did it together. His car was drawn up in the yard in front of mine. I'd brought a number plate with me—specially made. It was quite easy."

IV

HORATIO MERRYWEATHER was in a furious temper. He came down the steps of Bow Street police court growling and swearing under his breath, for the magistrate had fined him five guineas and costs.

"Curse that infernal girl," he muttered. "If only I could prove—"

"Pyper, guv-nor? All the winners."

He took it mechanically from the seedy newsvendor with the tattered bowler and threw him a copper. At the curb stood his offending car, with the chauffeur at the open door.

"The Century," snapped Merryweather.

"Very good, sir."

The financier lighted a cigar and lay back on the cushions, smoking moodily. Then he unfolded his paper, but as he did so he uttered a fierce imprecation. Right across the center page were branded in thick, black, glowing type the figures 1004—7—6.

He snatched at the speaking tube and the car slid to the pavement.

"Back to Bow Street at once!" he shouted, as the chauffeur opened the door.

So furious was he when he alighted that he could hardly speak. All the same, standing there on the pavement, a sense of his

own helplessness came to him as he glanced up and down and round about, seeing not a sign of the individual who had sold him the paper. To complain to the police would be to have to make explanations. And to have to do that—

"Oh, drive me back to the club," he flung out, and got into his car again. Then suddenly: "Did you see the man who sold me my paper?" he demanded.

"Me, sir? No, sir. Did you wish—"

"Oh, get on!" snapped his master furiously.

In the reading room of his club, after two stiff brandies and sodas, his courage began to filter back once more. After all, he was safe here. Out in the street, perhaps, he told himself—but not in here in one of the biggest and most expensive clubs in London!

All the same, as he walked upstairs to the billiard room he found himself glancing suspiciously at every man he met.

"Hello, Merryweather!" exclaimed a well known politician, as he entered the room.

"Here's a victim for you—Williamson!" to a man who was knocking the balls about carelessly. "Here's an opponent who'll make you run."

The other straightened himself up, adjusting his gold-rimmed monocle.

"Delighted, I'm sure," he said.

Deep in the game the financier soon forgot his disturbing thoughts. He was a keen and skilled billiard player, and his opponent was worthy of his steel. Several men drifted in and settled down to watch.

"What Williamson's this?" queried Merryweather in an undertone to one of his friends, while his opponent was building up a break. "I know him by sight."

"Sir Hugh Williamson, the explorer. Devilish good chap, too."

"Seems it."

The game came to an end with Merryweather the winner.

"Jolly good game, Sir Hugh. Like another?"

"Mustn't now. Another time—certainly."

"Have a drink?"

"Many thanks."

Sir Hugh Williamson, still in his shirt sleeves, dropped into a chair by the side of two or three other men. Merryweather walked across the room, took his cigar case from his coat, which was hanging on the rack—came back to the table.

"Cigar, Sir Hugh?"

"You're very kind."

Merryweather clicked open the case, but as he did so he leaped back as if he had been shot. And simultaneously a big white card fluttered out on to the floor.

The four men had seen it, they couldn't help seeing it, but it was Merryweather at whom they were staring now. For Merryweather was livid with rage, and tearing at his collar literally as if he was choking.

Williamson was the first to break that amazed silence. There was grave anxiety in his voice.

"Are you ill, Merryweather?"

It seemed to restore the financier. With a desperate effort he appeared partially to regain his composure.

"N-n-no—it's n-nothing," he muttered. "I—I—I'll be back in a minute."

He made hurriedly for the door, and they noticed that he was mopping at his face with his handkerchief.

"He's left that card," said one of the men after an uneasy pause.

"Ask me," answered another, "and I think he was scared to touch it."

"Hardly wise to leave it there, is it?" suggested Williamson, as he bent forward and picked it up. The others leaned over eagerly as he turned it. On it was printed in big letters:

1004—7—6

V

A WEEK had elapsed. It was rumored at the clubs that something was seriously wrong with Horatio Merryweather, the big financier.

Usually a loud-voiced, thoroughly self-satisfied man with a big laugh and a confident manner, he had all in a week become a mere shadow of his former self—a man who seemed to be on wires, who was always glancing over his shoulder as if in fear of something—moody, irritable, snappish.

And nobody could find out why it was. All that his office could have told you was

that he was making the lives of each one of his clerks a burden—always demanding to know who had been in his room—who had been touching his papers, his inkstand, his books, his blotting pad. A thousand questions of that kind, they said—every day! And never any sort of explanation!

And at all his clubs they could have told a similar tale.

Only he himself knew that now, after six days of this, he was almost becoming insane. Only he knew how every moment of his life had suddenly become a nerve-racking, devastating torture. From the moment he left his house in the morning—his house was the only place where nothing ever happened—the spectre of 1004—7—6 gave him no rest.

It rose up before him at every twist and turn. It came in letters, in harmless-looking printed circulars, in registered envelopes, in telegrams. It was left for him in a thousand forms at his clubs by messenger boys, by uniformed commissionaires, by clergymen, clerks—even women. Telephone messages would come while he was at his lunch, apparently bona fide telephone messages from well-known business firms who would start, when he took the phone, by obviously genuine business discussions to which he would listen interestedly and intently.

And then suddenly, after keeping him there for a full ten minutes:

"What we really want, Mr. Merryweather, is—one thousand and four pounds, seven and six please!"

Yet such was the obstinacy of the man that he was still refusing to give in. That the adjusters were doing it he knew full well, but he was preferring to face the endless tortures which he was undergoing, rather than admit defeat to that hazel-eyed girl who had smiled so serenely at him in his office.

Yet he knew well enough that each day was getting worse than its predecessor. Today, it was true, he had had a respite. Yet no real respite, before the haunting tension was always upon him again—the perpetual dread that gave him no rest.

And then at twelve o'clock a clerk had brought him in a message—Merryweather refused to go near the telephone now—that Lord Ammington wanted him to come and lunch at the Ritz at one-thirty.

The financier hesitated a few moments. He had another luncheon party already fixed—a luncheon party *à deux*, that he didn't want to miss.

But Lord Ammington was rather an important personage to him just now. He was in negotiation with him over a very big deal. This might perhaps clinch the whole matter.

"Tell Lord Ammington I'll be there," he said curtly.

One hour and a half later, as he sat in the lounge of the Ritz, a page approached him with a note. Merryweather's terrors swarmed back in a moment, but one glance at the envelope reassured him.

He knew Lord Ammington's handwriting, and took the letter with a sigh of relief, and slit it open.

A week ago he would have turned the air blue with fierce fury and bitter invective. He would have withered the page boy, singed the hall porter, consigned the whole staff to regions unnameable.

But now he never said one word. He just stood gazing stupidly at the sheet of paper he held in his hand—Lord Ammington's note paper, Lord Ammington's crest. And scrawled across it in a strange hand:

1004—7—6

He fell heavily into a chair.

"It's—it's—all—right," he said thickly to the boy.

When he left the restaurant that afternoon one or two people commented on the fact that he seemed to have been drinking heavily.

That night Horatio Merryweather awoke suddenly with a start, and the uneasy consciousness on him that he was not alone in his room.

He had a vague idea that there had been a loud report, and he presently became alive to the fact that he could hear a faint whirring noise over by the window.

He raised himself gently on his elbow. Yes, he could hear it distinctly now—and it sounded like some perfect piece of

machinery, growing louder, too, every minute!

He felt the cold, clammy perspiration breaking out over him now as he lay there striving to pierce that black darkness. A hundred sinister thoughts crowded into his mind.

Supposing that this was the last desperate move of the adjusters? Supposing that they had managed to secrete a bomb in his flat, and that in a minute!

He longed to move, to cry out for help, to put out his hand and switch on the light —yet so great was the blind, unreasoning terror on him that he was powerless to stir —terror-stricken at what the light might disclose.

He felt beads of perspiration running down his face, but he couldn't move from sheer fright. The bedclothes seemed like a ton weight. And still that soft purring noise, like some great animal, seemed to be coming ever nearer.

And then suddenly he screamed, screamed as a man screams just before his nerves, worked to breaking point, finally snap. For a tiny little beam of light had suddenly shot up from nowhere in the darkness and was now dancing about in the air in front of him, backward and forward like a mad thing.

Another sprang up and joined it—two of them—three of them—four of them—five of them—six of them!

Horror! They were figures, real figures, shining out in that inky darkness, dancing, swaying, this way and that—backward, forward, sideways!

They were becoming steadier now—almost grouping themselves together—he could read them. There was a one—two noughts—there was a four—

Merryweather was clutching the bedclothes in an ecstasy of terror, perspiration streaming from him. He was going mad—he must be mad! It couldn't possibly be real, it—

And then he screamed again, for suddenly a luminous face, grinning terribly, had shot up and joined those dancing figures. It had a pointed beard and a sailor's peaked cap.

Merryweather went on screaming.

When his servants eventually broke into his room they found him huddled up on the bed in a dead faint.

VI

DAPHNE WRAYNE dropped into a chair in the secluded corner of the palm-shaded conservatory and Lord Trewitter sat down beside her.

"Give me a cigarette, Jimmy, and tell me all the news. I'm simply dying to hear it."

"Only one dance the whole evening," pretending to grumble, "and I've got to talk shop."

"Oh, Jimmy!"

There was a soft note of reproach in her voice as she gave a quick glance round—moved nearer to him. Then:

"There's—there's—no one about—darling!"

He bent down quickly.

As a couple came into the conservatory Daphne was fanning herself vigorously. Lord Trewitter was lighting his cigarette, talking calmly, conversationally, in little seemingly disconnected sentences with a pause between each one.

"It's all been so absurdly easy, Daph—they've all entered into it like schoolboys. Our friend's had it for breakfast, lunch, tea and supper—served hot, too!"

He chuckled softly and went on:

"We've spared no expense—sent him letters—specially printed note paper, stamped outside and in, with pukka headings—companies he deals with—all apparently genuine business on the first page. Then—he turns over and finds—the fateful numbers!

"Not only in letters, though—telegrams, registered packets, postcards, express delivery—to his clubs, restaurants, friends' houses where he's dined. We detailed off two men to shadow him and keep in touch with us. All so easy, my dear—like picking pennies out of a blind man's tin!"

He lighted another cigarette—still chuckling.

"And is he getting worried, Jim?" asked the girl.

"Worried, darling? Why he's plumb crazy! You see he's never had a moment's

respite. The afternoon he came out of Bow Street, Alan, as a disreputable old paper-seller, was waiting for him—sold him a paper—having previously stamped the jolly old number across the middle page.

"Alan knows that it clicked," laughing softly, "because his Highness was back again in five minutes and Alan only just got away without being seen."

"Oh, go on—I'm loving it," murmured the girl eagerly.

"Hugh was waiting for him at the Century Club," went on Trewitter, "took him on at billiards and slipped a card into his cigar case. And then there *was* a shindy! And so on and so forth—we've got him into the condition now that he refuses to answer the telephone—and if they bring him up a note he wants to know its life's history before he'll even touch it.

"He can't last much longer—he's nearly at the end of his tether."

"What makes you say that, Jim?"

"This morning's happenings," lowering his voice. "I'd dropped into Jerry Ammington's flat—Jerry mentioned he was on a big deal with Horatio. Too good to miss, I thought—pinched a sheet of Jerry's note paper—rung our friend up to come and lunch at the Ritz.

"When he turned up he received a note—I was there and saw it. It was as good as a play. Suspicion, fear, everything, as the boy comes up—you could see it! Then relief as he examined the envelope—I can forge Jerry's hand wonderfully," with a grin, "apart from the crest being outside. Then he opened it, and there's the dear old number again! He couldn't even scream, my dear. He just collapsed."

"I wonder how long he'll stand it?" mused the girl. "I should fancy, Jim, that he's a lineal descendant of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. There'll be plenty of 'won't let the people go,' yet."

"Maybe, darling, but I'll take six to four all the same that he's ringing you up for an appointment within twenty-four hours. Listen! Martin's been to his house to-night—electric light man, or one of those things—and left a small box behind his dressing-table where it's a hundred to one against its being found."

"What's in it?" queried Daphne.

"Something right off the ice. A clockwork contraption—set for two o'clock—Horatio gets home early these days—finds it safer," with a chuckle.

"At two o'clock the box opens with a bang, which is to wake him up and tell him the curtain's going up. Then up jump all the dear old figures on the ends of wires and do a sort of fox-trot in the air—and a nice little portrait of Captain Marriner! And as they're all done with luminous paint and our young friend's been drinking a bit lately, I fancy he'll have a sticky quarter of an hour."

Daphne rippled with laughter as she got up from her chair and shook out her skirts daintily. Then, as she put her hand lightly on Lord Trewitter's arm:

"Oh, Jimmy, if only I could hug you," she whispered, "just to tell you what I think of you all!"

A couple approached them at that moment. Lord Trewitter's face was devoid of expression.

"Not a bad idea at all," he said languidly.

As they strolled on together, the girl who had passed turned to her companion.

"That's 'Jimmy' Trewitter, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied with a careless laugh. "He and Daphne Wrayne used to be a bit thick, but since the adjusters started, she's got no time for him."

VII

CARLTON, the stalwart commissionaire, came into Daphne Wrayne's room the next morning, closing the door quietly.

"Mr. Merryweather to see you, Miss—but I don't like the look of him."

A twinkle of merriment came into the girl's eyes.

"Quite all right, Carlton—really."

"Then you'll see him, Miss?" still a little dubious.

"I've been expecting him every day, Carlton," she said with a sweet smile.

A moment later the commissionaire showed him in.

"Mr. Merryweather, Miss."

Daphne looked up a little languidly from her writing.

"Sit down, Mr. Merryweather," she said.

But he made no move—just stood there watching her, his fury growing every minute. For though fear and desperation had brought him there, he was beginning once more to harden his heart.

It infuriated him beyond measure to think that he, Horatio Merryweather, should have to humble himself to this girl who was calmly writing while he stood waiting!

"I want to know when this infernal business is going to cease!" he barked out.

Daphne Wrayne laid down her pen and lifting her eyes surveyed him as a puppy surveys a beetle. Then she stretched out her hand, took a cigarette from the silver box on the table, lighted it and, leaning back in her chair, blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling.

"Mr. Merryweather," she said and there was a dangerous glint in the eyes that she fixed on his, "I don't particularly wish to see you, though it would seem that you wish to see me. But please understand once and for all that unless you behave yourself properly I shall order my commissionaire to remove you."

This time he stared at her in sheer amazement. The girl who had come to his office had been a quiet, smiling, seemingly rather hesitating girl, who to all intents and purposes had been anxious to conciliate him. Now he was faced by a young woman who might almost have been a queen about to pass sentence on a rebel. Then, as he made no answer, she went on:

"What is it you want with me?"

His eyes blazed up anew at that. After all he had been through during the past week, and now to be asked by this slip of a girl—

"Oh, don't come the innocent on me!" he retorted roughly, "because it won't wash. What I want to know is—"

He stopped abruptly, for one slim hand shot out and was poised over the electric bell on her table.

"If I ring my bell," she said, and her voice was like steel, "this interview comes to an end. And you will have no chance of another—for a month! Get that clearly into your head, Mr. Merryweather."

He would have given half his fortune to defy her, but the finger that hung over the bell never trembled.

"I should like to discuss things with you," he said sullenly.

She inclined her head ever so slightly, and motioned him to a chair.

"You—you—came to me a week ago," he began, moistening his dry lips, "about —about a certain—Captain Marriner."

"I did. And I offered you certain terms which you laughed at. If you are prepared to listen to them now—"

"But it's perfectly preposterous," angrily, "I'll give you a check for five hundred pounds—"

"We'll end this interview," she said and reached out once more for the bell.

"Stop! I'll write you a check in full. But it's a swindle all the same."

"I should be a little careful," she answered, her eyes narrowing; "if I have any more of your impertinence you'll be sorry for it."

"Who shall I make the check out to?" sullenly.

"To Miss Daphne Wrayne."

He wrote it out without another word, tore it out viciously with a rasping sound, flung it on the table. Yet even then the arrogance of him couldn't resist one final attempt at bluff.

"I suppose it hasn't occurred to you," he snapped, "that if I chose to do so I could stop that check and run you in for blackmail?"

Daphne gazed at him—gazed at him with that faint smile of compassion with which one regards a puling infant. Then, with the smile deepening, she tilted back her chair and with studied carelessness crossed one slender silk-clad leg over the other—a perfect picture of lovely, insolent, contemptuous girlhood.

Then she held out the check to him.

"I suppose it hasn't occurred to *you*," she said, "that we haven't really started on you yet? But if you want your check back, we'd love to show you—"

But Horatio Merryweather had grabbed his hat and fled.

His derby had been dented and his overcoat split from its pockets

THREE MEN IN GRAY

By H. W. Corley

ON THE REAR FENCE WAS THE MARK OF A BLOODY HAND, AS IF THE PERPETRATOR OF THE DEED HAD LEANED BACK TO VIEW HIS WORK WITH SATISFACTION

A Story of Fact

DR. WALTER WILKINS had led a blameless life up to the time the three men in gray walked into his house and lay in wait to attack him.

He looked forward to a comfortable old age; for if his wife died before him, it seemed certain, so devoted was she, that he would benefit by her will. And if she outlived him there was an equal certainty that her loving devotion would continue.

The two were looked upon as an exemplary pair, a marriage which, in its twilight, was as full of romance and love as at its dawn. Dr. Wilkins was not well at sixty-seven, he suffered a chronic ailment of the digestive system, to which his wife administered with care and concern.

He needed his wife, that was plain from many an angle—and had William J. Burns not got into the case the crime of her death would have been set down probably as the work of the three mysterious men in gray.

Dr. Wilkins had been married twice earlier in life; it was Mrs. Wilkins's second marriage. They lived in New York in a large house in Sixty-Fifth Street, but they preferred the smaller summer home in Long Beach, and frequently spent the winter months there as well, leaving the town house, which was partly let to roomers, in the care of their housekeeper.

After awhile, however, Dr. Wilkins began asking these roomers to find other accommodations, giving the excuse that he did not care to have cooking done in his rooms.

But in February, 1919, the Wilkinses were living at Long Beach and journeying back and forth into town for dinner, or for the theater sometimes twice or thrice a week.

They spent this particular week-end in the deserted Sixty-Fifth Street house, and on the 27th of February, Sunday, started back to the beach by the train which would allow them to reach Long Beach at 9.06.

It was not far to their home in Olive Street, the air was mild for February, and they walked, thinking the stroll might do them good.

"I Want What You Have"

At about ten o'clock a frantic ringing on the bell of one of their neighbors, Max Mayer, a glove manufacturer, showed Dr. Wilkins in great dishevelment and much agitation, standing on the porch. His derby hat had been dented and broken, his overcoat slit from its pocket. Mr. Mayer rather wondered why, if he had been beaten, as all signs indicated, there were no marks on his face or head.

And it appeared that Dr. Wilkins had been beaten.

By the mysterious three men in gray!

"Just as we reached the house one of these men attacked me and knocked me down," he gasped as he confronted Mr. Mayer in the doorway. "I called to my wife to get help; then the other two rushed after her and felled her. She is lying in a pool of blood. For God's sake get help!"

But it happened that Mr. Mayer had no phone, as Dr. Wilkins, in any other calmer moment would have recalled. So he hurried back with the doctor to Mrs. Wilkins, while the stricken man went to another house, that of Cassius Coleman, justice of peace, to summon police aid and to notify the hospital.

The unconscious woman, with her skull fractured and her face pitifully bruised, was taken to the Nassau Hotel, which had recently been made over into a hospital for soldiers. Then the doctor told his story.

"As I walked in the gate I observed that the vestibule door was open, and I told my wife to stay behind while I investigated.

"The inner door, however, was closed; I opened this with my key. I stepped in and at once a tall man in gray rushed at me and beat me over the head with a blunt instrument. The only thing which saved me from a cracked skull was my derby, which remained on.

"'I've a gun here,' the man told me, 'but I am not going to shoot. I want what you have on you.'"

Then, as Dr. Wilkins handed him his wallet, stickpin, watch and chain, the robber sent his companions outside to attend to Mrs. Wilkins, "to stop her infernal noise," Dr. Wilkins quoted them.

She had been hit over the head with a small hammer, which lay beside the dying woman when she was found.

The house looked as if the three men in gray, who had of course disappeared, had been in it for hours. There were cigarette ashes, soiled dishes on the table, places set for three, food lying about. On the buffet was a half empty brandy bottle with three glasses standing near. And, funniest of all, a remarkably well filled purse close beside it!

"Odd they dealt with you so much more gently than with your wife," one of the police detectives remarked after a little.

Mrs. Wilkins Dies

"It *is* odd," agreed the doctor, but, after all, it was an oddity in his favor, and he could not take offense at the slight.

"Odd that the robbers overlooked this purse," the detective continued, holding it up.

"It is *very* odd."

Now the Wilkinses had two dogs, and the police asked what had become of them. They searched and found that one had been rather brutally stabbed, but the other, closed up in the cellar, set up a fine how-do-do when he saw his master.

Dr. Wilkins, happy that the second pet had escaped the fate of the first, who, though not dead, was dying, took the dog out for a walk before following his wife to the hospital. And when he arrived, he found that she was dead.

"She kept putting her hands over her face and moaning, 'Don't kill me! Don't kill me!'" the hotel keeper told Dr. Wil-

kins as he returned to the house after his sad vigil.

A detective spent the night at the house, and the doctor insisted that he share the same room. Neither slept for the moaning of the wounded dog, and the doctor's own restlessness and nervousness further prevented any tranquillity in the chamber.

When morning came Dr. Wilkins stopped suddenly in his dressing, buried his head in his arms and cried for nearly twenty minutes.

"I have lost my best friend," he sobbed, controlling himself with difficulty.

The Unwitnessed Will

There were no clews save his own description—the three men had been young and had worn gray caps. Just how they had escaped so completely remained a mystery.

Two women living near-by insisted that they had heard the sounds of a departing automobile, yet the police proved to their entire satisfaction that no such auto had crossed the bridge leading from the island to the long road through the marshes.

Nor had the robbers departed by boat—none had heard the sound of a motor, and the channel gave up no evidence in the way of a drifting craft which the three might have used to reach the mainland and then abandoned.

The police decided that the men had a safe rendezvous in the heart of town from which they operated. The empty house near the Wilkins home was suspected, and Max Mayer's young niece aided this theory when she recalled the evening of the tragedy.

"When Uncle Max was talking to the doctor at the door," she told them, "I was in my room undressing for bed. I saw lights wafting up and down stairs in that empty house across the way, lights which disappeared when Dr. Wilkins and Uncle Max rushed back to the scene of the murder."

On the fence in the rear of the house was the mark of a bloody hand as if the perpetrator of the deed leaned back to view his work with satisfaction, grasping the fence to give himself support after the ardor of his labors.

There were finger-prints on the brandy bottles and on the glasses on the buffet. There were finger-prints on the hammer with which Mrs. Wilkins had been struck.

The police scattered copies of the finger-prints throughout the country for comparison with those of known criminals, but to no purpose. They did not resemble any in the files of the police elsewhere or here.

Mrs. Wilkins, whose estate bordered on sixty-five thousand dollars, left a will which was not, after all, in her devoted husband's favor, but divided her effects among several charitable institutions. This had been made in 1903, before she had married Dr. Wilkins, and it was thought at first that she had merely neglected remaking the will to suit her present situation.

And then a diligent search disclosed a second will, made in Dr. Wilkins's favor and quite recently, too, but unwitnessed and therefore invalid.

"Strange that she did not make this legal," some one said who understood the love Mrs. Wilkins bore the doctor.

The Piece of Newspaper

"It *is* strange," the doctor said, but he would say nothing further, as if unwilling to cast even this small reflection on the deceased.

He seemed willing enough, however, to discuss all details of the tragedy with any one who suggested it. Detectives, spurred on by the disgust of Long Beach in general, repeatedly tried to solve this mystery, in which they made no headway at all, and consulted Dr. Wilkins constantly.

Newspaper men haunted the place, eagerly searching for some valuable clew overlooked by the authorities. And then they began to notice several things. Dr. Wilkins, although he made no show of unwillingness in discussions, frequently, little by little, began to change his tale.

His wife was struck down with a blunt instrument, a lead pipe, a hammer, a bludgeon, a blackjack, according to varying reports. Whatever it had been, it was, at any rate, wrapped in a piece of newspaper which concealed it, a newspaper which was carefully preserved as Exhibit A, gruesomely stained with the dead woman's blood.

Then an enterprising young reporter discovered another bit of that very newspaper in the pocket of the suit the doctor had worn that fatal night! Detectives and newspaper men had searched the house several times, when, quite unaccountably, a later unexpected search brought to light the very jewelry the doctor reported stolen—the watch in the springs of a couch, the loveknot pin in the lining of an overcoat on a hidden closet shelf, and the wallet, containing money, beneath the mattress in the dog kennel!

The Doctor Disappears

In the attic they found the typewriter on which the second will had been made—and it was proved that Mrs. Wilkins could not operate such a machine.

The town house gave up a piece of lead pipe stuffed with some more of the incriminating paper, and three knives blotched with what proved to be dog's blood!

Dr. Wilkins had, further, sent a gray suit with green and white penciled stripes to be cleaned of blood spots shortly after the tragedy.

"I didn't think anything of that," the tailor affirmed. "Doctors are always more or less spotted with blood. But it was his suit all right."

And though dozens of people could swear that they had seen him wear it, Dr. Wilkins committed the grave error of insisting that the suit was not his. Circumstantial evidence closed about him.

He engaged a lawyer. And then William J. Burns got into the case.

The first thing Burns did was to finger-print Wilkins. He was not arrested as a suspect, but this was done, Burns said, as a matter of form. And they found that the finger-prints on the hammer with which Mrs. Wilkins had been killed were those of her own husband.

"I picked up the hammer, yes," the doctor admitted. "I have told you that."

"You told us that you handled it lightly," Burns replied. "These prints are the sort made by grasping very firmly indeed."

Still there was no arrest, but there were several rather warm talks between the doctor and his attorney, who objected to his client's affable willingness to converse on his affairs so readily.

"Talk too much and you will hang yourself," he told the bereaved man exasperatedly, when he believed himself out of earshot of the reporters.

The Burns bill for March was just twelve hundred and fifty-six dollars seventy-four cents, which paid for several things. First he called attention to the fact that the doctor's hat was spattered with blood *underneath* its brim; second that though he spoke of being beaten over the head and felled to earth, he bore no signs of such rough handling other than torn clothes; and, lastly, that when he entered the house he carefully, though guessing the presence of robbers, shut the vestibule door and thus shut out any possible help.

"Strange," said Burns to the district attorney as he pointed these things out. "Damned queer!" was the reply.

Dr. Wilkins, too, began thinking how queer it was. But he had not been arrested. And on March 18 he committed his worst if not initial mistake—he disappeared.

Surrender at Last

That Sunday morning he stood in a telephone booth in the Long Island station and phoned his lawyer, who asked him to call at his house.

"I'll leave on the eleven thirteen train," Wilkins promised. But he failed to do so. Instead he went to Baltimore, shaved his beard and registered under another name at a quiet hotel.

He was held as a fugitive from justice pending arrest by the Nassau County authorities.

No one knew where he had gone—every avenue of escape was covered, his bank the railroads and steamship lines. And his daughter by another marriage also was watched.

Still he was not found.

"Has he committed suicide?" people began to inquire.

The district attorney snorted. "Not he," was his cryptic reply:

And then, just as he had been last heard from in a phone booth, so was he found within one, not a stone's throw from the first booth from which he had talked to his lawyer before he disappeared.

Arriving in the Pennsylvania Station, he called the authorities, but happened to be arrested as he stepped from a telephone booth, and as detectives met him a look of almost relief spread over his shaven countenance.

"I had just then given myself up," he said.

Antics in the Jury Room

He did not know, he told them, just why he had run away. He knew that he was suspected, although he had been treated considerately and had not been arrested. But the idea of arrest was odious; it preyed upon his mind. Well, here he was back again. He would soon prove that he was not guilty of this crime.

In his cell, though he had been composed when examined, he paced the floor and sobbed aloud.

It took seven days to get a jury, while the doctor became more and more restless and nervous. On the stand he crossed and recrossed his legs, shuffled about, but stuck in the main to his story.

He loved his wife, he would not harm a hair of her head. And he pointed out, what could her death profit him in the face of the unwitnessed will?

The State, however, worked on the theory that either the doctor was not aware that it would be invalid without witnesses or else that he had forgotten that this detail had not been attended to in full.

Many people testified that his relations with his wife were cordial and loving. His lawyer pointed out the unmistakable fact of other robberies in Long Beach that night and on the nights previous to Mrs. Wilkins's death. But the defense lost ground as it proceeded. Step by step the built up story was attacked, disproved, and substituted for sounder theories which damned the doctor, who did little to aid himself on the stand.

At sixty-seven he made a pitiable figure fighting in his own defense. He touched the sympathies of his jury to whom the judge said: "Don't be swayed by sentimentality. A man not too old to commit a crime is not too old to suffer for it."

He told the jury that it was not necessary for them to consider a motive if the evidence seemed to them to be conclusive of guilt.

On June 26 at five eighteen the jury retired. They were placed in a room directly over that occupied by the doctor and his guard through the tedious hours of waiting. It was a high paneled room with windows flung open to the warm, balmy air.

"I never heard such a riot," the guards told Dr. Wilkins, as those open windows gave forth the sounds from the room. The jury was shouting, jumping about and, it seemed, flinging its members onto the floor, against walls and generally engaging in rather unusual activities.

"Do they always act that way?" Dr. Wilkins asked.

The guard laughed.

"I bet there is a couple of black eyes already," he said.

The Smuggled Rope

The conduct in the jury room was, it appears, to say the least, a bit unseemly. Immediately upon filing into the court room, a very small, determined and apparently provoked little man asked the judge if he might report an incident in the jury room.

The judge silenced him. "I am not interested in anything which went on in that room," he remarked. "You bring your verdict to me; not your complaints."

The verdict was "Guilty," but with a strong recommendation to mercy because of the age of the convicted man.

The judge turned to them, far more in sorrow than in anger.

"It pains me that I cannot comply with your request for mercy," he said, "but first degree murder carries with it an automatic penalty of death. The only clemency in this case can be obtained from the Governor."

Dr. Wilkins was stunned and sat down heavily after hearing the verdict. But he stood straight later as he answered the

necessary questions, then, with an unfaltering step, left the court room.

" My faith in his innocence is unshaken," his lawyer said in a statement. " The jury was browbeaten. I intend to call singly on every man there and find out just what undue pressure was brought to bear."

But this act was unnecessary. Dr. Wilkins took matters into his own hands. First he made a statement.

" I am absolutely innocent of this crime," he wrote. " There was never anything but love in our house. I would not harm a hair of my wife's head. The jury could not have understood the law when they rendered the verdict with recommendation to mercy. I am stunned."

But for a man in his desperate situation, the guards remarked, he was in an unusually happy frame of mind. He sat in his cell awaiting sentence, reading and writing. Guards were doubled; every possible article which might do him harm, belt buckle, even lead pencils were taken from him; yet so cheerful was he that this seemed absurd.

The guards passing his cell every ten minutes did not, however, glance over his shoulder one evening as he sat writing three notes in plain view.

" I am going to be my own executioner," he confided in a letter to his attorney.

" By so doing it will save myself from being taken across the State, and I want to save the judge from looking me in the eye and saying that I had a fair trial."

He wrote a letter to the sheriff inclosing fifty dollars and asking that he be cremated.

Then he wrote a third letter giving instructions for his cats and dog.

At twenty minutes to eight the guard, as was his wont, passed the doorway. The doctor looked up and said something pleasant about the cooling shower which they had just enjoyed.

The cell door was open and the bathroom to which the prisoner might proceed without interference lay a few feet from the cell.

With catlike steps the doctor hastened within and closed the door. Ten minutes later the guard rushed in. There was the old man, hanging by a rope tossed over the waterpipe, his feet but an inch or so off the floor, his neck broken, his body cooling. He was quite beyond help.

For so old a man Dr. Wilkins had worked expertly and without bungling. Some one had smuggled him a rope, which he had tied together at each end, flung over the pipe, slipped into a noose which, by standing on the waste can, he had fitted about his neck. He must have jumped off the can with much force, for although the drop was hardly two feet his neck had been broken instantly.

Fifteen minutes later he was officially pronounced dead.

" I rather anticipated this," his lawyer said in a statement; " the doctor, in all events, had not long to live; and with death so near at hand in any case he did not wish to die under a cloud."

Who smuggled the rope inside the jail to Dr. Wilkins?

That was the question which was agitated for some time in the daily press, but the culprit was never found.

" This is the jail," one of the papers wrote, " in which four years earlier Erich Meunter committed suicide in a similar fashion.

" What is there about this jail which facilitates these suicides? Are there no men to watch the prisoners and what sort of men are they? It is time a searching investigation is made!"

The rope would have made a bulky parcel. Who smuggled it in? And who was failing to watch while he also tore a sheet into ropes and tied them end to end.

A writer of that day commented thus on the guilty man: " Dr. Wilkins, when in command of himself, was a cool and audacious criminal. There were times, however, when he lost his head, such as when he shaved and disguised himself and disappeared. He quickly repaired that error in returning to give himself up, it is true, and by remaining on the whole bold and cool.

" It *was* an error, nevertheless, and it was that error alone which made it impossible for the jury, no matter how much dust was thrown into its eyes, to acquit him."

"Come out with me or I'll drop you where you stand!"

WHAT'S THE LAW AMONG FRIENDS?

By Louis Weadock

FROM OUT OF THE YEARS CAME ADMIRAL FARRAGUT'S FAMOUS WORDS, JUST AS HE HAD HEARD HIS FATHER QUOTE THEM: "DAMN THE TORPEDOES! GO AHEAD!"

JUST as the courthouse clock in the cow town of Merida City finished tolling the hour of midnight, John Barrett, the new prosecuting attorney of Merida County, turned from his office window out of which he had been gazing silently for several minutes.

"I've made up my mind, judge," he said to the lean and spectacled little old man who was the only other occupant of the room. "Give me a warrant for Bill."

Little old Judge Oglesby peered over his steel-rimmed glasses at the worried but determined face of the young prosecutor. What he saw was a good face; it was not a handsome one, rather it was ruggedly homely; yet the rough-hewn features, lighted by honest, friendly eyes, were now so careworn that the judge, himself evidently no weakling, hesitated a moment before adding to his youthful friend's perplexities.

After a pause he remonstrated: "Why begin your term by being a persecutor instead of a prosecutor? What's the use of my giving you a murder warrant for Bill Wacker because that worthless sheep man Pedro Alvarado, flown with insolence and moonshine, as the poet says, went on a rampage in Bill's hotel and managed to get himself manslaughtered—"

"It wasn't manslaughter, judge," the troubled John Barrett objected patiently, "it was cold-blooded and deliberate murder. And just because Bill's a political power in this county—of course, I'll have to admit he was a cold-blooded and deliberate contributor to my campaign fund—is no reason he's above the law. I'll thank you for the warrant."

The old judge, his face very grave, arose, went to the younger man, put an arm around his shoulders and, although they were alone, spoke to him in a whisper:

" John," he said soberly, " I'm not thinking about politics, I'm thinking about you. Arrest Bill Wacker, and he'll fight back with every weapon he can lay his hands on. You're happily married, but Anne doesn't know about Flossie Nicholas. Bill Wacker does—and he'll tell."

Young Barrett's eyes were those of one who looks upon a ghost. " That all happened before I knew Anne," he managed to say.

" It never should have happened at all."

" I'm only human—we thought we loved each other."

" Bill Wacker's human, too. He's so human he'll no more be able to resist revenge than you and Flossie were able to resist what you thought was love. Think of Anne."

This piece of advice was unneeded. The prosecuting attorney's unhappy eyes were staring fixedly at a silver-framed portrait on his desk, the portrait of a cool, sweet girl in wedding finery.

After a long moment, the prosecuting attorney roused himself from his reverie, threw back his shoulders, drove his clenched right fist against his open left hand and said doggedly: " I'm going to arrest Bill Wacker and indict him and convict him. Please make out the warrant."

Regret and admiration fought in the old judge's face as he seated himself at the desk and drew toward him a sheaf of legal blanks. For a moment or so, the only sound in the room was the scratching of his pen.

Young Barrett, who had returned to the window where he stood looking into the night, broke the tense silence. As if speaking to himself more than to his companion, he muttered: " My father used to tell me that his idea of a man was Admiral Farragut. 'Damn the torpedoes! Go ahead!' "

" Your father was right," announced the judge, in the voice of one who is inwardly amused. " But I don't remember that Farragut ever lashed himself to the rigging and and led his fleet through Merida County. You're starting something that'll keep you busy damning torpedoes and going ahead. Here's your warrant."

The prosecuting attorney, with the document in his hand, searched the other's face. " Between ourselves," he asked, " you don't think I'll convict Bill Wacker?"

The old judge lighted a stogy before he replied. " Between ourselves," said he, " I know Bill Wacker'll get a fair trial in the court room. Which is more than *you'll* get outside. If you're going home, I'll give you a lift."

" I'm not going home just now," Barrett told him, " I'm going down to the Bella Union Hotel and serve this warrant on Bill."

His old eyes shining with pride, the judge bit hard into his stogy. " Damn the torpedoes!" he chuckled. " Go ahead!"

As the young prosecuting attorney walked slowly through the sleeping street toward the Bella Union Hotel—the only civic institution in Merida City, except the railroad station and the jail, that stayed open all night—he could not free his mind from the thought that he had invited himself into a game where the percentage was all against him.

More than a week had passed since the drunken and turbulent sheep man, Pedro Alvarado, had tried to drive a flock of thirty ewes into the office of Bill Wacker's hotel, and had been killed for his pains. During that week, a coroner's jury had decided that " said deceased had come to his death from a gunshot wound inflicted by a party or parties to this jury unknown."

This verdict seemed to have met with the general approbation of the community; and nobody knew better than the native-born prosecuting attorney that public sentiment would be dead against his attempt to go back of the verdict.

Yet he, working alone, had discovered concerning the killing of the unpopular sheep man certain facts about which the public knew nothing; and it was his discovery of those facts which had made him say to himself: " The trail leads straight to Bill Wacker's door. It's my duty to follow it."

To no one, not even to the wise and honest old Judge Oglesby, had he said anything about the new evidence he had unearthed; to no one, except his wife and Judge Oglesby, had he said anything about his decision to proceed against the popular politician.

And neither of the only two persons who knew he had taken the trail against the man, with whom he had been upon friendly terms since the days when he was punching cattle and studying law at the same time, had received the knowledge with much enthusiasm.

"Don't be a persecutor," had been the old judge's first advice. "Don't be a fool," had been the young wife's first and last; "I just know if you fight Mr. Wacker you'll never be elected Congressman, or Governor, or anything. So, don't be a fool."

Curiously enough, it was neither his ambitious wife, nor his conservative friend, nor even the influential Bill Wacker, that now was in the front of the mind of the slow-walking prosecuting attorney, whose obstinacy was more or less hinted at in the nickname by which he formerly was known among his fellow cow-punchers.

When Knot-Headed Barrett was within a few yards of the stronghold of Bill Wacker, what was in the front of his mind was the image of his sweetheart of other days—the Flossie Nicholas, who had been called, among other things, generous, and loyal—but never ambitious or influential or conservative. The image of this raven-haired, sultry-eyed dance hall girl—her own intrepid little self long gone no one knew whither—persisted even after the hand she had held so often had closed round the china knob on Bill Wacker's door.

"Well," the prosecuting attorney of Merida County said to himself, a far-away look in his eyes, "I'm happily married, just like Judge Oglesby says, and I love my wife. But Floss was a square-shooter, and, wherever she is, I wish her luck. Only I hope she don't need it quite as much as I need all the luck I can get right now."

He turned the china knob of the door that never had known a key, and walked into the office of an all-night establishment which was going full blast.

On his right, as he entered, was the double doorway leading into the big combination barroom and gambling hall whence came loud talk and laughter, the rattle of glasses and of poker chips, the hum of the roulette wheel and the tinny music of a mechanical piano.

He started toward that doorway, but halted when he heard his name called from behind the desk in the smoke-filled office.

"Hello, Jack!" boomed a friendly voice, and from behind the desk, where at first he had not seen him, there lounged out a big, breezy, hearty man in shirt sleeves, his broad, tanned face, even his bald, pink head, seeming to shine with welcome.

"Hello, Bill!" answered the prosecuting attorney, as Bill Wacker advanced with outstretched hand to greet him. "But before we shake hands, I've got to tell you you're under arrest."

"I'm *what?*" demanded the big man in amazement, staying his hand.

"You're under arrest for the murder of Pedro Alvarado," said the other quietly. "Here's the warrant."

But not so quietly did big Bill Wacker receive it. As soon as his angry, gray eyes had swiftly scanned the document, he let out a roar of rage that stifled all the talk and laughter in the adjoing room, and brought round him and Knot-Headed Barrett a circle of interested, silent faces.

"You damn fool!" he clamored. "You think you're goin' to arrest me because a drunk comes in my hotel an' gets killed in a fight? An' me not even here till it's all over? Well, you ain't! Here's what I think of you an' your warrant! Now, get out of here an' don't come back!"

While he had been speaking he had been tearing the warrant to bits. As he spat out his final words he threw these torn pieces of paper into the prosecuting attorney's face.

II

WITH lightning swiftness two forty-fives jumped from nowhere into the prosecuting attorney's hands.

"Come out of here with me or I'll drop you where you stand," said he who held the guns.

Big Bill Wacker's eyes, suddenly sick, kept staring at the blue steel barrels. But if it was his desperate hope that some of his friends would intervene, that hope was doomed to death. For his friends, knowing as well as he did, that Knot-Headed Barrett was as sure of aim as he was quick of draw, remained silent, interested, and motionless.

More resourceful than his friends was Bill Wacker himself. With a return of his old hearty friendliness—or, at least, with very good imitation of it—he said to the grim-faced young man who was covering him with the Colts:

"Jack, I'm sorry I blew up like that. It was the damn injustice of th' thing that made me. Down in your heart you must know I didn't kill Alvarado any more than you did. Somebody's been imposin' on you. If you'll let me show you right now how the thing happened, I'll bet you anything you want to bet you'll see I didn' have nuthin' to do with it."

There was a pause before the prosecuting attorney replied: "It is my duty to warn you that anything you may say can be used against you." Those words were formal, but in the tone in which they were spoken there was a hint that the speaker was willing, even if not especially anxious, to listen to what his prisoner had to say.

As a matter of fact, he was more than willing, he was anxious. And for this concealed eagerness of his there were two reasons. One was his curiosity to learn, in the presence of witnesses, how Bill Wacker intended to describe the crime, at the commission of which, or, so he had maintained only a moment before, he had not been present.

The other reason was that in the group of men, now surrounding Bill Wacker and himself, was the red-faced, blue-eyed Duke Emmett, who not only was Bill Wacker's faro-dealer, but also was the prosecuting attorney's best witness against Bill Wacker.

No sign of recognition had passed between the prosecuting attorney and the professional gambler, and none passed between them now while they stood eye-to-eye and heard Bill Wacker, with a large gesture, say: "Now, Jack, if you'll take your guns off me, I'll show you just how it all happened."

"Not carrying any iron yourself, are you?" insinuated the unsmiling prosecutor.

Bill Wacker, whose sense of the dramatic—to which much of his political success was due—never deserted him, and whose composure had wholly returned, raised both hands above his head.

"Search me," he said simply, "every man, woman, an' child in Merida County knows I never carry a gun."

"Your word's good enough for me," Barrett told him, slipping the two forty-fives back under his coat.

"No reason why these gentlemen shouldn't go back to their pastimes?" hinted the bluff, hearty owner of the Bella Union Hotel, barroom and gambling hall inclusive.

Barrett had a very good reason why at least one of the gentlemen should stay with him and Bill Wacker, but he dared not state it; he could not tell Bill Wacker he wanted Duke Emmett, the faro-dealer, to linger, so that later a double first-hand check could be made on Bill Wacker's version.

"What do I care?" he replied, his voice unconsciously edged with the irritation he felt at being balked in his first hope that all of these possible witnesses would hear Bill Wacker's recital.

No sooner had he snapped out the words than he realized he had made a mistake.

The adroit Bill Wacker was quick to take advantage of it. "New brooms always sweep clean, boys," he beamed upon the crowd. "I ain't th' boss here, right now. If I was, I'd choke off that pianner."

Barrett was further chagrined by the chuckles of amusement and the looks of sympathy for Bill Wacker which this smiling rebuke evoked. For, at that moment, the tinny mechanical "pianner" was giving forth the familiar strains of "Dear Old Pal."

Not a man in the room but knew of the long friendship between the genial politician and the stern young prosecutor; not a man but knew that without Wacker's influence Jack Barrett would not be in office; not a man but knew that on the range and in cow towns the blackest of sins is ingratitude.

Sensing the deepening hostility to him-

self, Jack Barrett stiffened. His hands sliding to his holsters, he said to the complacent prisoner: "I reckon I better take you down to the jail, *pronto*."

"Men, you see this young feller won't gimme a chance to tell him th' truth," Bill Wacker pointed out.

The response made the beset prosecuting attorney tighten his grip on his guns. It was the low, sullen growl of a crowd preparing to go into action. Through it cut the resolute voice of some unseen henchman in the rear.

"We'll make him, Bill," said the voice. "We'll see you get fair play."

The young prosecuting attorney caught his breath in a sigh of relief. The crowd would hear Bill Wacker's cooked-up story, after all.

Successfully hiding whatever disappointment he may have felt because thirty or forty good customers were to prolong their absence from his bar and his gambling tables, Bill Wacker, his bearing now that of a long-suffering apostle of righteousness whose patience has almost reached the breaking point, led the way into the big room adjoining the office.

At his right was the anxiously alert young prosecuting attorney; at his left the impassive faro dealer, the prosecutor's undercover eyewitness of the crime. Close upon the heels of the three followed the crowd.

"It was three o'clock las' Friday afternoon, slowest hour in th' day," began Bill Wacker, stopping at the end of the long golden-oak bar, "that's when I come in through the back way. I'd been out visitin' a feller's that's sick.

"Soon's as I come in, that fly-by-night bartender I had workin' for me—the coke fiend that left th' country that same night after robbin' th' till—rushes up, an' says: 'Oh, Mr. Wacker, Mr. Wacker, you're jus' in time to help ketch 'em.' 'Ketch who?' I says. 'Ketch them two drunken cowboys who done this,' he says, an' he pulled me from behin' th' bar an' showed me poor Alvarado lyin' right here where I'm standin' —dead, an' blood all over him frum th' bullet that killed him.

"Mebbe, I suppose, I should have chased right out after 'em, but they was nobody here but th' bartender an' me, an' he was all hopped up, an' excited, an' useless, an' I wasn't sure then this poor feller was dead, so I got some water an' a towel an' worked over him, but couldn't do nuthin'.

"Soon's as I foun' out for sure he was dead, I give th' alarm an' some o' th' boys took out after them cow-punchers, like you all know about, but they'd got too much start.

"An' why I should be drug into this is sure more than I see."

A murmur of sympathy for the teller of this straightforward tale ran through his hearers, but in this murmur young Barrett did not join.

The red-faced, blue-eyed faro dealer, Duke Emmett, did, though he, as well as Barrett, had heard Bill Wacker instinctively shy away from the one word in the entire narrative upon which Barrett depended to send Bill Wacker to the gallows.

That one word was towel. To Barrett and the faro dealer, there was a world of significance in the fact that Bill Wacker had said: "I got some water an' a towel, I got some water," because only they knew that it was of a towel that, if justice were done in this case, would be fashioned a halter.

To the bluff, hearty Wacker's other hearers, the word meant nothing. They wanted to know about the sheep. Some of them said so. Wacker, glowing with self-confidence because his story had been so well received, told them.

"Sure, Alvarado had been drinkin'," he said in conclusion. "I suppose that's why he tried to drive his flock o' ewes into th' office out there, an' got them drunken punchers sore, an' one of 'em shot him. All you fellers know what that big husky, Alvarado, was like when he was lickered up." He paused a moment, reflectively.

"I suppose," he went on, "if he hadn' been such a big husky, he wouldn't have busted his skull, droppin' to th' floor, thataway, after bein' shot."

During the brief space of silence which followed the triumphant Bill Wacker's statement of his theory regarding Alvarado's fractured skull, a theory which he

had been public-spirited enough to suggest to the coroner's jury and with which that learned body had agreed, a small wiry man thrust himself through the crowd.

When he spoke, his voice, identified as the lover of fair play who, a few minutes before, had assured Bill Wacker that the prosecuting attorney would be made to listen to his vindication.

Facing the prosecuting attorney, what he now said was: "What I'd do is offer a reward for them two cow-punchers."

"Would you?" inquired young Barrett evenly, and turned his back on him to confront the self-satisfied proprietor of the Bella Union. "Well, what *I'm* going to do, Mr. Wacker, is to take you to jail."

"Boys—" burst out Mr. Wacker, but went no farther. He had been stopped by the muzzle of a Colt's forty-five jammed against his stomach.

Said young Barrett in a voice of ice: "I can't kill 'em all. But I can kill you. If one of 'em makes a move, I'll do it."

Half an hour later, Bill Wacker, being safely, and profanely, in jail, a thoughtful young prosecuting attorney again walked through the sleeping streets, alone.

As he drew near the cottage where slumbered the cool and sweet wife whose dreams that he was to go to Congress, or to be Governor, his night's work may have wrecked, he was saying to himself: "There'll be plenty of torpedoes, all right. But, damn the torpedoes, and go ahead."

Yet, he was feeling very lonely.

III

DURING the first ten days that Bill Wacker was in jail, awaiting the meeting of the grand jury, Prosecuting Attorney Barrett resisted every one of the direct and indirect attempts which were made to get him to do what Bill Wacker's intercessors—some of them accredited go-betweens, others volunteers—called "listen to reason."

But, on the night of the tenth day, something happened that shook the foundations of the case he had built up against the prisoner. The stroke came out of a clear sky, for the tenth night was a cloudless night of stars—a night of such magical beauty that, under its spell of peace and loveliness, the much-tried and much-tempted and very tired young John Barrett relaxed, and, for the first time since he had begun to build the case, found comfort and encouragement in discussing it with his wife.

After she had washed the supper dishes and he had dried them and put them away, they sat down, side by side, on the upper step of the little front porch of their cottage. At first they sat in silence, the stilly evening, spangled with stars and fragrant with the perfumes of spring, seeming to lay invisible fingers on their lips.

But, when she had glimpsed a falling star, and having lightly kissed him, nestled her blond head against his shoulder, they began to talk in little, broken phrases about their future.

Insensibly, the talk came round to the Wacker case, and nothing since the first day of his investigation so soothed him as to hear her whisper: "You're making a brave fight, my man, and I hope you win it."

"Honey," he found himself saying, "I can't thank you enough for that. I get kind of tired sometimes. It's just fine to know you're with me."

"I wasn't, at first," she told him, capturing his hand. "I was piggy enough to want you to let well enough alone. But now I'm glad you went ahead. With most of the whole county down on you, I'd be a great wife, wouldn't I, if I didn't stick?"

A flash of Knot-Headed Barrett's fighting spirit was in his voice as he answered: "Most of the whole county will quit being down on me when I prove Bill Wacker's guilty. Every one thinks he's innocent. The people he's been sending to me every day all insist he's innocent. I know better.

"I know he planned that murder for more than a month—ever since Alvarado almost choked him to death while they were fighting over at Tucgoles. That was during the State Fair.

"The fight was over some girl. They'd had business troubles before, but this scrap over the girl was what made Wacker decide to get Alvarado out of the way for good. It seems the girl loved Alvarado."

"And how do you know all this?" his wife asked. "And who is the girl?"

"Duke Emmett told me about the fight. Alvarado told him. They were great friends, even though Duke was turning the faro box for Bill Wacker. He doesn't know who the girl is, but he does know he saw Bill Wacker kill him.

"Wacker doesn't think anybody except that bartender he paid hush money to, and sent away the night of the murder, saw him do it. But Duke Emmett saw him. Duke's my surprise witness. Wait till most of the county hear *him*—"

"Look, Jack, look!" she cut in, breathlessly. "Isn't that a man standing in the shadow of the pepper tree over there?"

On his feet in a flash, revolver in hand, he placed himself in front of her.

"You, over there under the tree!" he challenged. "Come here—and come with your hands up!"

A figure disengaged itself from the shadow cast by a pepper tree, between the sidewalk and the street, and advanced toward them, hands in the air.

"Duke Emmet!" exclaimed the relieved prosecutor. "What in the world—"

"I didn't see any light. I didn't know you were home. I was going to wait till you came," interrupted his star witness, the faro dealer, with what, for him, was unusual agitation of voice and manner. "You'd like to get your hands on that bartender Wacker shipped out of town, wouldn't you?"

"Would I?" cried Barrett.

"Then come with me. He's back. Right now, he's sitting in a five-handed poker game in room No. 8 at the Bella Union."

"And the grand jury meets to-morrow," said Barrett, thinking aloud. "If I can get him to tell the truth to that jury they'll simply have to vote a true bill. Without him, Wacker's friends on the jury might say they preferred to believe Wacker's story instead of yours. But, if he corroborates you, the jury'll just have to indict."

Impulsively, protectively, his wife slipped her arm around him. "But, but, can't you send for him?" she queried. "Is it necessary for *you* to go to the Bella Union?"

The prosecuting attorney's murmured reply was unintelligible, but not so the observation Duke Emmett volunteered. "No, it isn't," said he firmly. "To-night the Bella Union's no Y. M. C. A. There's a lot of hard drinking and a lot of hard talking going on down there, and some of those tough friends of Wacker's from Tucgoles are used to shooting without waiting for the hat to drop

"If any of them thought I was helping your husband, I'd have got mine before this. But they all think I'm body and soul with Wacker. This being my night off, they've been inviting me to sit in at their poker games. Wacker's Man Friday, the town marshal, is in one of them now.

"Suppose we do this? Suppose I go back and sit into the game the cokey bartender's in, Mr. Barrett, spread him out of it later and bring him here where you can talk to him?"

The wife breathed her relief, but her husband hesitated. "Let me make a suggestion," he said finally. "Anything may happen down there to-night, and I can't have you taking all the chances.

"It isn't fair. I'll go down with you, stake myself out near-by, say, in Wallie Sanders's feed store, where we've met, so far, without any of the Wacker crowd finding it out, and, if there is any trouble, I'll be close enough to lend you a hand. What time is it now?"

He started to pull out his watch, but the faro dealer had his out first and struck a match by which he might see the dial. The prosecuting attorney turned to his wife, when the faro dealer told him it was nine-thirty, and said: "You mustn't worry, dear, I'll be home early."

She kissed him. "I won't worry a single speck," she promised, and kissed him again. "Not a single speck." But her chin quivered as she said it.

"Come on, Emmett," said the prosecuting attorney, "I'll go down Cherry Street, you can take Pine. To-night of all nights, it won't do for us to be seen together."

"I'll play *that* bet straight, place, and show," returned the gambler, as they walked toward the gate. There he added, more gravely: "Of course, it's about a thousand to one that they haven't, but, if

the Wacker crowd *has* got anybody tailing me, I was a sucker to strike that match."

"It's a million to one they haven't," Knot-Headed Barrett assured him, yet in a voice as grave and low-pitched as his own. "And remember, I'll be in the feed store—with two guns."

"I'm packing one, myself," remarked the gambler, and they parted.

IV

THERE were two entrances to the feed store of Wallie Sanders, the close-mouthed friend of Prosecuting Attorney Barrett—the front door, which opened on Pine Street directly opposite the front door of Bill Wacker's Bella Union Hotel, and the back door, which opened on an alley. Barrett had a key to each door.

To-night, he let himself in from the alley, locking the door behind him. For it was a part of the official duty of Bill Wacker's vote-getting Man Friday, the town marshal, to go about trying doors, and it was the custom of that Wacker-worshiping official to attend strictly to his duty during what periods he could spare from his pleasant and profitable pastime of draw-poker.

Secure against his intrusion, young Barrett traversed the darkened store till he reached the cubby-hole of an office whose brown-painted window was all that the window of an observation post should be.

Because, it was so sketchily painted that, when the watcher sat down in the leather-seated swivel chair, he could plainly see much of what was in progress in the front rooms of the Bella Union and nobody in those lighted rooms could see him.

He had taken a shorter way from his cottage than that over which Duke Emmett still was coming, and, as he sat looking across the street into the hotel, he wondered why he had not advised the faro-dealer to take a way that was even shorter.

There was such a way—a short-cut across lots—which, had Emmett taken it, would have brought him to the Bella Union several minutes before he himself could have arrived at the feed store. That he had not remembered it in time meant that Duke Emmett was losing precious minutes.

For, from his vantage point, Barrett could see that the poker game in room No. 8, a second-floor room whose lighted, uncurtained window was staring down on him like an unseeing eye, was breaking up.

Of the five players who were cashing in, Barrett recognized the faces of only two—one was the door-opening and jackpot-opening town marshal's moonlike countenance, the other was the ferretlike face of the weedy little bartender who had disappeared from Merida City and turned around and come right back again. The three other faces were those of hard-bitten strangers Barrett never had seen before.

"They look tough enough to be from Tucgoles," said the prosecuting attorney to himself, "I wish Emmett would show up before that little bartender they're so chummy with gets a chance to do another disappearing act."

He had his wish. For, a moment or two later, he saw the jaunty faro-dealer come swinging down Pine Street, enter the office of the Bella Union and head for the stairway. Expecting to see him appear in room No. 8, he again centered his gaze on that room's lighted window. He did not see Duke Emmett. What he did see was one of the strangers step to the window and pull down the shade.

An instant later, he saw the beefy town marshal come out of the front door of the Bella Union, and lumber across the street directly toward his hiding place. He saw his big shadow pass the painted window, then heard him tramp into the dark hallway, and stop. But he did not hear him try the door.

"That's queer," thought Barrett; "what's he hiding there for?"

On the heels of the unspoken question came an answer. It was the crash of a pistol shot, closely followed by wild cries of "Help! Help! Police!"

Barrett's eyes, darting over the front of the Bella Union, were caught and held by a shadow suddenly cast upon the window shade of room No. 8—the silhouette of a group of men engaged in furious combat.

The next instant, Barrett was out of the front door, and racing for the hotel.

But the town marshal got there first.

By the time Barrett had shouldered his way through a hostile crowd on the stairway, and another hostile crowd in the second floor corridor, and had plunged into room No. 8, Bill Wacker's man Friday had clamped handcuffs on the wrists of the prosecution's star witness, Duke Emmett. The star witness's face and clothing showed he had been handled none too gently.

"What's this mean?" demanded the prosecutor.

"It means he's arrested for attempted robbery," wheezed the beefy town marshal. "These citizens he was playin' poker with allege he pulled a gun, an' told 'em to stick 'em up. I got four witnesses to that effect. I—"

"You got 'em in a hell of a hurry!" flamed Barrett. "You haven't been in this room more than ten seconds. Where are your four complainants?"

"These three gents from Tucgoles," announced the town marshal, with a triumphant wave of his hand, "an' Bill's old bartender. He was here a minute ago."

But he was there no longer. Bill's old bartender, for reasons best known to himself, had done another of his disappearing acts.

"He'll show up later," declared the town marshal. "Anyway, I got three."

Under the searching glance with which Barrett swept the three hard-boiled strangers from Tucgoles was hidden real concern. For he realized that this was a frame-up whose only object was to destroy the usefulness of the faro-dealer as a witness before the next day's grand jury.

He turned to the handcuffed prisoner. "Mr. Emmett," he said crisply, "I wouldn't go to jail alone if I were you. I would prefer charges against these men. Let me suggest some possible charges. Assault and battery, assault with a deadly weapon, assault with intent to kill—"

"Wait a minute!" broke in one of the three, his voice and his race reflecting sudden and sincere alarm. "We wasn't figgerin' on goin' to no jail-house."

"It's never too late to begin," rejoined Barrett. "I'd advise you and your friend, the marshal, here, to talk this over among yourselves before you go any farther."

They waited for no second invitation, and when the four came back from a low-voiced conversation at the window, the action of the town marshal spoke louder than any words could have spoken.

Because, what he did was to remove the handcuffs from the wrists of Duke Emmett.

The meaning of this symbol was not lost upon Bill Wacker's other friends in the smoke-filled room. They began to slink away—all except a small wiry man who bristled up to the prosecuting attorney.

"What I'd do," he began, with the same officiousness which had marked his conduct on the night of Bill Wacker's arrest, "would be to find out who fired that shot—"

"Would you?" inquired the prosecuting attorney, turning from him blandly to face Duke Emmett. "Mr. Emmett," he went on, just as blandly, "would you mind letting me see your gun?"

"With pleasure," responded the faro-dealer, and handed it over.

Breaking the forty-five, Barrett scanned the cylinder. "I thought so," he muttered grimly, "it's fully loaded, and you wouldn't have had time to slip in a new one."

His head still bent over the weapon, he continued: "I *thought* I could tell the difference between the sound of a forty-five and the sound of a thirty-eight. Marshal, did you really think you heard a forty-five?"

But when, after what seemed to be an unnecessarily prolonged pause, he raised his head, the marshal was not there to reply. He and the small wiry man had sheepishly faded away.

"Want 'em?" asked Duke Emmett in a whisper, as Barrett handed back the forty-five.

"Not just now," the prosecutor answered, a new glint in his eyes. "I let them get away so I could tell you before it's too late that the man we've got to find is that bartender that fired his signal with his thirty-eight. Let's go."

As, shoulder to shoulder, they moved toward the door, Duke Emmett whispered: "He shot into the ceiling. I didn't even pull my gun."

"I'm glad you didn't," the prosecutor whispered back, "I'm glad you didn't have to kill the only other man who saw Bill Wacker murder Pedro Alvarado."

V

AT ten o'clock, the following morning, while in his court room old Judge Oglesby was administering the oath to the twenty-four good men and true that constituted the grand jury, three men that had not had their clothes off, the night before, sat in the office of Prosecuting Attorney Knot-Headed Barrett, their tired eyes centered on a tin pail in which was a chunk of ice and a towel.

Fidgeting in his chair, the most nervous of the three—a weedy, furtive man—spoke up, his voice thin and jumpy: "Mr. Barrett, Mr. Emmett," said he, forcing himself to look from one to the other of his two companions, "I know you're telling me the truth when you say it'll work. And you ought to know I'm telling you the truth when I say I wish I was somewhere else. There's healthier jobs than testifying against Mr. Wacker."

The whine in his voice awoke no sympathy in the prosecuting attorney. "You're lucky to be alive," said young Barrett. "Either Emmett or I might have killed you at daybreak this morning after we'd tracked you to that cabin, and you started to put up a fight."

With a shrug of distaste he turned from his unwilling witness, and began to read aloud the affidavit that witness had signed and sworn to. When he had finished, he said to the red-faced, blue-eyed faro-dealer, who had been listening to the reading with satisfaction he made no effort to conceal:

"Emmett, this cinches it. And it's too late for our friend here to back out. The fact that he swears, as you do, that he'd heard Wacker threaten to kill Alvarado, that he knows that, on the afternoon of the murder, those drunken cow-punchers Wacker's talked so much about, simply weren't present, and that he, like you, saw Wacker shoot Alvarado *after Alvarado was dead,* means Bill Wacker's indictment. We all know if he's indicted he'll be convicted."

"That's a sure bet," said the gambler succinctly, rising to peer into the tin pail which held the ice and the towel.

"Another sure one is, if he ain't, I'll be killed for coughing up about him paying me to beat it, and then coming back with that Tucgoles gang to get some more dough," quavered the bartender, his eyes on the door as though he were thinking of using it. "That's a sure one, too."

Reading the unspoken thought, young Barrett stepped to the door, locked it and slipped the key into his pocket. "The Tucgoles gang has gone back home, but we can't take any chances of having you following them—not just yet," he said.

The bartender's eyes shifted from the locked door to the open window.

"Might as well close that, too," sighed young Barrett, walking to the window. But he did not close it.

Instead, he stood motionless, his gaze fastened on a dark-haired young woman, who was walking up the courthouse steps, his heart beating a bit faster as he muttered to himself: "Flossie Nicholas!"

Not until she was lost to sight inside the courthouse door did he so far recover his composure as to close the window, and face the other men, neither of whom had seen what he had seen.

"Emmett," he said to the faro-dealer, in a voice which sounded strangely in his own ears, "I'm going out for a minute. Lock the door after me. Keep your gun on this fellow while I'm gone."

With only one thought beating in his mind—to reach the girl before she could talk to anybody else—he drew his key-ring from his pocket, and strode to the door.

He opened the door. There stood Flossie Nicholas.

Even as his long, inquiring gaze gave back her own, he realized that her spell over him was broken. Waiting for her to speak, he hoped she had come upon some errand other than that of trying to revive the past they had shared together. She had.

Briefly and curtly, she said: "Mr. Prosecuting Attorney, I know who killed Pedro Alvarado, and I know how Pedro Alvarado was killed."

From the ferret-faced bartender, who was covered by the faro-dealer's gun, burst two words: "Wait! Wait!"

"Shut up!" she said to him, and came farther into the room. The prosecuting attorney closed the door behind her. "Listen," she went on, her voice even and colorless, her words addressed only to young Barrett, "I'm from Tucgoles. Never mind what I call myself over there. But I was Pedro Alvarado's girl."

With an absence of emotion which surprised himself, young Barrett heard this disclosure, but in what she, who once had been his sweetheart, said next he was keenly interested. "And Pedro told me," she continued, almost lifelessly, "that Bill Wacker had threatened to murder him in such a way that the guilt would never be discovered—"

"How?" he broke in eagerly.

"With *that!*" she exclaimed, pointing a dramatic directing finger at the pail in which was the towel and the chunk of ice. "Pedro knew! Back when they were friends, Wacker had told him. Let a towel lie long enough in ice water and it's the deadliest weapon of them all. It's worse than a blackjack. Because it kills and leaves no mark—unless, of course, it happens to fracture the skull."

Under his breath, the prosecuting attorney said: "*His* skull was fractured."

Out of the ferret-faced bartender burst another protective cry. "He fell on the floor," he said.

"Liar!" the woman spat at him.

"Liar!" repeated Duke Emmett. "I saw Wacker slug him to death with an iced towel. I saw Wacker shoot him after he was dead—with his own gun. And *you* saw it, too."

The conscience-stricken fashion in which the bartender cowered away from them would have convinced even Bill Wacker himself that Flossie Nicholas was telling the truth.

But Bill Wacker was past convincing. For, at that moment, the door opened, and into the office came old Judge Oglesby, his hand uplifted for silence.

"No witnesses, no exhibits are necessary," said he, his eyes studiously avoiding Flossie Nicholas, "Wacker has just committed suicide—"

"Without confessing?" she broke in, her voice edged with disappointment.

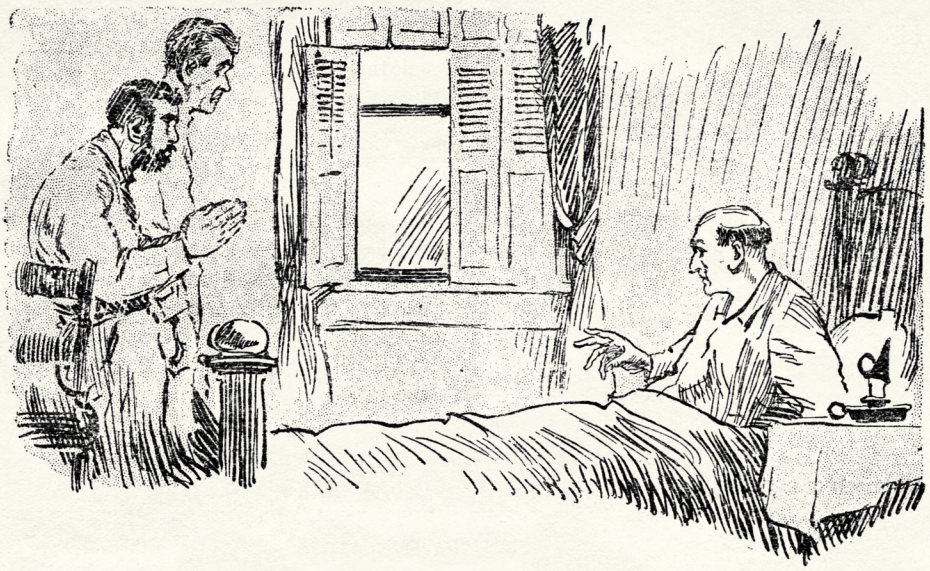
"My child," answered the old judge slowly, his gaze meeting hers for the first time, "suicide is confession. Daniel Webster said that, and it is true."

Her gaze unflinchingly meeting his, she moved to the door. "Somebody else said something that's true," she told him. "Let the dead past bury its dead."

Before any of the men could utter a word, she was gone.

Old Judge Oglesby, ignoring Duke Emmett and the gaping bartender, went over to Prosecuting Attorney Barrett and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Jack, my boy," said he gently, "I think I know what was in Bill Wacker's mind just before he hanged himself to the bars of his cell. I think he must have told himself: 'Nobody can beat a case when he's up against a prosecutor who damns the torpedoes and goes ahead.'"



Two figures appeared at the foot of his bed as he spoke

HAUNTS OF THE INVISIBLE—III

Edited by Alexander Stewart

"I SAW A GREAT SHIP COME GLIDING OVER THE GLASSY SEA," SAID MRS. ROSE; "ITS SAILS ALL SET AND ABLAZE, YET THEY WERE NOT CONSUMED"

A Story of Fact

THE late William T. Stead, well-known author and newspaper man, several years ago wrote:

"Unless all religions are based upon lies—that is to say, unless the most spiritually enlightened of the great leaders of our race, whose knowledge of the secret springs of the nature of man is attested by the enthusiastic devotion of the noblest of mankind in all ages—there is a world from which, if these founders were not deceived, they received the inspiration and the impulse which gave them their influence among men.

"For centuries the application of the inquiring spirit to these hidden forces was summarily checked by the rough methods of the rack and the tar barrel in this life, and the grim menace of eternal perdition in the next.

"Even in our day the student is overwhelmed with ridicule and punished for his temerity by the pitying compassion of his friends and the contempt and ostracism of the multitude.

"The time has surely come when the fair claim of ghosts to the impartial attention and careful observation of mankind should no longer be ignored. In earlier times people believed in them so much that they cut their acquaintance; in later times people believe in them so little that they will not even admit their existence. Thus these mysterious visitants have hitherto failed to enter into that friendly relation with mankind which many of them seem to desire.

"The reality of the Invisibles has long since ceased to be for me a matter of speculation."

Stead was a hard-headed newspaper man. He was a trained investigator who derived much of his journalistic fame from his fearless exposure of the real facts concerning various things which he had investigated. He was not a man who could easily be fooled. Yet he believed that "beyond the veil" there are spirits or ghosts—call them what you will—which take an active interest in the affairs of this world.

A Knock at the Door

One thing is certain, that, in spite of the great advances which have been made in the field of science, there are many things which scientists confess they are unable to explain. In this and the other articles of the series some of these phenomena are related. No explanation has been attempted, no theories advanced. The accounts are merely the records of the actual facts as far as they are known.

The first instance in this article is taken from a case which William T. Stead himself investigated. He first heard of it from a friend of his, whose story was so unusual that the newspaper man immediately became interested.

Stead himself says that the narrative "rests on the excellent authority of the Rev. Father Fleming, the hard-working Catholic priest of Slindon, in Sussex." The account which follows was written out by Father Fleming, who vouched for every word on his sacred honor as a priest. W. T. Stead, who later published it, said, in comment: "In all the wide range of spectral literature I know of no story that is quite like this."

So here it is:

"I was spending my usual vacation in Dublin in the year 1868, I may add very pleasantly, since I was staying at the house of an old friend of my father's, and while there was treated with the attention which is claimed by an honored guest, and with as much kindness and heartiness as if I were a member of his family.

"I was perfectly comfortable, perfectly at home. As to my professional engagements I was free for the whole time of my holiday, and could not in any manner admit a scruple or doubt as to the manner in which my work was being done in my absence, for a fully qualified and earnest clergyman was supplying for me.

"Perhaps this preamble is necessary to show that my mind was at rest, and that nothing in the ordinary course of events would have recalled me so suddenly and abruptly to the scene of my labors at Woolwich.

"I had about a week of my unexpired leave of absence yet to run when what I am about to relate occurred to me. No comment or explanation is offered. It is simply a narrative.

"I had retired to rest at night, my mind perfectly at rest, and slept as young men in robust health do, until about four o'clock in the morning. It appeared to me about that hour that I was conscious of a knock at the door.

"Thinking it to be the manservant who was accustomed to call me in the morning, I at once said, 'Come in.'

"You must attend us"

"To my surprise there appeared at the foot of the bed two figures, one a man of medium height, fair and well fleshed, the other tall, dark and spare. Both were dressed as artisans belonging to Woolwich Arsenal.

"On asking them what they wanted, the shorter man replied: 'My name is C——s. I belong to Woolwich. I died on —— of ——, and you must attend me.'

"Probably the novelty of the situation and the feelings attendant upon it prevented me from noticing that he had used the past tense.

"The reply which I received to my question from the other man was like in form: 'My name is M——ll. I belong to Woolwich. I died on —— of ——, and you must attend me.'

"I then remarked that the past tense had been used, and cried out:

"'Stop! You said *died*, and the day you mentioned has not come yet?'

"At which they both smiled and added: 'We know this very well. It was done to

fix your attention, but '—and they seemed to say very earnestly and in a marked manner—' you must attend us!' At which they disappeared, leaving me awe-stricken, surprised and thoroughly aroused from sleep.

" Whether what I narrate was seen during sleep, or when wholly awake I do not pretend to say. It appeared to me that I was perfectly awake and perfectly conscious. Of this I had no doubt at the time, and I can scarcely summon up a doubt as to what I heard and saw while I am telling it.

The Prophecy Fulfilled

" As I had lighted my lamp, I rose, dressed, and, seating myself at a table in the room, read and thought, and I need hardly say, from time to time prayed and fervently until day came.

" When I was called in the morning I sent a message to the lady of the house to say that I should not go to the University Chapel to say mass that morning, and should be present at the usual family breakfast at nine.

" On entering the dining room my hostess very kindly inquired after my health, naturally surmising that I had omitted mass from illness, or at least want of rest and consequent indisposition. I merely answered that I had not slept well, and that there was something weighing heavily upon my mind which obliged me to return at once to Woolwich.

" After the usual regrets and leave takings I started by the midday boat for England. As the first date mentioned by my visitors gave me time I traveled by easy stages, and spent more than two days on the road, although I could not remain in Dublin after I had received what appeared to me then, and appears to me still, as a solemn warning.

" On my arrival at Woolwich, as may be easily imagined, my brother clergy were very puzzled at my sudden and unlooked-for return. They concluded that I had lost my reckoning, thinking that I had to resume my duties a week earlier than I was expected to do.

" The other assistant priest was waiting for my return to start in his vacation—and he did so the very evening of my return.

" Scarcely, however, had he left town when the first of my visitors sent in a request for me to go at once to attend him.

" You may, perhaps, imagine my feelings at that moment. I am sure you cannot realize them as I do even now, after the lapse of so many years.

" Well, I lost no time. I had, in truth, been prepared, except for hat and umbrella, from the first hour after my return. I went to consult the books in which all the sick calls were entered and to speak to our aged, respected sacristan who kept them. He remarked at once:

" ' You do not know this man, father. His children come to our school, but he is, or has always been, considered as a Protestant.'

" Expressing my surprise, less at the fact than at his statement, I hurried to the bedside of the sufferer. After the first words of introduction were over, he said:

" ' I sent for you, father, on Friday morning early and they told me that you were away from home, but that you were expected back in a few days, and I said I would wait.'

Last Rites for the Dying

" I found the sick man had been stricken down by inflammation of the lungs, and that the doctor gave no hope of his recovery, yet that he would probably linger some days. I applied myself very earnestly indeed to prepare the poor man for death. Again the next day, and every day until he departed this life did I visit him and spent not minutes, but hours by his bedside.

" A few days after the first summons came the second. The man had previously been a stranger to me, but I recognized him by his name and appearance.

" As I sat by his bedside he told me, as the former had already done, that he had sent for me, had been told that I was absent, and had declared that he would wait for me. Thus far their cases were alike.

" In each case there was a great wrong to be undone, a conscience to be set right that had erred, and erred deeply. And not merely that—it is probable, from the cir-

cumstances of their lives, that it was necessary that their spiritual adviser should have been solemnly warned.

"They made their peace with God, and I have seldom assisted at a deathbed and felt greater consolation than I did in each and both of these.

"Even now, after the lapse of many years, I cannot help feeling that I received a very solemn warning in Dublin, and am not far wrong in calling it The Shadow of Death.—T. O. Fleming."

A Notorious House

Is it possible that, even in this life, the spirit is able to dissociate itself from the body and go to the place where the thoughts of the mind are directed?

It is reported in history that Sir Robert Peel and his brother both saw Lord Byron in London in 1810, at a time when he was, in fact, lying dangerously ill at Patras. During the same fever Byron also appeared to others, and was even seen to write his name among the inquirers after the king's health.

Even more remarkable, in a way, were the experiences of Samuel Wilberforce, the noted Bishop of Winchester, whose name is still familiar to the older people of this generation. They shall be related in another article, together with the story of the Seaforth curse and its dread workings down through the centuries. But the remainder of the cases given in this article shall be concerning places in this country.

One of them was the old Seward mansion in Washington, District of Columbia, over which a malignant spirit seemed to hover like an evil blight. The account which follows is quoted from a clipping of the New York *Sun*, dated February 3, 1890. The facts which it mentions are public history and can easily be verified.

"The house stands on Lafayette Square. It was built before the Civil War, and one of its earliest occupants was Secretary Spencer. Upon his family the evil spirits of the house first visited their fate.

"The secretary's son was a lieutenant in the navy, and while his father lived in the house, the son was hanged to the yardarm of his ship for his alleged participation in a mutiny.

"Then the Washington Club had the place during the Buchanan administration. The men about town belonged to the club, and Philip Barton Key, the reckless, adventurous District Attorney of the District of Columbia, was one of the members.

"There had long been talk connecting him with the handsome wife of General Sickles, then a Representative in Congress. The Sickles house was on Lafayette Square also, and one Sunday morning, when the sun was shining, a handkerchief was seen fluttering from one of the windows in the house of General Sickles.

"Young Key answered it, and then stepped buoyantly up the square. Sickles, who had seen the signals, caught him in front of the house, and in a moment Key lay on the walk wounded to death. It is only a few years since the tree against which he fell was cut down.

"Secretary Seward next occupied the place. On April 14, 1865, while he lay sick in bed, a man came to the house saying that he had been ordered to bring some medicine and deliver it in person to Mr. Seward.

Leased by Mr. Blaine

"This was denied him. But the stranger knocked down Frederick W. Seward and a servant, rushed into the secretary's room, and tried to kill him with a dagger. He was captured, but he escaped and rode off on his horse, which had been standing in the street.

"He was identified as Lewis Payne, and after a time he was caught and put to death. The War Department, fearing that other attempts might be made to assassinate Mr. Seward, ordered that a sentry patrol before the house night and day. This was done, and was continued for four years, even though for a long part of that time the Sewards were not there.

"Next, the mansion was taken by Secretary Belknap. He had not been there long before his wife died.

"That ended the occupancy of the house as a residence. The government rented it and used it for the Commissary General's office. When the Commissary General's staff was moved to the new build-

ing of the War Department the house was left vacant.

" No one dared to face the evil fates by taking it until it was leased by Mr. Blaine —Secretary of State James G. Blaine.

" He tore down the partitions that made rooms where the Seward assassination had occurred, and with a lavish spending of money transformed the musty old office apartments, and made them beautiful with the furnishings of a rich man's home.

" There were fears of calamity overtaking him or his family when it was announced that he had leased the old building. Gossip, superstitious and tragic, was heard among all who knew the history of the place. Had it been a haunted house, had ghosts been seen there in convention, there could not have been more talk.

A Plan of the Dwelling

" Some folks there were, though, who believed that the luck of Blaine would offset everything, but finally when the family of the Secretary of State gave a reception to their hosts of friends, and the rooms were filled with a gay, fortune-favored throng, the protestants against superstition declared that the spell, if ever there was any, was broken.

" Yet, within a week the eldest son of the secretary, Walker Blaine, fell sick and died. That made talk about the house, and people said it was an unlucky spot. Now Mrs. Coppinger, Blaine's daughter, is dead, and once more the story of calamity is told.

" There may be something, there may be nothing in the tale of a curse, but certain it is that if the house were in the real estate market to-day, it would be long before it got a taker.

" To those who go there now, the decorations seem like those of a tomb, and men want to know what will be next in the series of misfortunes that appear to come to those who inhabit this historic home."

The writer has not had the opportunity to trace the history of this house beyond the date given above, and consequently is not able to say whether or not the " curse " or spirit hovering over the place continued to exert its malignant influence.

The following case comes from Mr. Wilfred Ward and Lord Tennyson—for whom it was first written. The account was sent to the English Society of Psychical Research by Mrs. Pennee of St. Anne de Beaupre, Quebec, daughter of the late William Ward—a Conservative M. P.—and a sister of the late Rev. A. B. Ward of Cambridge.

At the time she wrote it out for Lord Tennyson, in 1884, Mrs. Pennee was living at Weston Manor, Freshwater, Isle of Wight. But the occurrences which she relates took place in Canada.

" It was in the year 1856," she wrote, " that my husband took me to live at a house called Binstead, about five miles from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. It was a good-sized house, and at the back had been considerably extended to allow for extra offices, since there were about two hundred acres of farm land around it, necessitating several resident farming men.

" Although forming part of the house, these premises could only be entered through the inner kitchen, as no wall had ever been broken down to form a door or passage from upstairs. Thus the farming men's sleeping rooms were adjacent to those occupied by the family and visitors, although there was no communication through the upstairs corridor.

The Woman and the Ashes

" About ten days after we had established ourselves at Binstead we commenced hearing strange noises. For many weeks they were of a very frequent occurrence, and were heard simultaneously in every part of the house, always appearing to be in close proximity to each person.

" The noise was more like a rumbling, which made the house vibrate, like that produced by dragging a heavy body which one so often hears in ghost stories.

" As spring came on we began to hear shrieks. They would grow fainter or louder as if some one was being chased around the house. But always they would culminate in a volley of shrieks, sobs, moans, and half uttered words, proceeding from beneath a tree that stood a little distance from the dining room window.

" The branches of this tree nearly touched the window of one of the spare bed-

rooms upstairs, immediately adjacent to the men's sleeping quarters. It was in February—I think—1857, that the first apparition came under my notice. Two ladies were sleeping in this spare bedroom.

"Of course for that season of the year a fire had been lighted in the grate, and the fireplace really contained a grate, and not an American substitute for one.

"About two o'clock Mrs. M. was awakened by a bright light which pervaded the room. She saw a woman standing by the fireplace. On her left arm was a young baby, and with her right hand she was stirring the ashes, over which she was slightly stooping.

Previous Visits

"Mrs. M. pushed Miss C. to awaken her, and just then the figure turned her face toward them, disclosing the features of quite a young woman with a singularly anxious, pleading look upon her face. They took notice of a little check shawl which was crossed over her bosom.

"Miss C. had previously heard some tales about the house being haunted—which neither Mrs. M. nor I had ever heard—so, jumping to the conclusion that she beheld a ghost, she screamed and pulled the bedclothes tightly over the heads of herself and her companion.

"The following spring I went home to England. But just before starting I had my own experience of seeing the ghost. I had temporarily established myself in the same room.

"One evening, finding my little daughter —now Mrs. Amyot—far from well, I had her bed wheeled in beside mine, that I might attend to her. About twelve o'clock I got up to give her some medicine, and was feeling for some matches when she called my attention to a light shining under the door.

"I exclaimed that it was her papa, and threw open the door to admit him. I found myself face to face with a woman.

"She had a baby on her left arm, a check shawl crossed over her bosom, and all around her shone a bright pleasant light, whence emanating I could not say. Her look at me was one of entreaty, almost agonizing entreaty.

"She did not enter the room, but moved across the staircase, vanishing into the opposite wall exactly where the inner manservant's room was situated. Neither my daughter nor myself felt the slightest alarm; at the moment it appeared to be a matter of common occurrence.

"When Mr. Pennee came upstairs and I told him what we had seen, he examined the wall, the staircase, the passage, but found no trace of anything extraordinary. Nor did my dogs bark.

"On my return from England in 1858 I was informed that 'the creature had been carrying on,' but it was the screams that had been the worst. It was always in or near the sleeping apartment adjacent to the men's that the apparition was seen, and as that was one of our spare bedrooms, it may frequently have been unperceived.

"Harry, one of the farm servants, had several visits from it, but would tell no particulars. I never could get Harry to tell me much. He acknowledged that the woman had several times stood at the foot of his bed, but he would not tell me more.

More About Binstead

"One night Harry had certainly been much disturbed in mind, and the other man heard voices and sobs. Nothing would ever induce Harry to let any one share his room, and he was most careful to fasten his door.

"At the time I attached no importance to 'his ways,' as we called them.

"In the autumn of the following year, 1859, my connection with Binstead ceased, for we gave up the house and returned to Charlottetown. I left Prince Edward Island in 1861 and went to Quebec.

"In 1877 I happened to return to the island and spent several months there. One day I was at the bishop's residence when the parish priest came in with a letter in his hand.

"He asked me about my residence at Binstead, and whether I could throw any light on the contents of his letter.

"It was from the wife of the then owner of Binstead, asking him to come out and try to deliver them from the ghost of a young woman with a baby in her arms, who had appeared several times.

"After I went to live in Charlottetown I became acquainted with the following facts which seem to throw light on my story:

"The ground on which Binstead stood had been cleared about 1840 by a rich Englishman, who had built a very nice house. Getting tired of colonial life, he sold the property to a man whose name I forget, but I will call Pigott—that was like the name.

"He was a man of low tastes and immoral habits, but a capital farmer. It was he who added all the back wing to the house and made the necessary divisions, *et cetera*, for farming the land.

The Phantom Child

"He had two sisters in his service, the daughters of a laborer who lived in a regular hovel about three miles nearer town. After a time each sister gave birth to a boy.

"Very little can be learned of the domestic arrangements, since Pigott bore so bad a name that the house was avoided by respectable people. But it is certain that one sister and one baby disappeared altogether, although when and how is a complete mystery.

"When the other baby was between one and two years old Piggot sold Binstead to an English gentleman named Fellows, from whom we later hired it with the intention of eventually buying it.

"The sister returned to her father's house, and, leaving the baby with her mother, Mrs. Newbury, went to the States and has never returned. Before leaving she would reveal nothing except that the boy was her sister's, her own being dead.

"It was this very Harry Newbury that we had unwittingly engaged as a farm servant when we leased the place years later.

"He came to bid me farewell a few months after I left Binstead, saying that he would never return there. In 1877 I inquired about him, and found that he had never been seen since."

Even more eerie is the record of the phantom child which haunts Block Island, fifteen miles off the shore of Rhode Island. According to the account given, a young woman, returning from a ball at Sandy Point on a crisp fall evening a hundred years ago, gave birth to a child on the way and strangled it, hiding its body in an empty hay crib by the roadside.

Old residents of Block Island claim that its doleful cry is still to be heard in the gray afternoons when the wind whistles across the Clay Head. As the wind pipes up low at first, but getting shriller, the infant's wail increases in intensity, ending in a shriek a little higher and wilder than the blast.

There is a reasonable suspicion that this wail may be the product of the imagination of the people who claim to have heard it. But there can be no doubt as to the authenticity of the appearance of the phantom ship, the Palatine. This ship has been seen by too many people who are not of a suspicious type, and who have not hesitated to let their names be known.

The story of the Palatine, the ship lured on the rocky coast of Block Island by false beacons during the last century, and afterward pillaged and fired by the islanders, is probably familiar to the readers of Dana and Whittier.

Since then the ship is said to appear at irregular intervals, portending disaster to the descendants of those who were suspected of wrecking and robbing her.

The Ship on Fire

The phantom ship was last seen on February 9, 1880. On that occasion the apparition was seen by more than fifty people on different parts of the island. Among them were United States Senator Nathan F. Dixon, the Dodges, Isaac Church, Captain Dickens and his family and relatives, and others not so well and favorably known in that section.

The following description of its appearance was given to a New York *Times* reporter by Mrs. Rose, one of the residents of the island:

"The evening twilight was setting in, and the sea was glassy and unruffled. It was almost a dead calm on Block Island Sound.

"I was on my veranda, which faces the north, when I noticed the windows shining as though a great bonfire was reflected on them. I turned toward the ocean and saw a great ship come sailing out from behind

Clay Head, to the north, and glide swiftly over the sea in the direction of Newport.

"I was surprised to see that every sail was set, and she was bending under her canvas as though driven before a strong wind, while there was apparently no wind elsewhere on the Sound.

"I was still more astonished that she appeared to be all on fire, from the water's edge to her highest sail, and that the flames seemed to leap up toward the gray sky. The sea around her was lit up with the radiance.

"The strangest thing was that the flames seemed to have no effect on the ship, and, though she was in sight for nearly fifteen minutes, her sails were not consumed. The vessel glided swiftly eastward, and disappeared slowly from view.

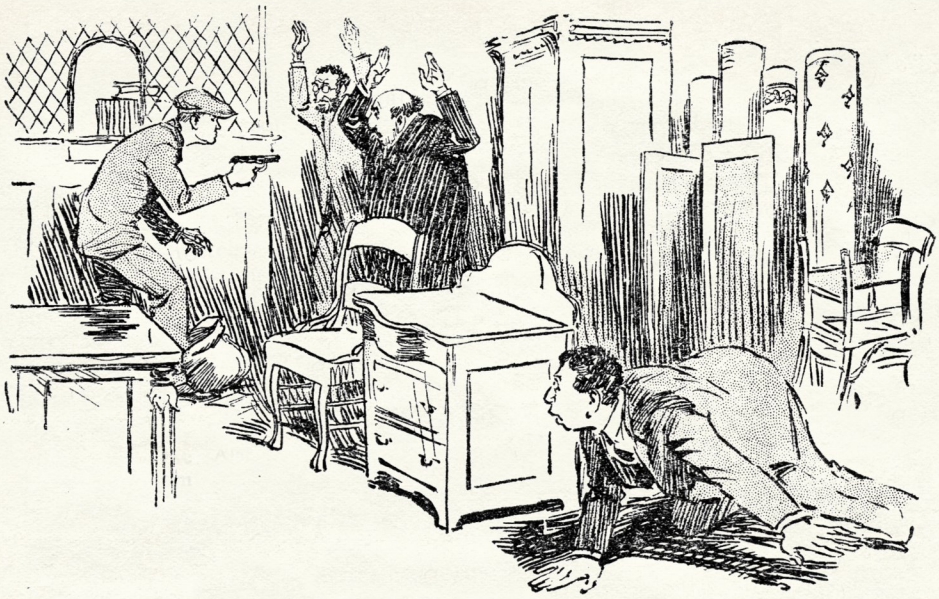
"As soon as I saw the Palatine I knew that something dreadful was going to happen, and I told my neighbor so as soon as I could.

"Only four days later a party of young Block Islanders, descendants of those who wrecked the ship, were drowned in Newport Harbor."

The accounts of this flaming phenomenon were so authentic that several years later a group of scientific men went out to Block Island to investigate it.

They gathered evidence from a score of islanders, consulted together, and then offered a natural explanation that was even more absurd than any which had been advanced by those who believe in the supernatural.

"Haunts of the Invisible" will be continued in an early issue of FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION



He dropped to all fours and scrambled to the door

RABBITS

By Austin Roberts

"THE THING THAT MAKES ME MAD, SON," SAID OLD POP, "IS THAT A MAN DON'T GENERALLY GET GOOD SENSE UNTIL HE'S TOO OLD TO USE IT"

IT was almost closing time at Cohn Brothers. Jacob, the elder partner, patted his departing customer affectionately on the shoulder. It had been a cash sale and as he turned back at the doorway he paused to survey the store with satisfaction.

Old Stern, the bookkeeper, was busy checking over next month's bills and "Looey," the younger Cohn, was surreptitiously watching Miss Getz put on her galoshes. Jacob chuckled. There had been no rain for two hours.

Less friendly eyes had also marked the scene with approval. "Wolf" Harris, with a last appraising glance up and down the street silently entered the store.

Before the unsuspecting Jacob knew what was happening he felt a hard object thrust against his ribs on the left side and heard a cold voice advise in his ear: "Walk right down to the cashier's cage, guy, an' make it snappy."

Too astonished to feel fear, Jacob automatically did as he was directed with a calmness he was later to shudderingly refer to as presence of mind.

Once behind the cashier's window Mr. Harris operated with the assured technique of a successful surgeon. A wave of his blued automatic flattened the senior partner and the old bookkeeper against the wall while with a swiftness that was almost painless he located and emptied the cash drawer; even the secret bill compartment.

Some inner consciousness beyond Jacob's control wrenched out the words:

"Say, mister, don't take the checks. Leave 'em; they ain't no good to you."

A smile flitted across the hard face of the gunman.

"You're a game little guy an' Jew to the last, aintcha? Well, I don't want the checks; take 'em."

He had racked the silver into a convenient canvas bag that was used to bank it; the bills were more pleasantly numerous than he had anticipated. Good-naturedly he began separating the checks, tossing them on the floor.

A customer entered the store and began poking about the display of furniture. Harris's eyes narrowed.

"You guys make a move and I'll plug you both," he muttered from the corner of his mouth as he shoved the currency in the bag with the silver. He left them still paralyzed against the wall and strode confidently up the aisle toward the entrance.

The would-be purchaser looked up as he approached, and seeing what he took to be a rather sullen working man on his way out, went on with his examination of a davenport.

All would have been well except for one thing: Looey's chronic distrust of everybody.

As Jacob had come down the aisle, to all appearances leading another lamb to the slaughter, Looey had remarked a glassy stare in the eyes of his older brother. Peeking around the edge of a convenient china cabinet, he beheld with horror the unbusinesslike transaction behind the cashier's counter and had dropped to all fours where he scrambled in a zigzag course to the door and bolted down the street unobserved by even the astute Miss Getz.

At the moment Harris neared the doorway, Looey was returning, well in the rear of the hastily summoned traffic officer from the corner.

Wolf Harris had always counted on boldness and the skill of long practice for the success of his depredations and on only one notable occasion had he failed, but now, as he saw through the window the uniformed officer approaching, he realized that for a second time he had overplayed his hand.

It could not have happened at a worse moment; at any cost he must avoid capture now. He stepped behind a convenient screen and waited.

The representative of law and order rushed in the entrance, his gun drawn.

Without exposing his person more than was necessary Harris fired four times in quick succession at the hand that held the pistol. His idea was to disarm the policeman if possible; failing that, he must shoot to kill.

One random shot replied. A dazed look came over the face of the officer, his knees suddenly doubled under him and he dropped on the floor, his arms outstretched.

Wolf Harris thrust his gun into his coat pocket and with the canvas sack under his other arm walked out of the store.

People were staring up and down the street trying to locate the noise of the firing. Looey had disappeared like a scared rabbit. Harris turned to the left and halfway down the block entered an alley.

An electrician who had paused at his work, hailed him as he passed.

"Hear them shots?"

"Nah, that was the exhaust from a truck," sneered Harris without stopping.

A little beyond, he broke into a run. At the opposite end he paused and looked back; three men had entered the alley and were following. He whipped out his pistol and turned. They stopped, then retreated, effectually discouraged for the time being.

Harris crossed the sidewalk and made his way between the line of parked cars at the curbing. In the street he turned to the right and passing several of these, darted into a small sedan farther along in which the engine had been left running.

A little old man in the front seat who had been anxiously peering at the passing pedestrians through the window, turned to chide him fretfully.

"I thought you said you'd only be gone a minute, Tom," he scolded. "It makes me nervous to wait so long an' set here listening to that engine burn up gasoline. I'd have turned it off if I'd known how to work the blamed thing."

"I was—delayed," grunted Harris grimly as he whirled the little car out into the traffic.

They passed the corner and swung to the right at the next; another two blocks and they turned south again. In this manner

they traveled for several miles before Harris headed due west and at last north.

At the edge of town he relaxed somewhat, and the old man, no longer finding it necessary to breathlessly clutch the side door, became talkative.

"I declare, Tom, I wished awhile ago I hadn't teased you to bring me along today. I got so fidgety there waitin' for you —something came over me, sort of. I got to wonderin' what I'd do if I should lose you agin."

"Aw ferget it," scowled Harris. "You give me the willies with that line."

The old man smiled placidly. "Folks hearing you talk would be like to think you didn't care much, but I can read you like a book, boy; you've got a heart just like your mother's."

Harris laughed shortly, but said nothing. It was not a pleasant laugh, but rather a grimace such as fighters use to taunt their opponents in the ring. It was like a defiant gesture of disillusion at life.

II

AS the scattered bungalows gave way to more and more infrequent fruit stands and gas stations, the old man's spirits rose.

"I guess I won't make this trip with you again, Tom," he said cheerfully. "I'm all through with the city. There's too much noise and too many people and automobiles. I guess I'll be content to stay on the ranch for the next few years; it won't be long you'll have to bother with me."

The stony-faced gunman snorted contemptuously.

"When I was in Mexico, I seen Indians a hundred an' eight an' ten years old. Lots of 'em. Chewed tobacco in their sleep they was so tough. You're soft. You talk like a woman."

"Now look at here, son," expostulated the other, "I ain't complainin' an' I ain't afraid to die when my time comes. I'm just lookin' facts in the face. When I was your age I was just as big a fool as you probably are, though I admit you been showin' a lot of kindness to your old pop.

"The thing that makes me mad when I think of what I might have done in the past, is that a man don't generally get good sense until he's too old to use it."

"Well, I figure you got quite a play comin' to you yet. I'm goin' to get you goin' in this rabbit business you got your heart set on an' if you don't try to corner the rabbit market you'll be settin' pretty in another year."

"You ain't going away again, are you, Tom?" queried the old man anxiously.

Wolf Harris turned his expressionless eyes on his father and then looked ahead at the road again.

"Ain't you satisfied with me gettin' you out of that 'Home' an' settin' you up in ranchin'? I gotta look after my own business, ain't I?" he gibed.

"That's so, Tom. I don't mean for to seem ungrateful. But you were gone so many years without a word—an' I thought I was all alone—an' then you came back all of a sudden. I'd hate to have you go away again now," he concluded lamely.

"Well, I ain't gone yet, old timer," said Harris gruffly. "But I might have to go anytime, see! If I get a wire from my pardner down in Mexico I might have to beat it right away, without kissin' the rabbits good-by or nothin'. All you gotta do is keep right on gettin' rich till I get back."

An ominous foreboding clutched at the heart of the old man.

"Anyway, if you do go, son, you'll write to me, won't you?" he asked anxiously.

"Me, write?" grunted Harris. "Hell, no. There ain't no post office where I'll be, an' them Mexicans swipe the stamps off your letters you give 'em to mail. I ain't a hand to write, Besides, like as not, I'll get back here before you had time to answer a letter anyhow."

The other's expression instantly lightened.

"Then you won't be gone long this time, if you do go?" he said with relief.

"Ain't that what I been tryin' to tell you?" snarled Harris. "You kept interruptin' me till I forgot it. Another thing you put clean out of my mind was that I'm going to send fer them prize rabbits to-morrow."

"Why, there won't be any better stock

in the valley than we'll have!" exclaimed the old man.

"Not *we*," corrected Harris. "This is your ranch. The deed's in your name. If it should leak out I'd gone to rabbit farmin' I'd never hear the last of it."

"That's what you always say," protested his father, "but it's your money, Tom. You've spent so much. I'm afraid you couldn't afford that prize stock just now."

"I forgot to mention it, but that's what we come to town for to-day; to get the money. Them rabbits are goin' to cost more than I figured," added the gunman.

"Then why not wait until we can afford it, son?"

"I already made the deal, pop," admitted Harris. "It's too late now."

III

THE "ranch" was a modest two-acre tract of land in a secluded little valley between two folds of sunny California hills.

One morning, several days after their trip into Los Angeles, Wolf Harris returned from a consultation with their next door neighbors, the Svensens.

His father was, as usual pottering among the rabbit hutches.

"I just made a deal, pop," he called as he approached. "In case I pull outa here sudden, somebody's gotta look after you. Mrs. Svensen says she'll do your cookin' an' her old man'll give you a lift around the place. All you do is sign an agreement an' it's fixed."

"Then you're going after all?" The old man dropped the feed pan he was holding and stood an abject figure of entreaty.

"What's eatin' you," demanded Harris. "Ain't I doin' everything I can to take care of you right? Ain't I left my business now until Gawd knows what shape it's in? Is that the thanks I get?"

"I was only hoping you wouldn't go until after the prize rabbits came," said his father humbly.

The gunman hesitated. Every hour now his "hunch" to depart grew stronger; the oppressing sense of impending disaster mounted. He grinned with sneering defiance.

"I was just goin' t' tell you I was goin' after them rabbits when they get to the express office Sunday," he said. "Now we got that off your mind, we'll go next door and sign the agreement."

It was a strange document that Wolf Harris had drawn up, after much explaining. More binding than many a cleverly executed transaction, because of the sincerity of the parties concerned, it stated briefly that for three hundred dollars cash and the further consideration that they would inherit his property, Lars Svensen and wife would care for the needs and bodily comfort of their neighbor, John Harden, until his death.

Characteristically Wolf Harris had inserted the clause: "In case of ill treatment, this agreement is all off."

He had affixed his legal name: Thomas Harden, the signatures of the two Swedes had already been added. It remained only for the old man to sign.

"We talked this all over, pop," Harris explained. "There's nothin' fer you to do but put your John Hancock on the dotted line. You're signin' up for three square meals a day."

"But suppose you don't have to go, after all, Tom?"

"This here document only goes into effect after I've left," said Wolf in his best court room manner.

His father nodded, satisfied, and accepted the pen that was held out to him.

He added his name to the others and looked up at the Svensens with misty eyes.

"My boy, Tom, is very kind to me," he told them, smiling. "He thinks of everything for me."

The Swedes agreed.

"Yas, dot's right. Tom bane goot square feller," said Svensen.

"My oldt fadder die two years back," added his wife, wiping her eyes with her apron. "I look after you, Mr. Harten, chust like I did him."

Harris glanced at her suspiciously.

"I had two—other boys," continued the old man, "but when I needed help, they put me in a home for the aged."

The Wolf glared at him ferociously.

"Come on, pop. Snap out of it. You

can save the story of your life to tell 'em on the long winter evenings," he said sarcastically.

They made their way back across the new alfalfa field that was just beginning to come up. Harris poked among the tender cloverlike plants with curiosity.

" I'd like to be back here when you start cuttin'," he said reflectively.

A distant train whistle sounded in the still air.

With lifted head he glanced across the oak dotted hills in the direction from which the sound had come.

" Guy," he muttered to himself, " you better be liftin' your feet, pronto."

The remaining two days before Sunday, he put in building the hutches for the new rabbits and putting the place in order against his departure.

There were hours when both father and son worked side by side in the sunshine, the one feebly, the other in the clumsy deliberate fashion of unskilled labor.

In the evening they sat and smoked in silence for the most part, the old man breaking into occasional rambling reminiscences.

After one such outburst, to which the Wolf had listened with stolid indifference, he asked suddenly:

" Tom, what made you come back and hunt up your old pop? Before you went away I hardly ever saw you. You were the harum-scarum of the family; you was out most every night an' more worry to your maw an' I than both your brothers." Caught off his guard, Harris shifted uneasily. It had been a diabolical turn of fate that had sent him home, a freshly released convict, in the hope of borrowing money.

" Oh, I just turned up, I guess," he answered noncommittally.

He smoked on, watching his father through lifeless eyes, his still face like a stone slab beneath which all emotion was buried.

" I was gone quite a long time," he said at last. " Got to be quite well-known in some places; funny you never heard of me."

" Not a word," replied the old man. He appeared to hesitate. " There was a rumor once—your brother Bill heard it, that you had gone wrong. But, of course, I didn't believe it," he added indignantly.

" Jealousy," nodded Harris. " When I come back here, though, I expected to find you well looked after by the boys. I didn't have a notion how things stood." He relapsed into silence and after a time continued:

" You see, where I was I had it pretty tough for awhile. There was some guys tried to break me, an' I was alone a good deal. That was the worst thing, ' solitary'; I mean bein' alone so much," he explained hastily.

" When I come back and found you was sort of up against the same kind of deal I figured it was up to me to get you out of it. I was all you had left, and probably outside of you I ain't got a friend in the world. It was up to us to stick together."

" What about that pardner of yours you been tellin' me about?" asked his father suspiciously.

" There you go again, trying to make me out a liar," roared Harris. " What I meant was, I ain't got a friend here in California —outside of social friends like the Svensens. There ain't another guy anywhere, like my pardner in Mexico, an' when I tell him somethin' he gets what I'm driving at without tryin' to trip me up," he concluded sarcastically.

IV

HARRIS lit a cigarette and stamped out the door of their two room shanty.

The night was warm and fragrant with the smell of green fields. He glanced up at the starlit sky. It was calm and restful here, yet every fiber of his being urged him to go; to strike out before it was too late.

The constantly recurring question, " Was he a killer?" destroyed this one moment that should have meant peace. He realized dimly that never in life could he enjoy the well being of quiet places. Too long had the Wolf been dedicated to violence.

He turned back; his father had already retired. He undressed slowly and got into bed. For hours the glow of his cigarettes burned against the darkness as he planned

a get-away that this time should actually lead to Mexico.

Sunday morning dawned at the ranch like any other day. No church bells rang in the valley, nor well dressed idlers loitered through the holiday. Chickens and rabbits must be fed, and as Harris backed the Ford out of the leanto garage he observed the scattering of farmers in the little community already at work.

His father came out of the house and stood bareheaded in the sunshine watching him.

Wolf leaned out of the car.

"The express office is supposed to be closed to-day, but the guy promised he'd be there to let me have them rabbits. I'll be back before noon."

The old man nodded.

"I'm crazy for to see 'em," he admitted with a gleam of anticipation.

"You understand how things is with me, pop," said Harris slowly. "If anything should happen, like I got a wire, I might pull out, see? You want to cross this new buck with them other rabbits you got, but keep the new strain unmixed."

His father opened his mouth as though suddenly deprived of speech.

"I'm just tellin' you what to do if I have to send 'em out by somebody else, that's all. I expect I'll be back like I said. So long."

He spun the little car around and turned it down the newly made driveway. When he reached the main road he looked back. The old man was still standing, bareheaded, watching.

Harris leaned out of the window and waved. He saw the other answer uncertainly.

Surprised at his own action, he stepped on the throttle viciously. In his pocket was a note already prepared to send back by the driver he would presently arrange for. For the last time he said good-by to his father.

The nearest railroad station was Gleason, fourteen miles away. Not more than a score of houses comprised the village. It lay on the main boulevard to Los Angeles, and on Sunday was apt to be crowded with automobiles.

By going early Harris hoped to avoid most of this traffic. He had previously received, through the services of Svensen, who had been in to Gleason for supplies, the express agent's consent to meet the morning train. As he approached, Harris observed that the State highway was still nearly deserted; hardly a soul seemed astir in the town.

He drove boldly to the express office, where he found the agent and his son awaiting him.

"Train got in fifteen minutes ago and left some of the prettiest bunnies I ever laid eyes on," admired the former as Harris pulled up. "My boy here has some rabbits, but they're nothing to these."

The Wolf glanced incuriously at the crates and then turned to the youth.

"Can you drive a Ford, kid?" he asked.

"Sure can, mister," answered the other.

"Tell you what I'll do," offered Harris. "If you'll take this outfit out to the ranch an' leave the car you can have one of the does. I'll give you a note to the old man explaining."

"Oh, will I!" exclaimed the boy.

"It'll save me a trip in and back. I've got to get to Los Angeles on the next stage an' I may be gone a week or two."

"I can tie my bike behind and ride back on it," the boy told his father.

This being satisfactorily concluded, Harris moved up the street to the main garage where the auto stages stopped. He bought a Sunday paper from a soft drink establishment near-by and withdrew around the corner of the building to discover in seclusion the answer to the question that burned like a fever in his blood.

On the second inside page he found it:

POLICE KILLER STILL UNCAPTURED

SUSPECTS RELEASED

Reward for Capture Swelled by Additional $500

Further along he read a wholly erroneous description of himself. At the end was appended a paragraph to the effect that Patrolman Roney was the father of three small children.

Harris crumpled the paper with an oath.

He sat for a time chin in hand, thinking, fighting against the panic that threatened his already ragged nerves.

One thought above all churned through the turmoil in his mind: He must put as much distance as possible between himself and Gleason. There must be nothing to connect him with the ranch and "the old man."

He got up.

A huge truck returning empty from the city had stopped to take on gas and oil.

The weary driver was getting a drink at the stand next door.

Harris approached affably.

"I'll take the wheel fer awhile if you'll give me a lift," he offered.

"How far are you going?" asked the other.

"Oh, up the line," answered the Wolf vaguely.

"I turn off about thirty miles above here, if that'll do you any good," said the driver.

"That's O. K.," agreed Harris.

He climbed to the high seat.

"I'll get her goin' an' you can spell me awhile," said the stranger as he cranked up.

Harris took the wheel.

"We been cuttin' alfalfa at the ranch," the young fellow informed him as they moved off. "I worked all day yesterday and started in to town at twelve o'clock last night. I ain't had a wink of sleep since Friday night."

"Take a nap then; I can handle her," said Harris.

"I sure would like to, but don't forget I turn off where we come to a rock gas station. It's on the edge of the desert. You can get a lift from there."

He shortly fell asleep, and the gunman, breathing easier as each succeeding mile dropped between him and "the ranch," piloted the big machine onward.

But toward the last they seemed to drag along. As each succeeding carload of Sunday tourists flashed past, now with greater frequency as the morning drew on, he had a feeling of being held back. It was a nightmarish sensation.

Eventually they reached the turn off and Harris awoke the other and climbed down.

"Hey, Joe," his late companion called to the gas station manager, "if anybody comes by you know, tell 'em to give this guy a lift; he's O. K."

"Thanks," called Harris.

"Thanks yourself," yelled the young fellow as he drove off.

V

OUT here, on the edge of the Mohave the sun was too hot to be comfortable. The Wolf moved over to what shade was offered at the side of the gas station.

"Where you headed for?" inquired the dour-looking manager suspiciously.

"Up the line."

"Well, stick around, there'll be a lot of cars stop by before noon."

He sat down in the shade and waited, but whereas it seemed that previously a continuous line of machines had darted past, now they had disappeared utterly.

He got up again and paced back and forth restlessly. He felt that *something* was gaining on him.

"If it wasn't for them damn rabbits I could 'a' been in New York by now," he muttered.

Then his mood changed. "Gee, I bet the old man was tickled when he seen 'em. I'd like to been there. Maybe in a year, I might get back."

"'Here comes one now," called Joe.

A big black sport roadster with red trimming and generous nickel plating was slowing down. At sight of the long hood sheltering the powerful motor, the Wolf's heart leaped. Here was a car he could make a get-away in, if he only had the chance.

As it stopped he advanced with as beguiling a look as he could summon.

The driver was protesting to Joe: "Vat, twenty-two cents for a gallon of gasoline? Then only give me two gallons."

Too late, Harris recognized Looey Cohn and Miss Getz.

In the same instant the former cried out: "Oh, look, Rosie, the holdup what shot the policeman!" He made a frantic effort to climb over the lap of his companion.

"Get out quietly," growled the Wolf, as he drew his automatic. "I could have

made my get-away before if it hadn't been for you."

"Fill her up," he ordered Joe, "an' take a look at th' oil. I'll see that this bird pays you."

Looey and his companion climbed out and stood white and shaky before him.

All the hatred of his prison years centered suddenly on the figure of the timid merchant.

"I oughta kill you," snarled the Wolf. His rage choked him. He felt nauseated. There was little hope now but that he would be captured and identified. The futility of his plans crushed him.

"Aw, what's the use," he said brokenly.

He turned and pitched forward suddenly on his face.

With surprise he heard the report of Joe's rifle; another saw him in the doorway.

"Sent him for oil," he remembered.

An orange spurt of flame from Joe's gun; another giant blow that paralyzed his left shoulder.

"This won't do," thought the Wolf thickly.

He flung his right arm over like a swimmer and fired. That was better. Joe had ducked for shelter.

The Wolf lay panting, fighting for breath. It came over him that he was done for, dying.

They would trace him back to Gleason; show his body to the express agent; take away the old man's rabbits.

Suddenly a triumphant smile cracked his granite face.

Slowly, painfully, he aimed at the glass gasoline container of the pump.

He pulled the trigger and it shattered.

There were two more. He aimed again.

"Run, Looey, run," he heard the girl scream behind him.

He fired. Again a hit.

"Why didn't the damn stuff explode?"

A shape sprang from the station and raced beyond his vision. Joe was making his get-away. That was all right. Nobody to stop him now.

Gasoline was bubbling out of the pumps and trickling toward him.

He hitched forward, closer.

It was getting dark. He waited, gathering his strength for the last trigger pull.

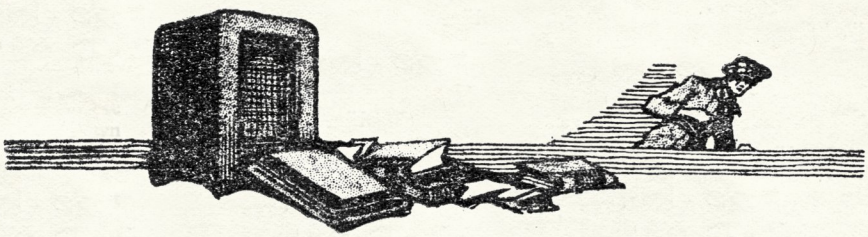
It was somewhere there ahead. He couldn't see.

Suddenly he felt a cold liquid on his arm; it crept along, touched his face.

Gasoline! The old man was safe with his rabbits.

Summoning his dying strength the Wolf fired.

His consciousness went out with the explosion that rocked the desert.



"Give me my mother's umbrella!" she cried

DEFENDERS OF THE LAW

By Mansfield Scott

AN OCCULTIST PROPHESIED HIS DEATH AT THE WHEEL, SO HE DEFIED IT EVERYWHERE ELSE: AT EACH TURN HE FLIRTED WITH THE GRIM SPECTER

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

ALTHOUGH Harold Ward operated the Boston antivice society during his father's illness successfully enough to cause crooks to attempt his life, on the death of the elder Ward, Harold was removed from the society and Sawtell, formerly the chief's aid, took over control. During the early part of his régime he allowed a warrant to expire on the notorious Harrison gambling and dope house, to the disapproval of Detective Steele, ally of the society. Steele refused to disclose the identity of the person who obtained the inside information about the house; that person was his most elusive operative, Dizzy McArthur, so called for his reckless abandon, former college athlete and war aviator, who was in the game for adventure, and chafed under the temporary inactivity.

CHAPTER XXXII

A NEW "TICKET"

THE investigator did not allow his operatives to approach him while in the corridors of the courthouse. Judge White was on the warrant bench. Appearing as complaining witness, and offering also the testimony of his two men, Steele asked the magistrate to grant a new search warrant for the premises at 142 Warrington Street. After examining the witnesses briefly, Judge Gray complied; and the warrant was given to Joseph McNulty, an aged police officer attached to the district attorney's office.

McNulty was disliked by most of the police—not for personal reasons—for he was an affable and quick-witted man—but because of his close connection with the district attorney.

The officer adjusted his glasses and peered at the warrant. "What do you want me to do with this, Mr. —"

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION for August 27

"Merely to keep it, for the present," Steele replied. "And to say nothing about it *to any one.*"

"All right, sir; I can certainly do that," said the other, laughing.

This was on Thursday forenoon. In the evening Steele sent an operative, Brown, to watch Harrison's house; and he himself through Warrington Street twice about midnight. He saw two parties entering and one leaving. In the morning Brown reported that the dive had been running as usual.

The investigator went to the courthouse again, but did not find McNulty. He descended to a telephone booth and called Sawtell.

"This is Steele, speaking from the courthouse. I have a new search warrant for Harrison's place."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Sawtell. "What have you done that for, Mr. Steele? Just when I was trying to let them get into full swing! Don't you see—they'll be tipped off exactly as they were before!"

"Oh, do you think they will?"

"I know they will! A very foolish move, Mr. Steele."

Anger was plain in the other's voice. Steele hung up the receiver, smiling in faint amusement, and returned to his office, where he was required upon another case. When evening came he gave instructions for Thompson to watch the house on Warrington Street.

Sawtell's prediction proved correct. All comers to Harrison's that night were turned away at the door. Moreover, Thompson reported the presence of several exceedingly tough-looking men on a near-by corner for more than three hours. He said that these men had every appearance of gunmen.

For the third morning in succession, Steele went to the central court. He found McNulty in the district attorney's office and spoke briefly with him. Leaving the building by the rear entrance, he met Special Officer Bennett, leader of the raiding squad.

Bennett gave him a peculiar glance. "How are you these days, Mr. Steele? Still doing work for the D. A.?"

"Occasionally. Just now I'm on that Harrison job."

"Oh, yes, on Warrington Street. But that place isn't running any more, I understand from the society."

"I know it isn't," the investigator said. "It's closed tight. That's the way I hope to keep it. That was Mr. Ward's wish. Sometimes, I believe, the unspoken threat of prosecution is more effective than prosecution itself."

"I guess that's right," returned Bennett, smiling, and again looking at him oddly.

Steele did not hear from Sawtell during that day, which was Saturday. In the early evening he called Dizzy McArthur's home.

"Is Mr. Kendall McArthur there?"

"Kendall McArthur speaking."

"This is Steele."

"Who?" demanded the inventor—and he broke the connection.

Steele hung up his receiver, and presently the bell rang.

"Hello, Mr. Mack? Yes—this is really Steele. Can you come around to my office?"

The other arrived in a half hour.

"Mr. Mac," the head of the agency asked, regarding him seriously, "are you sure that you want to go on with this matter?"

"You mean, with Harrison's?"

"Yes."

The inventor laughed. "I'm going to finish it."

"M-mm. Why?"

"I'm a sportsman," explained McArthur.

"Quite so. But I wonder if you really have any idea of what you are doing. You are attempting to stand in the way of a system which is making hundreds of thousands of dollars every month for promoters and grafters in this city."

"That's what makes it hardfought and interesting."

Steele chuckled quietly. "You'll find it interesting enough if they ever suspect that you are the cause of their recent troubles; I guarantee that. I have three men out watching the house to-night. Heaven help them if their purpose becomes known in that neighborhood.

"Well, if you wish to continue—we'll take a ride through there a little later."

They did, passing the house several times behind the curtains of Steele's gray roadster; and to all appearances the place was closed. Parties were turned away from the door one after another. Finally Steele followed one of the parties—two gamblers and the girl known as Diamond-Tooth Marjie. They rode away from the house in a red cab, circled through the back streets for a few minutes, and presently returned, walking down a narrow, dark alley toward the back of Harrison's premises.

In the morning Steele's operatives informed him that they had seen many parties enter and leave quietly by the back alley.

"Do you know," he declared to Walter Clapp, his most intimate associate at the office, "I think it is small wonder that Mr. James Ward often had to use drastic methods to accomplish his results. How little any of us knew of the endless fight he had—one man, all alone, against indifference and corruption—like a rock in the midst of a dirty stream! Is it any wonder that the currents wore his life away?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

"WATCH THEM MIX IT"

"I WANNA Go Where You Go—"

"Then I'll be happy!" finished Little Evelyn, laughing.

McArthur thought that it was an unusually thin and pale Little Evelyn who sat opposite to him at Canton Cabaret. He would scarcely have recognized her as the girl whom he had first met there four months earlier. Her face was lined, her eyes sunken, and artificial colors did little toward concealing it all.

"In Heaven's name," he flung out suddenly, "why don't you, why can't you cut it out?"

She smiled at him again, a faint and rather wistful smile. "Sky-pilot!" she murmured. "Holy-Joe! Holy-Joe Mac!"

"It's no worse than being a booster," he returned.

"A—booster!" said Evelyn, a hint of anger creeping into her eyes. "Say, listen—don't call *me* a booster! If you do, I'll never speak to you again. I'm not a booster—"

"You said you were once—"

"I never did!" she gave back, putting down her knife and fork. "I certainly hope I was never that dumb. Only dumbbells are boosters. I—I—" She hesitated, her face relaxing into a smile once more. "I may have said I used to be a fillout or or a get-away for a mob of swell boosters—"

"Well," challenged McArthur, "what's that but shoplifting?"

"It's all the difference in the world," declared his companion. "Fillouts and get-aways don't do any hoisting themselves. Their job is to beat it with the swag as soon as the boosters lift it, so if the finger calls the booster he doesn't get any goods on her. Then the booster can put up such a squawk that he'll never dare bother her again."

"Humph. I think it's rather a nice distinction. I'm not criticizing you—but I can't understand what you see in it. It's only the dope that makes you do such things—"

She laughed again, coughing. "Listen. We have to hit the coke to help our nerve. It makes one's face steady."

The inventor shook his head. The pity of it had never impressed him so forcibly as it did upon this evening in the Canton. It occurred to him that the finger might soon call Little Evelyn in a summons which she must answer without stalling, without waiting to split the swag before going up the river.

"For God's sake, Evelyn, quit it, before it's too late!" he begged suddenly.

"But how can I?" she asked. "I have to live some way."

"Tell me. Have you a brother?"

"No. Why?" She looked at him, her gaze puzzled.

"Well—I haven't any sister, either. Let's pretend that I'm your brother for a little while. You won't have to keep on with this game, if we do that."

For an instant the girl stared at him, amazed; then once again she shook with laughter.

"You—be my brother!" she exclaimed.

"You—be *my* brother! Go on—you're making fun of me—"

"I'm not," he said.

"But how could you be my brother? And, listen, you fiddler! What was the idea in sending me away up to the St. Elmer that night? If I hadn't met Jimmie Brown, I might have got pinched for going in there. They'd think I was a dip or something."

"I apologize humbly," McArthur declared. "But why not be my sister for a little while?"

A subtle change came into her expression.

"I—I have a brother," she replied.

"I thought you said you hadn't."

"Well, I didn't want you to know. He's—he's in trouble. I've got to make money to get a mouthpiece for him. Listen—loan me a hundred dollars so I can help my brother—will you, please?"

"Help him keep on beating the law!" he surmised.

"No, no. He wants to quit the racket—honest. He was framed."

Before they parted at her door, McArthur loaned her the hundred.

He had allowed the cab to go away, so he walked toward Columbia Street to find another. As he strode along, he became aware of an odd sensation that he was being followed. Twice he glanced back sharply, but could see no one. Finally he noticed a small man on the opposite side of the street, who, however, did not appear to be paying any attention to him.

To make certain, McArthur went into a drug store and asked for a milk shake. While it was being prepared, he watched the stranger through the window. The man walked steadily on, not even glancing across the street; and when McArthur came out he was not in sight.

On Columbia Street he found his old acquaintance, the colored driver, with his delapidated olive-drab taxi. He gave his home address, and the negro left him at his door with a cheery "Good night, boss!"

As the inventor turned to go in, another car stopped directly in front of the walk. He started. The machine was a roadster; and there was a single occupant, beckoning to him.

He approached warily, and caught his breath in surprise. The man was Malcome Steele.

"Mr. Mac, have you forgotten what I said to you the other night?"

"What do you mean?"

"About running risks when it is possible that Harrison's gang may suspect the truth at any time?"

"Oh—" McArthur frowned, blinking. "By risk, you mean my being with Little Evelyn?"

Steele shook his head. "It is for you to decide what risk you are running in that connection. But when you go into a drug store in that district again, and drink a soda or a milkshake—you watch them mix it. Watch them mix it, Mr. Mac! Do you comprehend?"

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FIRST OF THE MONTH

ENTERING the office of the society on the first day of March, Malcome Steele asked for Sawtell, and was admitted to the tiny inner room where he had conferred upon several occasions with Harold Ward.

"Good morning, Mr. Steele," said Sawtell stiffly.

"Good morning, Mr. Sawtell. I think this is the date you spoke of in reference to another effort to raid Harrison's?"

"Well, I did speak of it," returned the representative of the society, with some spirit, "but my plans have been completely disorganized by your getting out that second ticket. I can't do anything about it now until I've conferred with the president and the directors. There's to be a meeting to-morrow—"

"Regarding the second search warrant," the investigator remarked, "I notice that its effect of stopping Harrison's activities lasted only for a single night."

"What on earth do you mean, Mr. Steele? The joint is shut down dead at present. I watched that house for an hour twice this week, and not a single person entered or left."

"Did you watch the back alley, too?" Steele inquired.

"The back alley?" Sawtell repeated, staring hard at him.

"I think your information about the place is incomplete."

"Well, the fact remains that they did learn of the ticket as soon as you swore it out."

"Quite true. But I think we should capitalize the fact that they aren't particularly afraid of the warrant. You say you are positive that a clerk of the court, Charlie Wilton, was responsible for the leak. Would you be willing to tell me how you are so sure?"

"No, I wouldn't, Steele," replied Sawtell bluntly.

"Well, I propose, if you are certain Wilton is the one, that we eliminate Wilton."

"Eliminate him? How?"

"Surely we could contrive to have him absent from the court for a day. We'll return this ticket while he is there; then take out another in his absence."

Sawtell again looked at him sharply. "I'll have to take it up with the directors," was his answer.

On the following day the investigator did not hear from him. The next afternoon, Friday, he received a letter from the president of the society:

DEAR MR. STEELE:

I am informed by the agent in charge of our office, Mr. Wallis Sawtell, that our expenses for the past two months have greatly exceeded the regular allotment, and that this has been the case because of our having employed detectives from your agency in the effort to obtain evidence against drug and gambling rings said to be centralized on Warrington Street.

Mr. Sawtell has now shown me reports convincing me that these illicit interests are no longer being carried on in such a manner as to be a menace to the community. I feel, therefore, that we cannot at present continue the extra expense involved in having your agency coöperate with us.

Very truly yours,
FRANKLIN W. LOWELL.

Steele called McArthur, hung up the receiver while the inventor called back, then told him of the development. At McArthur's suggestion he wrote to the president of the society, asking him if he was sure that his information about the Harrison activities was correct. On Monday the investigator received the following:

DEAR MR. STEELE:

I have your letter of March 3, inquiring about the reliability of information which has been given to me in regard to the illicit activities on Warrington Street.

I am grateful to you for directing my attention to the possibility of error in this matter; but I feel, as before, that we are not warranted in pushing the case at present.

Very truly yours,
FRANKLIN W. LOWELL.

"Now, that is strange," Steele mused to Walter Clapp, as he laid aside the letter. "The president of the society is one of the finest men in the State. I am surprised that he should be so readily deceived."

As a final move, he wrote to the district attorney. The reply was prompt:

DEAR MR. STEELE:

Thank you very much for your information that the narcotic and gaming combination on Warrington Street has not been entirely broken up.

Mr. Franklin Lowell has written me, however, that these evils have been greatly reduced, and that the results to be obtained by further action would not justify the heavy expense. As this has been one of the Ward cases from the first, I am inclined to let the matter rest for the present, although I have suggested to Mr. Lowell that his agents keep watch of the place for some time.

I am making every effort to find those responsible for the death of your operative, Wesley Stone, who was working for me on this investigation. You may be assured that whenever I have need of further service of this kind I shall negotiate with your agency.

Sincerely yours,
HENRY C. O'NEIL.

"Well—you see what will happen now, don't you, Clapp?"

"What?"

"You see what the move is? By the time that Mr. O'Neil is convinced that these gaming and narcotic interests have not been curbed, it will probably be so near the end of his term in office that he will hesitate to undertake a job of such magnitude. I am afraid he has definitely killed all chance of his reëlection. And who can say whether the next district attorney will push the matter at all?"

"He's going to continue the Stone investigation," Clapp observed hopefully.

"Yes; but it's my opinion that the one hope of finding his slayer lies in arresting whatever gunmen we might encounter at Harrison's in a raid, and giving them the third degree. We know that Stone had been in the house shortly before his death—at least, we are sure of it beyond a reasonable doubt—and I am thoroughly convinced that the party at his table in the Canton Cabaret included one or more of the gunmen from inside."

For a few moments he sat gazing thoughtfully at his desk.

"Well—we'll have to inform Mr. McArthur—" he decided, as he took up the telephone.

CHAPTER XXXV

MCARTHUR CALCULATES

"MR. MAC," Steele remarked, when the inventor arrived, "it appears that there is not to be any further action against Harrison for some time."

"You tried the district attorney?" Disappointment was clear in McArthur's voice.

"I wrote to him. But he has been advised that it is needless to go farther in the matter at present. I would urge him, only it would seem as if we were looking for more work on the case, and might result in his not using our operatives in the future."

"Suppose that I go to him and lay the matter before him?" the inventor suggested.

"If you do," Steele replied, regarding him steadily, "if you as much as set foot inside the door of the courthouse, Harrison's gang will be told of it, and your rôle will be at an end."

"I could write, or see him at his home."

"I have written," the investigator reminded him.

McArthur nodded, studying the pattern of the rug. He drew a long breath. "It looks as though they have beaten us," was his comment.

For a half minute he sat motionless, whistling.

"Mr. Steele," he asked, at length, "doesn't the law provide that any citizen may appear as complainant against lawbreakers? It doesn't have to be the district attorney, or the police, or the society, does it?"

"Certainly not. Any person may go to court and complain legally about violations of the law. It's a fact that many people don't realize, because it's so seldom that a private citizen does such a thing." He looked steadily at McArthur again. "Why?"

"Well—suppose I should go in as complainant, and get a warrant sworn out myself—wouldn't it have to be served?"

Steele smiled. "I am afraid that I detect several loose ends dangling from that idea, Mr. Mac. To obtain an order from the court for action, you would have to produce witnesses other than yourself. And if you should go in as complainant, you may be sure Harrison would learn of it immediately."

"But why can't some one become complainant for me? Why can't I engage your concern to push this case just as Mr. Ward had planned to push it?"

"M-mm. I see what you mean." The head of the agency hesitated. "Do you know what it would probably cost you to complete it, against the opposition you would face, at the rate which I charged the State for our service to the district attorney?"

"How much?" inquired McArthur, thoughtfully.

Steele took a pad and made a rough estimate. He passed the top sheet to the inventor.

McArthur laughed when he saw the figures. His total capital, including what he held in convertible securities, would cover the amount with a little to spare. A very little. Income from his electric car switch had decreased considerably, and he had not finished his train-stopping apparatus.

It would mean fewer neckties and sport shirts, perhaps even a delay in conforming to some of the latest styles.

"I'll engage you to carry it through, Mr. Steele," he said.

"You understand that my estimate is conservative."

"Oh, yes." The inventor blinked.

"Mr. McArthur, I'm curious to know why you are so keen about this."

"It was Mr. Ward's wish, wasn't it?" he returned simply.

In his heart McArthur realized that there was another reason, although for days and weeks he had shrunk from admitting it. He had shrunk instinctively from the thought which was becoming so large in his life—an amazing and bewildering thought—that of Little Evelyn.

And of a promoter who backed Harrison's joint, who had taught her the game she was playing, had promised her immunity from prosecution is she would "line up with his mob." House of death? Heaven knew that it was well named by Officer Harvey—if only for the way it was withering Little Evelyn!

The private investigator rose, looking out of the window. He shook his head slowly.

"No, Mr. Mac," he said with quiet decision, "you can't hire me to finish this job."

McArthur had seen enough of Steele to know that it was useless to try to sway him. He left the office bitterly disappointed. But he was not defeated. There were many other detective agencies in the city, many with cheaper rates than the National. McArthur went home to make arrangements for turning some of his securities into cash.

His brother, Duncan, caught him poring over documents and figures and demanded an explanation.

Duncan's proprietory attitude would long since have irritated Dizzy McArthur beyond the point of endurance, had he not realized that his brother meant it all in a spirit of kindness and protection. He told Duncan of the way that the action against Harrison and Muir had been dropped, and confided his intention of carrying the matter through.

"W-well—you colossal fool!" exclaimed the other, flinging himself down into a chair with such force that it creaked, and staring at him. "You continental, absolute, unabridged ass! What in the name of the Lord are you doing this for?"

The inventor started to tell him.

"James Ward's sake!" scoffed Duncan. "James Ward, rot! I wish to Heaven you had never met the man! But you're not doing it for his sake. It's just another of your damned, wild, tom-fool escapades!"

"Well, then—for the good of the community."

"*Bah!* Do you think any one will thank you? Good God, they'll laugh at you! Who do you think cares whether that joint keeps on running or not? No one except some fanatic like James Ward. If a fellow doesn't want to go to a joint like that he won't go there—that's all."

His brother blinked. "When the drug craze or the gambling craze gets a man, he's a slave to it."

"Well, what if he is? It's better to let him dope himself to death or shoot himself than to burden the rest of society with him. The country is over-populated with people who would be better off dead, and the kindest and sanest thing is to let them get out of the way if they want to. This saving a man in spite of himself is a mistaken policy. But go ahead, if you want to!" he finished, in disgust. "After you've busted yourself, or got your head blown open, you'll probably wake up."

Kendall smiled, and went on with his calculations.

He did not visit any of the other detective agencies that afternoon. It seemed advisable first to formulate a more definite plan of action. Much depended upon the question of whether he was still unsuspected by Harrison and his associates; and he could learn that only at night. In the evening he dressed with his usual care, took a cab to the corner of Dartnell Street, and walked from Dartnell down Columbia toward Warrington.

His brother's denunciation followed him. After all, Duncan was probably right. His attitude was the nearer right of the two, the more normal. Of course, the community would not thank him for his efforts to close Harrison's place—would only laugh at him. Nearly every one whom he had encountered so far, except James Ward, had laughed at him, either secretly or openly.

Steele had not laughed. He had simply looked at him steadily and curiously. But he had declined to work for him.

The refusal had left McArthur surprised as well as disappointed. He had imagined

that Steele was a man who would be glad of the chance to keep on until he had obtained his objective. In a way, he had thought of Steele as the greatest asset to his team in the game against Harrison—not as an active player, for Steele had been playing so many years that he was ineligible—but as head coach, as manager.

Perhaps, however, the investigator felt that his particular work was to find the slayer of Wesley Stone.

McArthur passed the Canton Cabaret without meeting any one whom he recognized and continued slowly toward the well-remembered corner of Columbia and Warrington Streets. After a mild week, winter had come back in earnest for a final siege; and flakes were driven against the inventor's face. Again, as on the last night when he had gone home with Little Evelyn, he had an elusive sensation that he was being followed. Repeated glances failed to show him any reason for the feeling.

At Mountfort Street, the last before Warrington, he paused long enough to direct a youth who addressed him.

"The second on the right," he told him mechanically.

It occurred to him then that the young man's face was vaguely familiar. He bore a rather close resemblance to Thompson, one of Steele's operatives. Sharply McArthur caught his breath and looked back at him. He *was* Thompson, beyond question—now on his way toward Oliver Street.

Oliver Street—

Casually the inventor took out his notebook. He turned the pages until he found:

"State Street at eleven."

Steele's words in his office came back to him. "You can't hire me to finish this job."

All at once McArthur blinked in complete understanding.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN THE HOUSE AGAIN

McARTHUR'S notebook was so arranged that if it should fall into the hands of the gangsters, it would convey no meaning to them, no hint of his connection with Ward or Steele. On the first page was a simple list of twenty-one names. A close scrutiny of this page could reveal only the fact that all of these happened to be names of streets, also that the names began with twenty-one different letters. The instructions were written on the pages bearing the index letters.

On one page, the letter B, there was nothing written. There was no need of it. McArthur had memorized this sinister signal first of all. It was similar to the seventeen, the "life and death" of the railroad code. If he should be given that signal, it would mean that the game was over, that his purpose had been betrayed to gangland, that his life in the district wasn't worth a lead dime! B for Beach Street!

Beach Street—connecting the slums of Chinatown with the precincts of the Castle gang—street of a thousand evil deeds and memories!

In the office on State Street McArthur learned that Steele's plan was the same as his—an experiment to learn whether Harrison's forces had suspected his part in obtaining the warrants. At twelve he returned to the corner and approached the house. He was watched by Steele's men, but, of course, he knew that they could not help him once he had entered.

He had envied the men in the West before the coming of law—men who had "gone through" against odds alone, with a gun in each hand spitting flame and bullets. The Great War had brought all his day dreams of this kind into a fascinating and terrible reality. Here was his chance to go through once more; only this time he must go unarmed, in a stronghold guarded by half the bad men in the city.

But at the door McArthur was refused admittance. No explanation was offered to him. He watched, and saw others turned away. He also saw some of these others stroll around toward the alley at the back. The inventor did not make the mistake of seeking entrance in this way himself. That, when he had not been told of it, would show too much knowledge of Harrison's affairs.

He discontinued for the night, and the next morning he conferred again with

Steele. It was decided that McArthur must learn of the "back way in" through a casual conversation with Topper Drohan or some of his friends.

About twenty minutes after the inventor had left the office of the National Detective Agency, Brown pressed Steele's buzzer.

"Mr. Wallis Sawtell is here, sir."

The investigator raised his eyebrows. "I'll see him."

Sawtell came in smiling. "Good morning, Mr. Steele! Not sore at me, are you?"

"Certainly not. Why should I be?"

"Oh, I was a little abrupt the other day," the man apologized, "but I didn't mean anything by it. When I've been worrying, I say things sometimes, but I'm all over them in a day or so. I'm sorry the directors feel that we can't afford to keep on with you just at present."

"Sit down, Mr. Sawtell."

"Thanks. I can't stop but a minute, though. Say, Mr. Steele, there was one little matter—about that second ticket you took out on the Harrison place—do you remember? It was given to McNulty. We're closing our reports on that case today, and we thought if the warrant was returned we could finish everything right up quickly."

"I see," the investigator said.

"I asked McNulty about it this morning, but he said he wouldn't turn it in until he heard from you. Would you be willing to give me a little note to him this morning?"

"No, I wouldn't, Sawtell," replied Steele bluntly.

The other's face darkened. "Well—"

"Did you ask the district attorney?"

"No, I didn't want to bother him. It seems to me, Mr. Steele, inasmuch as you swore that ticket out in our behalf, your duty is to help us finish the matter up as quickly as possible."

Steele made a note on a small pad. "I'll bear it in mind the next time I go over to court," he replied.

Muttering something inaudible, Sawtell rose and stamped out of the office.

The next evening, Dizzy McArthur went tc the Canton for supper, hoping to meet Drohan or one of his friends.

He was successful. The bootlegger entered shortly after ten, and joined him at his table. If there was any change in his attitude toward him, McArthur could not detect it.

"Evelyn tells me you did her quite a favor," he remarked. "She was hard up for ready cash; and she had a chance to swing a nice little sale to some friends of hers on West Needham Street."

"What the devil do you mean?" cried the inventor. "I loaned her that money to help get a good lawyer to defend her brother."

"S-sh!" returned Drohan. "They ain't no need to broadcast."

He looked nervously around the room. "Let me wise you," he added, laughing. "Little Evelyn hasn't any brother."

When they had finished supper, the suggestion that they drop in at Harrison's followed naturally. One of Drohan's friends, Duke Andrews, drove them to the house in his cab. He had a mirror above his windshield, and McArthur could see the dim yellow eyes of Steele's roadster behind. When they left the cab, the bootlegger surprised him by leading the way directly to the front door.

He pressed the bell—once, four times, twice. The bullet-headed individual admitted them without hesitation or question.

McArthur caught his breath in comprehension. Here at last was the correct spacing of the seven rings. One—four—two. "Simple enough yet complicated enough," Steele had predicted. 142. Patrons would not forget it, for it was in full view upon the transom.

Brick Harrison's face lighted, his gold teeth flashed genially, when he saw McArthur. He wrung his hand, and they chatted for several minutes in a corner. The gaming room was not crowded, but all who were present were playing without restraint.

The inventor told Harrison that he had been refused admittance.

"Once this week, and once before."

"We was closed here for awhile," Harrison admitted. "Takin' a little vacation. We all have to take a rest, even in this game."

The explanation seemed natural. It was unlikely that Harrison would tell visitors that his place had been in danger of being raided. McArthur felt sure that none of the men in the room regarded him with suspicion. He was greatly puzzled, however, by the fact that the front door was now being used freely and openly.

"What was it you had on your mind, Mr. Mac? Been thinking over that little proposition I made?"

The inventor thought quickly. The novelty of his legerdemain had worn off, and he could not hope that it would make him welcome indefinitely.

"I—I've been wondering about it," he answered. "You see, I never used my skill with the boards for that purpose. The idea sort of makes a hit with me. But I'd have to practice a little—"

"Practice? Hell, no! You're a wizard right now, Mac."

"W-well—suppose I let you know in a few days—"

"Do that," returned Harrison. He squeezed his hand again.

McArthur stayed for a short time, talking with a few of the others. Many smiled and nodded to him, several greeting him as "Four-Ace Mac." He found Jimmie Brown at a table with his friend Silk, Dr. Marsh, and others. The physician had been drinking, and was declaiming heavily and somewhat stupidly as he endeavored to play. Upon McArthur's arrival he poured drinks for all in the group; and after the next deal he repeated the courtesy.

"My friends," he proposed solemnly, "here's to our old friend, James Ward—the only good thing he ever did—he kicked the bucket!"

A roar of hilarity and approbation from all around greeted this. McArthur blinked, and laughed with the others.

When the inventor left the house, he rode home in a yellow cab, with Steele following skillfully at a distance. This time the head of the agency did not approach his door, and they did not have an opportunity to talk until morning.

"The warrant has been returned," Steele told him.

"Oh! How did that happen?"

"Well, I find that it is contrary to police rules to keep a search warrant more than seven days without service. Some one informed the superintendent that McNulty had been holding this warrant much longer than the time allowed, and he ordered him to turn it in."

The inventor shook his head as he left the building. The farther he went, the more hopeless his task seemed. Hopeless and thankless. His team was losing ground, not gaining.

"McArthur—you colossal fool!" he mused suddenly, laughing until his sides ached.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"WHAT'S A GAMBLING JOINT?"

MALCOME STEELE had hoped from the first that two or more of his own men might win their way into the good graces of Harrison's "mob" to such a degree that they would be welcome visitors at his house; and for this purpose he had transferred two men from the Chicago branch of his agency—Wesley Stone and Arthur Williams. The death of the former, however, had convinced Steele of the futility of this hope, and he had sent Williams back to Chicago, where he was needed. The head of the agency now considered calling him East again.

It was true that Williams had claimed Stone's effects at the hospital, and that Harrison might have learned of this. But all efforts by other operatives to make friends with members of the gang had failed. Strangers were regarded constantly with suspicion.

Steele had reason to hope, because of the progress Williams had made earlier, that in time he might succeed in entering the house and thus be able to assist McArthur. Of course, neither Bolton nor Marvin, alias the Robinson brothers, could become regular visitors without exciting speculation which might also involve the inventor.

A week after the second search warrant had been returned to the court, the investigator wired for his operative.

Arthur Williams was, in fact, more than an operative, being regularly in charge of

the branch in Chicago. He was a young man, with blue eyes and curly hair, one of the last whom a stranger would suspect of being a detective. Upon his arrival, he began frequenting the Canton Cabaret for supper. He had already contrived a slight acquaintance with Topper Drohan, a method similar to McArthur's—although, as it happened, Williams knew nothing about McArthur.

After a few nights, he met the bootlegger, and found that he remembered him. In artful ways he managed to strengthen their acquaintance.

Drohan was fond of billiards and bowling, and Williams was expert at both. They met upon several occasions and spent an hour at one of these sports. The detective did not attempt to hurry matters, for Drohan was naturally restless, and seldom spent very much time in one place.

One evening in Conlon's pool room, Williams saw a man whom he recognized instantly, although the man was in plain clothes on this occasion and he had previously seen him in uniform. It was Sergeant Hill, who had been at the hospital on the night of Stone's death. Williams did not believe that the sergeant remembered him.

The following Monday, he met Drohan again. The bootlegger appeared in a rare humor, and insisted that Williams have supper with him before they went to bowl.

They chose the Canton. When the waiter, whom Drohan addressed as Wing, had taken their order, Williams looked pleasantly at his host.

"Well, how's the liquor business?" he ventured.

Drohan met his glance frankly.

"Fine. How's the sleuthing business?"

The operative caught his breath, stared at him for a second, then laughed.

"I'll give you credit, Topper. How did you make me, and when?"

"Oh, don't worry, Artie. I've been on to your little game since I first knew you."

"Is that so!" mused the other, in amazement. "Why haven't you ever said so?"

"That's easy. I wanted to get a line on just what you was after."

Williams chuckled. "And have you got it?"

"Not yet," his companion admitted. "But I have a pretty fair idea."

He looked around for the waiter.

"Say, listen, Williams," he said, turning back. "What is your game? Tryin' to get the guy that bumped your side kick, eh?"

"That's it," the detective told him.

"That, and something else—eh?"

"You seem to know," said Williams carefully.

"I do know. You from Chi, too, are you?"

"Look here—how do you know Stone was my side kick?"

"Oh, never mind that," returned Drohan. "I have a hundred eyes in this town. But listen, Artie. What the hell's the sense in making a lot of trouble for a fellow that ain't doing nothing but running a gaming joint?"

"No hard feelings?" the operative asked.

"Course not. Detecting's your business; bootlegging's mine. But, on the level, what's the harm in gambling?"

"There's dope in that joint, too."

"No, no. Let me tell you something. There's no dope in that place. That's all the bunk."

He paused while the Chinese brought the food and served them.

"Brick Harrison is as good a fellow, as good a sport, as they is living," he went on a moment later. "Now, mind you, I've got no use for this croaking stuff. If I knew who is was that plugged your side kick I'd tell you right this minute. I swear I would. But what harm is Brick doing by keeping a gaming house?"

"Perhaps not very much," Williams admitted. "But—"

"Yeah—I know. It's what you're getting paid for. But ain't it a hell of a way to have to make a living, Artie—taking a chance every night on getting bumped like Stone was? And what if youse do break into that joint? There'll be more shooting—some one else will get plugged. What's the sense of it?"

"You think there'll be more shooting, do you?"

"Say, listen." Drohan dropped his voice, emphasizing with his forefinger, and

Williams observed two strips of soiled adhesive plaster on the back of his hand. "Listen to this, Artie. They's five or six men totin' gats inside that place all the time. And suppose you fellows get the place? That ain't going to help find the guy that croaked Stone. If I knew who done that, I'd wise you—honest to God I would. What use is it to knock Harrison?"

"I'm not the boss of the job," the other reminded him.

The bootlegger returned a glance from narrowed lids.

"You're the boss of your own life, aren't you? How long will it take you to make ten grand at your game?"

Williams chuckled again. This amused him. "Who said anything about ten grand?"

"That ain't much money when you know the way to make it."

"You're kidding, of course?"

"Kidding?" Drohan leaned toward him again. "I can put ten thousand iron men right in your hand to-morrow night."

"But I can't stop the case from going through. Why don't you try the boss?"

"Say!—do you know any more jokes? Naw—on the level, Artie—I ain't razzing you. If you want ten grand right now, I can put you next to it."

The detective frowned, puzzled. "I tell you, I can't stop the case—"

"No? Well, you can come damn close to it—and I'll tell you how. They's only one thing we want to know. We'll do the rest!" Once more he lowered his tone. "We want to know how they got evidence enough to get them warrants out."

"I don't know how they got it," Williams objected.

"I'll bet you don't! Not if I know anything about Steele's methods; and I figure I know something about them. But you might be able to find out, eh?"

"How?"

"Well, I'll tell you—"

"Wait," the other cautioned. "Here's the chink."

"Nothing more to-night, Wing," said Drohan.

"All light, *sir*." The little waiter turned away.

"I'll tell you, Artie. We know the warrants was both sworn out by men named George L. Bolton and Fred A. Marvin. One lives upstate somewhere and the other's from the Main Burg. Of course we know they both work for Steele. What we don't know is, how did they get their evidence on Harrison's? What did they testify to? Who are they, to us? Do we know them under some other names?"

"Why are you so keen to know this?"

"So they won't get any more evidence!"

"Humph. You'd silence them, also, I suppose?"

"Aw—no, no, no, Artie! Now, here! Now, listen! No one will harm either of those guys. We don't have to. All we want is to keep them from getting any more on the place—keep them out, if they've been workin' from the inside. They'll have to bring the evidence up to date if they want to get a new search warrant. All you gotta do is find out how they worked it—and, if you can, how soon Steele's thinking of trying it again."

He paid the checks.

"You better jump at it, Williams," he advised, as they went out. "It's a pipe for you, compared to a ferret's job. You ain't doing no harm by telling us that. If it was anything serious, you might have something on your conscience. But, hell, man! What's a gambling joint?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE GUN-MOLL

STEELE had managed to obtain a small room in a house at 135 Warrington Street without awakening the suspicion of any one in the neighborhood. From the front window his operatives could keep watch on Harrington's house at No. 142 throughout the night without exposing themselves to view—or to a possible bullet.

The room, however, did not provide a view of the back alley; and when Thompson and Brown decided that traffic at the main entrance between eleven and twelve was light for Friday evening, the latter slipped out of the lodging house and took a position at the corner of Warrington and Columbia Streets.

On the opposite corner, four tough-looking men were grouped, smoking, and the detective saw that they glanced frequently in his direction. He made sure that the safety catch of his automatic pistol was raised. Across Columbia Street two other men were talking in the darkness of a doorway. Brown watched the alley leading to the back of Harrison's, but observed no one enter or leave by this route.

A large, red-faced policeman approached, after about five minutes, crossing diagonally from the east side of Warrington Street. He looked at Brown with obvious suspicion, sauntered past, then suddenly squared around.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded heavily.

"Sir?" returned Brown, at a loss for an instant.

"I said, what are you hanging around here for?" the officer challenged in a louder voice, noticing the youth's rather timid response.

Brown hesitated. He could not show the policeman his credentials, because of the groups of men who were watching.

"I was waiting to meet some one," he ventured.

"Well, do you think this is a proper time of night to be loafing around corners?"

"But I haven't been loafing, sir," the operative protested.

"Go on—I've been watching you for the last twenty minutes. If you've got any business here, state it. If you haven't, get out—and if I see you hanging around here again I'll take you over to the box."

"All right, sir," Brown replied meekly.

He walked back the way he had come, and the officer continued up Columbia Street in the direction of the Canton Cabaret. Of course Brown did not immediately go back into the house at No. 135. It was important that he should avoid being accosted again by the policeman, if possible. He had observed the figures 517 on the man's cap; and he walked rapidly to station five, which is on East Needham Street. A lieutenant at the desk was talking with a sergeant, and both looked at him curiously.

"A few minutes ago," Brown apologized, addressing the former, "I had to give Officer 517 a false explanation of why I was standing on Columbia Street. I came in to set it right."

"On Columbia Street, sir?" The lieutenant took up his pen. "What part of Columbia, please?"

"At the corner of Warrington."

The sergeant, standing by the desk, leaned forward with perceptible interest.

"And you say you gave the officer a false explanation?" the man at the desk asked.

"Yes—on account of several men who were near-by. I'm an operative of the National Detective Agency; there are my papers. I may have to work in that vicinity for some time. We have a room there."

The lieutenant handed back the credentials. "All right, Mr. Brown," he said, smiling. "Thank you for coming in and explaining. I'll tell the officer, the next time he reports."

The detective returned to Warrington Street, but found two of the men still on the corner; and it was after one o'clock before he was able to enter the lodging house. Thompson was waiting for him in a darkened room.

"I think they're wise to us, Brownie."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean, they're all looking up. Every party that's come out of that joint for the last half hour. They've been looking up at the windows on both sides of the street."

"The devil you say!" exclaimed Brown, in consternation.

Meanwhile, Kendall McArthur was in the midst of a trying experience.

He had met Little Evelyn on Columbia Street; and—not warned by the unusual brightness of her eyes—noticing only her face, which seemed whiter and thinner by comparison, he had urged her to go home. McArthur had not had any experience with "snowflowers."

For that matter, he had had little with any kind of girls, except for one very brief period following the Armistice in France, when his head had been turned slightly by the honors heaped upon him. He had distrusted all young women, had believed that they were deceitful and treacherous by nature. He could not explain his interest

in Little Evelyn—only he knew that it had begun with pity.

The girl would not go home. She wanted more money.

"You promised to loan me another century," she said.

"But there were conditions," returned the inventor.

"You said if I'd quit for a week. A week!" she scoffed. "Listen—I can make a century in one night. Loan me a hundred, will you, please? Loan me a half century."

"M-mm! To make another transaction in dope, I suppose?"

She looked at him, her eyes glittering for an instant. "What do you care what I do with it?

"Take me to the Canton," she commanded, smiling prettily. "I'm hungry."

But in the restaurant Evelyn would not behave properly. McArthur had not seen her before in a really dangerous mood.

When Wing Shinn had gone for the order, she leaned toward the inventor, meeting his gaze earnestly.

"Listen," she advised. "You loan me that money, or you'll be sorry."

"I'd loan it to you, Evelyn," he replied quietly, "if I thought you'd keep your part of the bargain. I think, if you'd quit this business for a week, you might quit forever. But I don't intend to supply drugs for a hop-joint!"

She was still gazing at him. "Listen," she repeated, her lips twitching slightly. "Loan me the money."

McArthur shook his head at the horror of it.

"Well, you kite!" said Little Evelyn, mistaking the gesture for a refusal. "You fiddler! You Bible-stiff! You rotten kite! Let me tell you something! You give me that century, or I'll go to headquarters and tell them you gave me the other! I'll tell them you told me to buy coke with it, you sky-pilot! I'll tell them you started me in the racket!"

He smiled. "Blackmail is too risky a game for you, little girl—"

"Blackmail! You call *me* a blackmailer—you sky-pilot—"

"Evelyn—" he begged.

People at other tables were watching them in amazement.

"Don't 'Evelyn' *me!* Don't speak to me again!" In sudden rage she seized her umbrella and smashed the sugar-bowl in the center of the table. She struck another blow at McArthur's glass, but he caught the umbrella and took it from her as gently as possible.

"Give me my mother's umbrella!" she cried, snatching at it.

He blinked. "Your—mother's—"

"Give me my mother's umbrella!" screamed Evelyn again.

Some one rose from a near-by table and approached. It was Jimmie Brown's dark-haired friend.

"Give her the umbrella," he intoned manfully.

"Silk," replied the inventor, laughing, "keep away from here before you get creased and torn. I'll give you the umbrella, Evelyn, when we go outside."

Her eyes blazed at him. "Keep it then!" she returned, fumbling hastily in her hand bag. "And take this with it!"

He lunged sharply across the table when he caught a glimpse of what she held. The girl cried out in pain as he took something from her. He sat back, a trifle dazed by the realization of what she had tried to do.

"Give me my gun!" Evelyn shouted.

People were gathering from all parts of the cabaret, gaping into the booth.

"Give me my gun, you kite!"

"Give her the gun—" ventured the youth with sleek black hair.

The proprietor pushed through the group—then a big, red-faced policeman. "What's going on in here?" the latter demanded.

He picked up the weapon, a twenty-two caliber revolver, from the corner of the table.

"Whose gat is this?"

"That man owns it!" accused Silk, pointing at the inventor.

"He pulled it on me!" said Little Evelyn.

"It is lie!" declared Wing Shinn, greatly excited. "Mr. McArt' don't have gun! Me see lady bring it out!"

Evelyn grew very white. She did not answer. She began to cry.

The policeman bent his gaze to her. "Don't you know any better than to pull that kind of stuff in here?" he asked fiercely.

"Second time trouble in my place!" agreed Charlie Sang.

"What's the idea, Evelyn? Mr. Mac's your friend—" This was Buddy Remick, whose cab stood outside.

"Well, come on out of this!" snarled the officer, yanking the girl roughly from her chair, and pocketing the revolver. "You'll hear about this—"

"Let go—you're hurting me!"

"She's only a child—" McArthur reminded him.

"*Eh?* That's too bad! Get out of here, you hop-head"—he wrenched her arm again—"and stay out of here, from now on!"

"I'll take her home in the cab," Remick offered.

They marched her, protesting and still crying, out to the street, while most of the patrons followed in curiosity. In In Remick's cab, Evelyn began pounding upon the window.

"I want my gun! I want my mother's umbrella!" she sobbed bitterly, as the machine moved away.

The crowd in the doorway of the Canton laughed.

McArthur stood alone on the sidewalk, watching the red cab out of sight. It had not gone in the direction of her home, but toward Harrison's. Toward the house on Warrington Street, house of death, run by promoters who had promised there would be "protection" if Little Evelyn would "line up with the main mob."

"Damn them!" said Dizzy McArthur, blinking again, his eyes bright and cold.

CHAPTER XXXIX

FOR TEN GRAND

ARTHUR WILLIAMS'S first intention, after his surprising conversation with Drohan, was to report the matter to Steele and learn whether his employer advised trapping the bootlegger on a charge of illegal gratuity. When he arrived at the office on the following morning, however, he found that the head of the agency was in New York.

Steele returned that evening—which was the night of Dizzy McArthur's disturbing experience in the Canton—but Williams did not know of his arrival; and two days passed before they met.

During this time, the young man had been thinking. He had been amazed at first—later almost fascinated—by the astonishing fact that Topper Drohan's mob were willing to pay ten thousand dollars for information as to how Bolton and Marvin had obtained evidence enough for a search warrant.

Nothing more than that. Just the one piece of information. True, Drohan had asked him to learn something else "if he could," but apparently the one fact would be sufficient to earn the money.

What incalculable profits the promoters and the gang must be making from their activities, if they could afford to give that price for protection from a private agency!

And, after all, were they doing any great harm by operating this house on Warrington Street? If a man wished to gamble, wasn't it his own business? As for the narcotics rumored to be there—would any one go to the place for drugs except those who were already past saving?

Not that Williams had the slightest thought of accepting the offer. To do so would be false to his employer. But the wasted effort involved in the problem impressed him. A heavy expense, a big risk to lives—all to control a group of men who really weren't committing serious crimes.

Suppose, for an instant, that he *should* accept Drohan's offer.

No—he would not even think of it.

Yet suppose that he should—

What great wrong would it be? It would be dishonest, of course; it would be grafting—but many, many people were grafting. Some evidently regarded it as one of the privileges of their office. In the present case, would his giving Drohan the information he desired have any effect upon Steele's effort to find the murderer of Wesley Stone?

Williams could not conceive of its having the slightest influence upon that investigation.

It would disrupt Steele's plans for raiding Harrison's. But, when one came right down to the truth of it, wouldn't such a failure really be safer, better for every one concerned? A raid, Drohan had assured him, would result in more fatalities. Perhaps—just perhaps—*this* was a case where a bribe should be accepted in order that good might come.

Not a bribe. That was such a distasteful word. A favor in return for a favor.

As far as Marvin and Bolton were concerned, it could bring no danger to them. Williams knew that Drohan did not know—that the evidence which they had already obtained was valid for six months. It was not necessary for them to obtain more. The gangsters did not ask to be told where they could find Bolton or Marvin; merely the method by which they had worked.

And, as a matter of fact, neither was in the city. Marvin had been sent back to the headquarters of the agency in New York, where he was regularly in charge; and Bolton, who specialized in scientific matters, had gone to Chicago with Walter Clapp.

Gradually Williams began to think of the effect that the money would have upon his own life. He tried to count the number of years before he could possibly save that much—if, indeed, he ever could. And with it he could have so many things that his wife, Doris, longed to have, could do so many things that she had hoped they might be able to do. For instance, they could buy a big, high-powered car like Fred Marvin's.

When Williams finally did talk with his employer, he received his instructions without mentioning Drohan's proposition.

A few days later, while in New York on a special case, he had luncheon with Marvin. They were intimate friends.

"Do you think it likely that the boss will call you in on that Harrison dope and gambling job again?" he ventured casually.

"Oh, I suppose so," his friend replied. "Bolt and I have the important evidence. I hear we're going through with it."

"A ticklish piece of work, I think."

"You bet it is. Those gangsters are ugly customers. I hope we do finish it, if only for the chance of landing the rotter that shot Stone. Terrible thing, that. A mighty nice chap. I suppose the boss is still using you on the job?"

"Yes. He wants me back there day after to-morrow. But, by the way, that kind of case was a little out of Bolton's line, wasn't it? What do you and he know about gambling, anyway?"

"Oh, we didn't have to know," laughed Marvin. "All we needed was a little sleight of hand."

Williams was puzzled. "What do you mean? Did you go inside the house?"

Now, Marvin had strict orders not to talk upon the subject, even to those whom he trusted implicitly.

"You've seen the boss perform, haven't you?" he evaded.

Williams was wise enough not to attempt further inquiry. On the following night he left New York by boat. Almost exactly twenty-four hours later he slipped into a telephone booth in a cigar store, looked around carefully, and called a number.

A woman with a harsh, crackling voice answered.

"Is Mr. Drohan there?" Williams spoke very quietly. She did not hear. "Mr. Drohan?" he repeated.

"Naw—he ain't in now. What do you want?"

The young man drew a breath, lowering his voice again. "W-well—tell him Williams called. Tell him to meet me to-morrow night. The place we agreed. He'll understand what you mean."

CHAPTER XL

A CASE OF GRIPPE

FOR a week following the incident of the umbrella and revolver at the Canton Cabaret, McArthur watched vainly for Little Evelyn. He received no response when he rang the bell at her home; and, although he looked sharply at passing taxicabs and private automobiles, as well as at pedestrians, he did not see her when he walked through the South End at night.

He wished to talk with her, to assure her that he had not intentionally been responsible for her rough treatment at the hands of

the policeman. He also wanted to make one more effort to induce her to give up her miserable way of existence, to go away and rest, and to " take the cure " for the drug habit. But, although he watched frequently at night, he did not find her. He hoped that she was not as bitter against him as she had seemed.

His efforts to bring about the raiding and closing of Harrison's joint on Warrington Street appeared to be as far from success as at the beginning.

He had never seen as much traffic there. People passed in and out, in and out—singly, in pairs, in couples, in groups—all night long, by the front door, evidently without the slightest concern about possible spies in the neighborhood. And to McArthur, this brazen attitude had but one meaning: that Harrison and his associates, for some reason, were *sure* that their house could not be raided!

As for the matter of spies, there had been a difference of opinion at the National Detective Agency when Thompson and Brown had reported that their room at 135 Warrington Street had been discovered. Malcome Steele apparently had felt that they were jumping at conclusions.

" I cannot agree that the mere fact of the parties glancing upward as they came out is an indication that they knew you had a room in the vicinity," he had told them. " You state also that they seemed to be looking on both sides of the street. It is quite possible that they were looking to determine the quarter of the moon. Gamblers are unbelievably superstitious."

" Then—shall we use the room again tonight, sir?" Thompson had asked.

" We shall not," his employer had answered. And the room had not been occupied since.

There had been one encouraging development—only one. It had involved Officer Harvey of division four, the policeman with glasses whose route ended at Columbia Street, and who had spoken once to McArthur.

Harvey was decidedly unpopular. More than once he had been warned that his " day " was coming, that gangsters had sworn to " get " him. One night, while standing at his corner on the north side of Columbia Street, he had observed three men acting suspiciously in a doorway across the street. He flashed his light upon them, and walked rapidly over to investigate.

The men had every appearance of toughs. They did not retreat as he approached. It was not an inviting situation for Harvey. But he was a conscientious man, as well as courageous, and he walked straight up to the group.

" What are you men doing in this doorway?"

The three continued to look at him. One, the tallest, spoke:

" Aren't you a little outside of your district, officer?"

Harvey returned his glance sharply. " That's my affair," he stated. " Now, you fellows get a move on and keep going."

Then all at once he caught his breath in recognition. " Oh," he said. " It's Mr.—Mr. Steele, isn't it?"

The tall man nodded. He was disreputably dressed. " I hope you'll pardon my remark, Mr. Harvey. I was surprised at seeing an officer go outside of his division under such circumstances."

" Well, it's plainly my duty," defended the other.

" Oh, yes. I know it is. But now, if you should hear a disturbance some night in that alley "—he pointed a few yards farther down the street—" would you consider it your duty to investigate that also?"

" I certainly would, sir," replied the policeman, looking him in the eye, " unless there was a man from station five already doing so—and even so I'd probably join him."

" Good," replied Steele, shaking hands with him and glancing at his watch. " I'm glad to have met you again, Mr. Harvey."

The investigator had explained to McArthur wherein this conversation was encouraging, but the latter could not see that there was real cause for hope. Of what use was it, he reasoned, when the difficulties connected with obtaining a new search warrant and serving it were still insurmountable?

It seemed definitely proved that a warrant could not be sworn without Harrison's

being immediately informed about it. He had too many friends. Precisely who had been guilty of sending this information, neither Steele nor McArthur knew. Both had heard that Charlie Wilton, a clerk of the court, was to blame.

Steele had made a tactical error in telling Wallis Sawtell of his plan to "eliminate Wilton," and he now admitted it frankly. He had made the suggestion to Sawtell in order to observe its exact effect upon him, not realizing that he might desire to put the scheme into actual use afterward.

Another disappointment had come when Steele had appealed to the Commissioner of Public Safety, asking him to order action from the State police. The commissioner had explained that the State officers never interfered with matters in the city, their work being confined to smaller communities where the local police were not equipped to deal with existing conditions.

In Dizzy McArthur's eyes, the prospect had never appeared so hopeless. He was afraid that it was only a question of time before Steele would decide that the case could not be completed, and would give up the matter, leaving him the forlorn chance of finding other detectives whom he could trust.

But the inventor did not for an instant consider abandoning his purpose. In his experience he had found that it is sometimes out of the darkest situation that the puck bobs free at one's feet.

On Wednesday afternoon—the Wednesday following the inventor's last meeting with Evelyn—Clerk Charles Wilton of the central court went home complaining of chills. The next morning he was ill with grippe, and a substitute took his place at the courthouse.

McArthur was called at once to Steele's office.

"Are you going to try it?" he asked, when he heard the news.

"Not immediately," replied the head of the agency. "But we should be ready to act at an hour's notice. I hear that Mr. Wilton cannot be expected back for at least a week, but one never knows."

"You've made up your mind positively that he's the guilty one, then?"

"No, I haven't," said Steele, in his expressionless manner. "But one fact is certain: he cannot be blamed for it while he is ill at home."

He sent a telegram to New York for Marvin, and another to Chicago for Bolton.

CHAPTER XLI

WILLIAMS KEEPS A DATE

TOPPER DROHAN was in a strange and savage humor. He had threatened two of his friends when they had invited him to supper at the Canton, and he had knocked down his landlady because a leaking gutter had spoiled his ceiling. These actions were so unlike Drohan's usual manner that his associates were deeply puzzled. They were much concerned, too, for the bootlegger had a transaction of the gravest importance to complete.

John Castle and his brother, Ed, both argued with him, telling him that he must be "feelin' tough," and that it would be wiser to let some one else keep the appointment and obtain the promised "info." Drohan retorted angrily that he had made the bargain possible, and that he was "going to handle it," or there would be strained relations between his forces and the Castle gang.

Neither John Castle nor Ed could afford that. The bootlegger brought his sedan out, giving vent to foul and ferocious language when he heard the rattling, labored sound of the motor.

"She's dry, Topper," one of the gangsters offered, solicitously.

"All right! I'll get more oil."

"It's the radiator," John Castle ventured, picking up a can.

Drohan rocked him with an uppercut, almost knocking him off his feet.

"Get t' hell out o' here!" he commanded glaring.

He got into the car and started in the direction of Columbia Street. He knew that he was late, and he drove recklessly. Halfway to his destination, his machine side-swiped a small touring car, but he continued without stopping. There was big money upon his person, and it wouldn't pay to take chances. At Dover Street he

narrowly avoided running down a woman and a child.

It was ten minutes after the appointed hour when he pulled sharply to the curb in front of Conlon's pool room. A young man wearing a cap and a light gray overcoat was standing in the doorway. He recognized Drohan at once and came forward.

"I don't want to get in here," Arthur Williams said nervously. "Some one might see me. Drive up to Albion Avenue and Danforth, and I'll take a cab up."

"All right, make it snappy," returned the other.

The detective signaled a taxicab, wondering at the peculiar way that Drohan had stared at him. He rode to the designated corner, and found the bottlegger waiting there.

Drohan flung open the door. "Well—have you got the dope? Got the info? Got it straight?"

"Yes; I've got it," Williams replied, instinctively glancing around the square. "But we mustn't sit here and talk. Drive out of town a little distance."

The bootlegger slipped in his clutch and turned up the avenue.

"You say you've got it?" His voice was eager and tense.

"Yes. But what about the cash?"

"Don't worry. I've got the cash right on me."

"You've got ten thousand here?"

"Sure. Ten grand is nothing."

Williams sniffed. "What's burning?"

"It's this damned motor," explained the other.

"I thought so. Better be careful or you'll burn a bearing."

"Aw, to hell wit' it! Now, we ain't got no time to lose, Artie. Might as well get busy and spill the works."

"Oh, but how about the money first?"

"Nothing doing."

The detective looked at him. There was something in Drohan's manner which made him a trifle uneasy.

"Well, what about half first and the other half after I talk?"

"How do I know you've got any info at all?" the bootlegger countered.

This was a delicate point for Williams. He wasn't sure that he *had* enough to satisfy the other.

"I can tell you what you wanted to know," he assured him. "I can tell you how Bolton and Marvin got their evidence."

Drohan appeared thoughtful, and they rode in silence for a minute.

Albion Avenue runs far out into the suburbs, but at this time a section was closed for repair. It was barricaded, and a sign pointed to the left. Drohan made the turn, but found himself on a dark street leading past the Meganset bridge. He stopped, turned the car, and crossed to the opposite side of the avenue. Here, owing to the melting snow from the hill, the street was flooded. He turned again, quite hastily, and drove back the way they had come.

He looked behind twice; and suddenly Williams understood the strange expression in his eyes. It was fear that he saw there, unmistakably. But fear of whom? Of what?

The detective began to notice a high, thin rattling from the motor. The burning smell was stronger than before.

"We'd better stop," he cautioned. "You'll start a bearing."

There was a small service station on the right. Drohan turned in, applying his brakes. An attendant in uniform came out.

"Oil," said the bootlegger.

"Oil? Yes, sir. How much, please?"

"I don't know. It 'll take plenty, I guess."

The attendant raised the hood and investigated.

"No, sir; it's full of oil. Must be the radiator—"

"Never mind the radiator! Give me another quart of oil."

The man looked at him doubtfully. "It's full already—"

"Well, then, put in a quart of extra heavy."

In an uncertain manner, the attendant obeyed. He took up a can from beside the gasoline pump. "I think your trouble is in the radiator, sir—"

"Get out o' here, you stiff!" roared Drohan. "Here's your money. I said I wanted oil, not advice!"

He drove on, and left the man gaping.

"Now, Artie, we ain't got all night," the bootlegger urged again. "Come on—spill the works. What you got?"

"No—I want half of the money first."

"Oh, all right, all right! Have it your way!" And once more Drohan put on his brakes.

The avenue was nearly deserted. Taking a thick roll from an inside pocket, he counted off fifty new hundred-dollar bills, while the detective watched closely.

"There you are—take it. And now come across, or you won't get the rest."

Williams thrust the money out of sight.

"What I know is this," he stated rapidly. "Bolton and Marvin, our men, got the evidence against Harrison's by doing some sleight of hand, some magic. Something the boss taught them—"

"Ye small gods!" ejaculated Drohan.

"Why—does that help you?"

"Does it help me!" shouted the other, staring at him in the light from the dashboard.

"Ssh!"

"Well—that doll-faced spalpeen!" the bootlegger cried. "The dirty, double crossing stool pigeon!"

"Who? Bolton?"

"Not—not Bolton! Not Marvin! The rotten, smooth, sky-piloting kite! By God, they'll cut his heart out!"

Williams shuddered. A twinge of remorse gripped him. Had Drohan deceived him about his intentions, after all?

"See here—you promised not to harm either of those fellows!"

"Harm them? Hell! It ain't them—"

"Well, you'd better not harm any one, Topper. The boss has been told you know a lot about Stone's death."

"Told *I* know a lot?" Drohan gasped. "Say—I wasn't even there! Where does he get that stuff? Well—by the sweet saints! That rotten stool pigeon again!"

He broke off, choking. The motor was still running, and the car was filled with fumes of burning oil.

"You'd better see that there isn't any violence, Drohan, or—"

"Yeah—or what? What'll *you* do, with five grand in your vest?"

"What about the other five, then?"

"Try and get it! Five grand is plenty for queering that dirty snitch! Give me more info later and you'll get the rest."

He started the car again, laughing in a devilish way.

Williams considered swiftly. He was bitterly disappointed. He thought for an instant of taking the other half of the money by force. But he abandoned it as too dangerous. The bootlegger was undoubtedly armed.

A complete loathing of himself, of what he had just done, rushed over the youth. It had made a wretch of him, a coward.

Gradually he became aware of a pattering overhead. The sound grew louder.

"Oh, my God!" screamed Drohan, in terror.

With a sob, he stopped the car once again, and flung himself toward the back of his seat, clutching at it convulsively.

Amazed, Williams drew out his flash light and turned it upon the other's face. He recoiled in horror.

CHAPTER XLII

WHAT DROHAN FEARED

PATROLMAN BARNES, of division ten, was on his way to pull a box on Albion Avenue when he saw a sedan stop suddenly in the middle of the street. He was hurrying, for it had begun to rain heavily, and at first he took little notice of the car. Presently, however, he saw the interior illumined as if by a flash light; and a man wearing a cap and a light gray overcoat stumbled out. The man looked around wildly for a moment.

He caught sight of Officer Barnes, and approached, running. His face was white.

"Good heavens, officer—get a doctor! The—the man in that car—"

Without waiting for further explanation, the policeman hurried to the machine. He found a man in a state of collapse in the driver's seat, apparently suffering from convulsions. A passing automobile stopped at his signal; but it seemed inadvisable to convey the sufferer in a private car, and Barnes sent word to the station for a police ambulance.

Returning to the scene in haste, intending to question the young man in the gray overcoat about the circumstances, the officer could not find him. Other machines had stopped, and curious people stood in the downpour looking at the sedan, but the man he sought was not among them.

As soon as the ambulance arrived, the stricken motorist was lifted gently inside, and was rushed to the city hospital, leaving the spectators wondering what had happened.

At the hospital, the sufferer was identified as Charles F. Drohan, who resided in the South End; and the officials were mystified upon discovering five thousand dollars in new currency upon his person. He was still in a semi-conscious condition, and physicians of the hospital conferred to determine the nature of his illness.

Topper Drohan knew nothing of this. He scarcely realized that he had been taken from the car. His mind was filled with fantasies of a most terrible kind.

At times he thought that he was adrift upon a river, a swift river which swirled around him, dragging him inexorably along. At other times he believed that he was imprisoned at the foot of a precipice, over which hideous streams of water were pouring in silver cascades—tumbling and gurgling around him, while he fought in mad frenzy to escape. And there were other moments at which he realized the futility of struggling—for all about him was a deep, cold pond, horribly dark and still.

Through it all, in the midst of the swirl of water, he could see Arthur Williams's face, startled, questioning, always at hand. In vain he tried to drive it away.

"Damn you—you've got enough, haven't you? Five grand is plenty for queering that dirty snitch!"

The haunting face did not leave him.

"What'll *you* do," Drohan challenged again, "with five grand in your vest? That doll-faced spalpeen! The dirty, double crossing stool pigeon! Playin' the good fellow with me an' Evelyn—then bringin' them ferrets down there to do their stuff! We'll show *him* some sleight of hand! We'll cut his heart out!

"Not Bolton! Not Marvin! Four-Ace Mac, the rotten, sky-piloting kite!

"Steele says *I* know who bumped Stone, does he? Say, Artie—where does he get that stuff? I wasn't even there!"

But Williams never answered.

"Damn you, Artie, ain't you got enough? Get out o' here!"

Not until the very end did Drohan realize that Williams's face and the tumbling water were all of his fancy. When the tumult of the rivers had begun to drift away, he became aware of other things. A room, a window, a bed, a woman in white. A doctor with gray hair who sat beside his bed and gazed at him with grave, quiet interest. A table with a white cover, with strange instruments, small bottles, *a glass of water*—

With a shriek of dread, he turned his face away.

After a time his struggles became less revolting, his outbursts of delirium less frequent and prolonged. And finally the nurse arose and composed his arms; and with the physicians in attendance she quietly left the room.

"Doctor," she ventured to the man with gray hair, "while you were out a few hours ago, he made some strange remarks, some of them quite lucid, which he kept repeating. It occurred to me that they might have to do with criminal matters, as in the Forbes case."

"Yes?" he returned absently, as he made a notation at his desk.

"I had some of them taken down," she added. "We couldn't get all of them, but there was something in reference to the money they found."

He nodded. "That was very thoughtful of you," he commended.

"And, doctor, shall I have the paper sent to the police this forenoon?"

"The—er—paper?"

"The paper with the remarks which were taken down."

"Oh, yes, yes," he said uncertainly. He was not quite sure of the exact procedure in such cases.

"Er—to the district attorney, I think," he added, reaching for his coat and hat.

TO BE CONCLUDED

The Watch wobbled about and looked as imposing as they could

DEACON BRODIE

By Louise Rice

THE TRUTH IS THAT "DEACON" BRODIE PROBABLY WAS AS CLOSE TO THE MASTER MIND CRIMINAL AS WE WILL EVER GET

A Story of Fact

WILLIAM BRODIE was born on the 28th of September, 1741, to a family of super respectability, in a class of utmost respectability, that of the professions, his father being a "writer to the signet"—a lawyer, according to the modern term.

The elder Brodie was also a freeman of the City of Edinburgh, and was "deacon" of his guild of wrights.

There were many children born to the family of the elder William Brodie, but most of them died in infancy. The family was less parsimonious than many of that time, and their attitude toward life was both sensible and kindly.

There were no privations for the boy to endure. There was nothing to mark his young mind and soul with the fears, terrors, restraints, and animosities which it is now the habit to consider as the contributing factors to the development of a criminal nature.

He attracted little attention as a child, in fact, and was so well behaved that he never merited—at least to the knowledge of his father, chastisement.

Seek as we may for an explanation of that into which he grew, we shall not find it in his home conditions.

The boy was both admired and loved by his relatives, who liked his cleverness and

shrewdness and also approved of his way of living, for as soon as William was through school he took up his residence with the old folks and showed little interest in girls.

He attended to business, was civil and fair spoken, and had a certain brusque directness of manner and speech which the honest and hardy Scots liked. The town trusted young Brodie and counted him a substantial citizen, worthy to follow in the footsteps of his family.

"Born Bad"

In February of 1763 William Brodie, the younger, was well established at home, a freeman of his native city, practically in charge of his father's business and having a great deal to say about all the details of his parents' house, where his wishes were scrupulously met.

He introduced some modern ideas into the business and the home, kept up a little better appearance than his father had, and succeeded in getting into the society of a good many of the aristocratic families.

In addition, he won the right to come and go as he pleased, in a way which was not common; for his father trusted him and saw, he thought, that the boy would slowly forge his way socially, and add to his patrimony, until such time as he could take to wife some girl of a higher station, with a tidy little sum of her own and with important connections. Meanwhile, a few quiet wild oats would not matter.

This is the way of the world, more or less, to this day, and at the period which we are now considering Scotland's lads were apt to take that attitude toward marriage.

The older Brodie, therefore, asked no questions when young William was absent for a night. He always came home sober, he was never seen roistering anywhere.

He told his parents that he gambled somewhat and that he went with other young bloods to see cockfights—then a popular "sport"—but the ideals of conduct for refined young gentlemen were as elastic then as now, and Brodie the elder believed his son to be a model young man.

So did his mother, for that matter, and therein is proof of his cleverness, for mothers are harder to fool than fathers, despite the fact that they often lack the material evidence and information which fathers have.

Young William was, indeed, one of those youngsters who are "born bad," it would seem. In after years it came out that there had been a good many unsavory incidents in his school days, but always—at least for a long time—he was too clever for everybody.

It is a sure thing that the town of Edinburgh suspected nothing; at least, none of its upper layers of society did. In 1781 William became deacon of his father's guild, and as such he entered the proud ranks of the city council.

For a year, in the course of this part of his career, he was Trades Councillor. In 1782 his father died, honored, "full of years," and delighting in the thought that he left behind him a worthy representative.

William was, of course, the heir, and practically the sole heir, the other surviving children being only two and receiving little. Brodie went right on gathering up business and positions, but he really did seem to have a much harder time than his father in meeting his financial obligations.

An Epidemic of Crime

He made light of this, always seemed to have cash on his person and was never stingy, but in 1788 his creditors made a little stir.

They wanted a statement from him and they got it. He said that he could meet everything and in a short time he did, so his credit was greater than ever.

Edinburgh, meanwhile, from about August, 1768, onward, had become a very precarious place in which to live and do business. Robberies got to be the order of the day. Houses were mysteriously opened without breaking a window or a door.

The secret back doors of banks were unlocked, despite the fact that the one and only key might be reposing in the pocket of the proper custodian. When the burglars, seeming to know just when whole households would be away, got in, they knew right where to look for the hidden savings.

The police force, to be sure, was totally inadequate. " The watch " were worthy old gentlemen of the town, too old for active employment, who wobbled about on their decrepit legs and looked as imposing as they could.

They occasionally caught an inept young thief, or a stupid oaf, but they never came within even suspicion distance of the perpetrators of these large and persistent robberies.

The curious thing was that, along with these almost daily lootings of houses, stores and institutions, street holdups and robberies became less and less and several rather well-known gangs of ruffians mysteriously left town after being manhandled in an obscure street fight.

Solid in the Underworld

The truth was that " Deacon " Brodie was probably as close to the " master mind criminal" as we will ever get. That is to say, he had a certain talent for organization and a personality which must have been baffling, although assertive, as we shall see as soon as we take the lid off of the respectable life which he continued to lead for so long.

And while we cannot be sure, any more than the town of Edinburgh was at the time, whether Brodie was always either the perpetrator or the instigator of the extraordinary era of robbery there, which extended for over eighteen years, it is interesting to record that when his activities were cramped by a hangman's noose, the town suddenly went back to a normal percentage of housebreakings and street holdups and that mysterious entries by means of mysterious and unknown keys ceased to take place.

Well, then, we have the picture of Brodie keeping bachelor hall in his father's house, decorously attending Town Council meetings, working hard, taking his young men from one house to another, to fit keys, to repair windows and doors, to fix sagging floors—and generally to be the Mr. Fixit of the place.

Among other jobs, Deacon Brodie repaired the framework and crosspiece of the hanging apparatus, and several times adjusted the rope for some poor wretch.

With grave face he appears—well dressed and calm and many a mother looks at him and sighs, for he has been the town bachelor for so many years that all hope of winning him has been given up by dames of every degree.

Bearing this in mind, let us retrace this story to the date of February 9, 1763, with old Brodie still alive and young Brodie quietly slipping into the life of the old people, and of the town.

At that very time, the young man had succeeded in making himself " solid " in the underworld of Edinburgh!

There is little doubt that he already had evil companions before he was through his eighteenth year, and that his influence on them was even then sufficient to keep their mouths sealed as to his friendship with them.

He had already become familiar with vice while still seemingly too bashful to talk to girls of his own station in life. All this is not so astounding, but that which is most so, is that for so many, many years he succeeded in completely veiling this.

Brodie's Double Life

Charles Peace, the infamous little English criminal, did, indeed, lead a double life for many years, but he was never subjected to the scrutiny of close companions of the utmost integrity.

He was never surrounded by the half jealous admiration which besets the successful merchant. He was never obliged to meet all the upper strata of his native town, shrewd as well as suspicious and sternly respectable people. This was a test which few criminals could ever have withstood and which William Brodie did withstand, with entire success.

Not a single suspicion of him was entertained, in all the years that he led his extraordinary double life, until the last year or two of it, when, indeed, a few people began to whisper behind their hands that robberies seemed to follow wherever Brodie worked.

Continuing the study of Brodie's nether life, we find that even while his father lived he had already established two households, in each of which he maintained the

position of master and father, neither of which knew of the existence of the other, as no one in the upper levels of his life knew of either.

What was more, although criminals were his associates and hangers on in both households, neither set of rascals ever discovered the other set.

Smith Comes to Town

Thus, Brodie had to watch out for complications between—1. People who knew him as Deacon. 2. People who knew him as the master of the house where Anne Grant held sway. 3. People who knew him as the master of the house where Jean Watt held sway. 4. People who knew him as an active thief and knew nothing of Deacon, Jean Watt, Anne Grant or that he was anybody but a man who knew how to produce keys and plan robberies. And 5. The wild and half criminal layer of aristocratic youth who knew a little of both women and something of Deacon; but nothing of the thief and master of criminals of the lower world.

It must have been a hectic life, indeed, that he led, that cool and serious businessman, going about his affairs, slyly taking impressions of keys, observing where valuables were kept, learning the secrets of bolted doors, memorizing the hours and the habits of the townfolk, while he kept careful eyes abroad for chance—and undesired —acquaintances.

Edinburgh has always been a town of rather sharply separated social strata, always a cosmopolitan town. Many a town in England or France of the period would have rendered this imposture an impossibility, but the criminal world and the bawdy world kept pretty much to themselves. These and the decent business world affected to ignore the other's existence, and the aristocratic world dealt loftily with the business world and was either totally ignorant of the lower world or, at most, only half friendly with it.

So that is precisely the condition of social life which allowed William Brodie to pursue this amazing course of his for so long.

But a change was coming.

In July, 1786, an Englishman named George Smith—or, a man who said that was his name—arrived at Edinburgh, and if Brodie had any premonitions about that time he must have had some bad dreams.

Smith put up at a tavern kept by Michael Henderson, in the "Grassmarket," and there he was soon friends with one named Ainslee and one named Brown, whose proper name was said to be Moore.

This last named person was an escaped convict from England, who had been wandering around Scotland for twelve years, not daring to set his foot over the border.

Brodie, in his character of the master mind of a criminal fraternity, already knew Ainslee and "Brown."

The tavern was frequented by doubtful characters, along with the honest farmers whose "ordinary" or restaurant it was, and Brodie had been able to go there in double character, being known to some as "deacon" and to some as a more or less shady individual, but it was safe enough, since few persons of these diverse classes would ever know or speak to each other.

A Working Partnership

The four, Smith, Brown, Ainslee and Brodie, gradually became intimate, and to them Brodie confessed that he had had thoughts for some time of "starting a life of crime."

In this one respect, however, he was reticent with these new comrades, since his life of crime had long since been started. What he was really looking for, at that time, was some one who would alibi for him, and this he found in Smith, who knew a good deal about locks, bolts, keys and other door and window fastenings.

The proposal which was made was that Smith should be set up in a small grocery by Brodie, so that he might have a proper excuse for settling in the town, and that he should work, in his spare time, for Brodie, fixing locks and making keys and spying; also taking impressions of locks in wax and otherwise attending to Brodie's dirty work.

According to the custom of the town, a boy from the neighborhood could be apprenticed to the "grocer" for a very small

weekly sum, and thus Smith would be free to come and go, while seemingly leading a perfectly open mercantile life.

Brown and Ainslee were to have their parts in the arrangement, with maintenance from Brodie when they were not "working."

Smith's part time work for Brodie would make him the go-between, so that the two would be kept informed of what was afoot. On this basis they settled the partnership, with an equal division of the spoils as part of the agreement.

A number of minor robberies were at once committed, avowedly for the purpose of letting Brodie see how the combination worked!

The University's Mace

As he became more assured of his partners, Brodie ceased to maintain some of the fictions with which he had started.

He allowed them to see that he had been a criminal for years, and admitted to them that he had a regular "fence," as we should now call it, across the border in England.

This fence was a Scot, much "wanted" in his own country and therefore an exile, just as Brown was wanted and a fugitive from his country. These two wrote to each other and became well acquainted by letter.

So Smith ran the grocery and did odd jobs, of all sorts, for Brodie, and Ainslee and Brown seemed to live modestly on what they declared to be remittances from their families, and Brodie walked about without even the faint shadow of the suspicion which had been gathering.

Had he not stopped going himself to houses and institutions and banks for the work he now hired done? And did not the robberies keep right on, as usual?

In October of 1787 the four stole the silver mace of the University of Edinburgh, seemingly for pure wantonness. They could not dispose of it without giving themselves away, and melted down its value was that of mere lump silver.

It was never found, but the theft of it increased the fury of the town, which had been steadily rising so long.

People began to say that something really had to be done about the reign of terror which had so long existed. The mace was taken by a person or persons who had had a key to the room where it was kept.

In 1788, in the early part of the year, a lot of very expensive silk from a shop at Edinburgh Cross was stolen in the dead of the night. No doors were broken open—they were unlocked and locked again after the loot was taken, so that the watch might suspect nothing.

The honest tradesmen of the town, aroused by all these many robberies, all of which bore the stamp of "inside work," as it would now be called, got together and made a very systematic effort to find out how it was that they had been despoiled for so many years.

They also offered a reward for the return of the silk and the pardon of any accomplice of the robbers who would turn informer.

Brown, who was always "Low Man" in the four who made up the criminal quartette, made a note of this reward. He had occasionally had disputes with the aggressive Brodie, and he was always in terror that one or more of the four would betray him; being the one escaped convict of the lot, he was in the most danger and for some reason he was not liked by any of the other three.

The Dice Are Loaded

So he stored up the idea of turning them over to justice and going scot free himself.

Then something very disagreeable happened. A stranger appeared at the inn one night, and he and the four started shaking dice. The stranger was no fool; suddenly he seized the dice and declared them "loaded."

He hauled his four playmates to the police station, but there he cooled off. Inquiries as to his own antecedents worried him. He went away suddenly and the four were released, but not until Brown had been rather sharply interrogated.

He remembered this. He put it away in his kit of recollection, determining that he would be influenced by what had happened —some day.

March, 1788, the gang determined to do

something which was more daring. Brodie knew very well the buildings of the excise office in Cannongate, for he had often been there to make repairs.

Also, he had a relative who had an office there on whom he called occasionally, for he never missed the opportunity to be friends with people in power, and he had long had his eye on how he might use this person.

The Fourth of March

The watchman was away a good part of the time; Brodie tried to find out what those times were. He called on his relative at the office, in his character of lock-window-door and floor repairer, and took with him an assistant who was none other than Smith. Smith took an impression of the key of the important room, while wandering about, seeming to wait for Brodie.

Brodie, finding it difficult to get a precise account of the movements of the watchman, Ainslee was set to work to lounge and smoke and talk when the man was taking the air, at the door of the building.

The result was an exact report. The watchman was away from eight to ten every night, at his supper. This left the building without a soul in it.

The fourth of March was set for the day. Brodie, to give himself an alibi, had a party on that day. The guests sat down to a bountiful dinner at three in the afternoon, then the fashionable hour.

He was dressed all in white, which was a well-known eccentricity of his; his special "party" style. At seven, he had thought, the guests would all be gone, but he had reckoned without the easy going ways of his townsfolk. They were gone only at eight.

He tore off the white clothes, after bowing his guests away from the brightly lighted front door, for the benefit of passers-by, and ran through well-known alleys to Smith's store, where the three lesser rascals had already begun to shiver in their boots because of his failure to appear at seven, as agreed on.

Brodie was in high spirits, singing "Let Us Take the Road," from "The Beggar's Opera," which was a great favorite of his. They set out, on streets which were none too well lighted. At the building they saw no one in the dark square which it fronted, and slipped inside.

It was the work of Smith and Brown to open the locked boxes, desks and "safes"—the iron boxes in which the large sums were kept. They went at their task, using the great ring of keys which they had, which would open almost anything.

Ainslee was to stand just outside and to softly whistle if he saw any one coming, and Brodie stood in a dark place in the lower hall.

Smith and Brown had found about seventeen pounds, which was a mere trifle compared to what they could have had if they had finished their work, when they heard a door downstairs slam. Footsteps came up the stairs.

They stood, petrified, expecting every moment to have some one come on them, in the midst of the boxes and safes, all of which they had pulled into one room for convenience in working, when they heard some one go down again and slam the door.

Brodie Tries to Explain

A moment afterward a door opened, as they could tell by the draft—and then softly closed. They listened for a whistle, and heard nothing. They slipped down the stair, failed to find either Brodie or Ainslee, got into a panic and headed for Smith's home.

What had happened was very simple. A Mr. Bonar, who worked in the building, had remembered that he needed a paper which he was to take with him on a business journey the following morning.

He went back for it after work was over, and had not the slightest idea that any one was in the building at the time. If Brodie had kept his nerve, he need never have stirred from the dark place where he was entirely concealed, in the hall.

But he had been getting nervous. Some of his early effrontery had deserted him. He ran to his house, stripped off the black suit into which he had changed from the white one and went, as he often did, to spend the night at his Jean Watt home.

For several days he kept out of sight of Smith, who did his jobs about town, directed thereto by notes which his employer left for him.

Then Brodie reappeared and to remonstrances said that he would see them all that night. At Smith's house, then, he appeared that evening, full of of assurance.

He declared that he had slipped out of the building because it would be absolutely fatal to the operations of the gang for him to be seen, and that he had thought Bonar —whom, at that time, he did not know of by name—was the watchman.

French Leave

He succeeded in partially cooling off the anger of the three and, to appease them farther, dug up a lot of loot which he had been keeping and sent Mrs. Smith, who had been the go-between of the gang for a year, across the border to the fence, promising them all of what was procured for it.

Suspicion was stronger than Brodie thought, and his association with Smith, Brown and Ainslee had not been as successfully hidden as he had imagined. There was no proof, however.

Brown, though, finally furnished it. He had not liked the way that Brodie had treated him, from time to time, and he was a timorous soul, too, always fearing that he would be made the " goat."

The other three had made the great mistake of discounting Brown, of making fun of him, of giving him less than his share of the proceeds of their robberies. They cheated him at cards, thought anything good enough for him, and, last and crowning insult, cut him out with a girl that he liked.

So, he went to see the procurator—that is to say, the district attorney, and the next day Smith and Ainslee were arrested for the job on the Excise Building.

The two were lodged in the famous " Tolbooth," where so many famous and infamous prisoners had been confined. Just why Brown did not implicate Brodie at first is not clear. He might have thought that it was safer to charge the lesser rascals and see what came of it.

If Brodie escaped the net, it would be better not to have mentioned him, he thought, but he trusted to later events to bring Brodie into the matter, in which he showed himself an astute observer.

Brodie was in a great sweat when he heard of the arrests, but so far there was no direct suspicion attracted to him. He made sure of that and then went to the Tolbooth to see the two men, making the excuse that he thought he knew them, but the authorities had forbidden the public to have access to them.

In those days, unless there was such a special order, the public streamed through the Tolbooth—which was the principal jail of Edinburgh—as if it were the zoo.

Efforts to have notes taken to them failed and Brodie turned tail! Knowing the men as he did, he entertained no false ideas of their loyalty to himself, or to any one. He gathered some money together and went to London, where detectives shortly followed and lost him.

Brodie got over into Holland, still with a fair amount of money remaining and could have got work there and remained safe and in obscurity if he had not had the idea that he ought to write to the one person in the world for whom he had ever shown true affection, Anne Grant.

The Death Verdict

These two women of his had both borne him children; Anne Grant had one boy and two girls and Jean Watt had two boys; but it was always the first family to which Brodie really turned, Anne Grant — who, up to the time that Brodie fled the country never had the least idea that her " husband " was anything but a man who " traveled," i. e., who sold goods on a set route, which kept him away from town for days at a time.

On the way to Holland Brodie had found some people on the boat who, after completing their business in Holland, were returning to Scotland, and to them he gave a letter addressed to Anne Grant. They already had their suspicions of him, for, slow and meager as were the reports of the press in those days, those reports did reach pretty far and these people knew of the man who had fled from Edinburgh.

So with a good deal of hesitation, they slipped the seals and took a look at what this friend of theirs, " Mr. Dixon," had written to his woman friend. What they read was sufficient to send them to the authorities with the letter, when they reached Edinburgh.

That letter was certainly one of the most foolish ever written, for it practically confessed the guilt of Brodie, not only in the one instance, but for many years back.

They caught him at Amsterdam, extradited him, got him to London, accused him there, got the papers carrying him onward to Scotland, where he arrived just fifty-four hours after leaving London, which was some speed, for those days.

In the meantime Ainslee and Smith had made a desperate attempt to break jail and Brown had been taken on an old charge of murder. So when Brodie was clapped into the Tolbooth he had familiar company.

The trial began on the 27th of August and, according to the procedure for capital crimes at that time, went right on without an adjournment until it was finished, the jury being out for many hours before a verdict was arrived at.

The trial was brightened by some of the most lively scrimmages ever indulged in by the staid Scotch courts.

There were six judges. Lord Braxfield, Lord Justice Clark, Lord Hails, Lord Eskgrove, Lord Stonefield, and Lord Swinton. There were many distinguished counsel on both sides.

Two unknown young lawyers were present to look after the interests of Smith and one of these, Clerk, made such a record for himself that he is a permanent figure in Scottish tradition, although he was never heard of, very greatly, afterward.

He was one of the first lawyers to perceive that in " the technicality " the lawyer has a weapon of tricky weight and power and he made tremendous efforts to demand exceptions and to raise objections on every possible point where a technicality could be called into question.

He frizzled the tempers of the learned judges, stopped the proceedings again and again, browbeat the presiding judge and continually made his point, despite the way in which every one combined to sit on him. He did his client little good, but he put the name of Clerk into the history of the bar of Scotland.

Jean Watt testified for Brodie that he arrived at their joint home a little after eight and stayed all night. Her maid testified to the same and claimed that she knew the time by the chiming of a church clock.

The prosecution made her prove, by her own words, that she did not know where this church was and that it could not be heard at the house of her mistress.

A great deal of the implication contained in the testimony against Brodie was veiled. It could not be proved that he had been for many years the head of various bands of criminals, or that he had used the confidential position which his work gave him to make the impressions of keys and to ferret out the secrets of families and institutions, but witnesses all hinted at this veiled suspicion, and it was really this which was putting Brodie on trial.

The verdict was death. At that time the one crime of " breaking and entering " would have brought the sentence of death. That sentence was all the surer because of the practical certainty that Brodie had systematically bled the town, while masquerading as one of its prominent citizens.

Smith and Brodie were to be hanged.

Smith took it with a certain resignation and talked calmly and rather sadly with the various clergymen who sought to comfort him, but Brodie, sardonic, antagonistic, and bitter, denying constantly that he had ever been anything but a law abiding citizen, would have none of the spiritual comfort offered him, and he so vigorously fought for a reprieve that he almost got it, despite the great array of proof which had been rolled up against him.

He had a great deal to do to wind up his affairs, leaving as much of his property as possible to Anne Grant and her children, scrupulously making arrangements to pay his debts and to have his furniture, long in the family, sent to distant connections.

He was hanged, with Smith, and severely criticized the bungling arrangements of the hangman, whose technique, he declared, was painful for a real expert to look on.

At sight of him, the dog thrust his muzzle skyward

THE SPLITTING EDGE

By Edward Parrish Ware

"NOW," SAID CAL, HOLDING UP THE AX, "NOTE THAT THIS EDGE IS FOR CHOPPING, BUT THE OTHER, THE BLUNTER ONE, IS THE SPLITTING EDGE"

IT was the mournful howling of a hound that attracted "Frogeye" Bates to the scene of the murder. Frogeye, a trapper on the St. Francis above Buck Island, was on his way down river to Marked Tree for supplies, and first heard the hound when he neared the mouth of Little Caney, which enters the St. Francis from the east at a point one mile north of the island's head.

"Sounds lak he mought be tied up, or ketched in a trap," the native speculated. "Splinter Hughes lives over thataway somewhars. Reckon I'll go ashore an' see whut ails th' critter. Splinter mought be away, an' one of his houn's mought be ketched."

To a native of the Arkansas Sunken Lands, as well as to most men who dwell in the wildernesses, a good dog is of great consequence; he is to be looked after and protected at all times, and woe to the person who abuses another's canine property.

Frogeye Bates was in a hurry to reach Marked Tree; it had been many weeks since he had visited the place, and he hungered for the good things to be had only in the village. But he could not pass that hound so distressfully voicing woe. He headed in above the mouth of Little Caney, went ashore and started off in the direction of the sounds.

"By granny!" he exclaimed after a few moments. "Thishere path leads straight to'ards Splinter's cabin. One of his houn's, shore as I'm bawn!"

A hundred yards farther he had reason to conclude that Hughes was at home, for he came upon the old man's dugout where it lay at anchor on the north shore of Little Caney. From that point the trail led directly to the cabin, a distance of two hundred yards through the timber. The hound, sensing a human presence, redoubled his howling.

When Bates entered the clearing before the cabin he saw the hound, gaunt and black, standing before the door, alert, his muzzle pointing in the direction of his approach. At sight of him, the dog thrust his muzzle skyward and howled with long-drawn misery.

Frogeye shivered. "Shut up that racket!" he called sharply. "Whut th' hell's th' matter, anyhow? Wharat is yore master? Shut up, now, or I'll lay a limb across yore back!"

The hound, recognizing a voice of authority, ceased his wailing, and sidled away from Bates, watching him out of red-rimmed eyes.

"Hello in thar!" Bates called, pausing near the door. For some undefined reason he hesitated to enter. "Git up, Splinter, and greet yore comp'ny!"

No reply. The hound gave tongue in long, mournful cadence. Again Bates shivered.

"Somethin' wrong," he mused. "Somethin' wrong, shore as I'm bawn! Guess I'll hafta look inside."

It required courage to pull the latch-string, but Frogeye mustered it. He pushed the door open cautiously, then stood for a moment on the threshold and gazed into the dark interior. Presently his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom—and he saw much.

What he saw was not pretty. Nausea assailed him, and he sought the air again, white and trembling. At length he entered the place, opened a shuttered window and allowed light to flood the room.

Splinter Hughes, a mere wisp of man, old, white of hair and beard, lay on the floor in the center of a large smear of dry blood which had poured from a terrible wound in his head. He had been dead many hours; perhaps two or three days. The cabin's crude furnishings were overturned, and the room was in a state of wild disorder. No other person was there.

On the floor near the door lay a huge black and tan hound, mate to the animal outdoors. His head had been split open.

Frogeye Bates saw all that, but no more. He did not linger to investigate further. Racing back to his dugout, he leaped in and sent the craft downstream with all the speed he could command. Ordinary death would not have disturbed him in the least, but this was not ordinary. Murder had been done, and the mystery of it sent a chill to his heart.

By the time he reached the foot of Buck Island he had reached a conclusion. Oak Donnick lay twenty miles farther, and the headquarters of the rangers was there. Frogeye had never had much use for the rangers, but he knew they were the ones to inform of this matter.

Chief Wheeler would send a man up there to look around, and that "looking around" would certainly result in a solution of the mystery and the capture of the guilty party. Frogeye knew that; knew it because he could recall many similar cases. The rangers always solved mysteries, and always got their men.

He met other natives on the stream, but kept his mouth closed about the crime. He was intelligent enough to understand the importance of keeping his news to himself, thereby affording the rangers a chance to get on the scene before others.

"Splinter had too much money," he reflected, recalling tales he had heard concerning the old man's possessions. For the swamp land, he was wealthy. Industrious, saving, Hughes had accumulated considerable money—at least, such was the report. "Kep' his money hid in his cabin, I'll bet, an' somebody done kilt him fur it!"

In the late afternoon he beached at Oak Donnick, went ashore and reported to Hubbard Wheeler, ranger chief.

An hour later, Inspector Jack Calhoun, accompanied by Ranger Murdock, departed up river, bound for the mouth of Little Caney, and the cabin of Splinter Hughes.

II

JACK CALHOUN, tall, lean, muscular, had arisen from the ranks of the rangers to the post of chief inspector, a rank second only to that of Hubbard Wheeler himself. Beneath his thatch of straw-colored, sun bleached hair, lay a store of knowledge astonishing in its scope and depth.

His understanding of the natives of the

Sunken Lands, their character and their habits, individual and in the mass, was little short of marvelous. A woodsman of the highest skill, the country itself held few secrets from him.

Homely of face, quiet and unassuming, he was not, when idle, impressive to the eye. When in action, however, he became transformed; the quiet, unassuming, seemingly indolent Cal disappeared, and in his place came the machinelike person of brain and energy which was the real Calhoun. The Calhoun who was feared and respected throughout the whole of the Sunken Lands.

Tom Murdock, the inspector's choice as an aid when available, was much like Cal in build and in some other particulars; the same indefatigable energy, skill in woodcraft, and regard for duty.

He lacked Cal's penchant for leadership, his keen perception—in short, his fine mental ability. Murdock excelled in execution; he could and did follow orders to the letter. The two men worked together in perfect harmony and understanding, and the fame of their joint achievements will never be forgotten in the Great Swamp.

It was those two men who set out on the trail of the murderer of Splinter Hughes. They proceeded silently, each in his own dugout. Until the scene of the crime had been reached and thoroughly examined there would be little or no conversation.

One of Calhoun's invariable rules was not to discuss a case or speculate upon it at all, even in his own thoughts, until he had inspected the premises and learned all he could therefrom.

Day had dawned when they beached their boats on the north shore of Little Caney and took their way toward the cabin. The hungry but vigilant hound challenged their approach, was quieted and fed, and the two entered the cabin.

The fact that the body of the murdered trapper, and the contents of the room, remained undisturbed so long was due, no doubt, to the lonely situation of the cabin. There was no other habitation within a radius of four or five miles, and the natives of the Sunken Lands are not much given to visiting.

Murdock sat down near the door and waited while Calhoun walked about the room, surveying it critically.

"Killed with an ax," he said. "No struggle. Must have died instantly. Room in disorder because the killer searched for something. Two or more men ate supper here the evening of the murder. Hughes lived alone. Had a guest that night, either known to him, or a chance caller. No means of determining that. Must have happened three or four days ago, because the water in the drinking bucket is stale and has a slight scum over it."

He paused in front of a table which sat against a wall near the fireplace, took up an empty tomato can, looked at it and replaced it on the table. Then he poked into the few pots and pans the cupboard held.

"Dishes all washed up," he resumed. "But there was company at the meal." He indicated some wrapping paper which lay in a wood box near the table. "That paper was removed from a side of breakfast bacon that evening. It is on top of the kindling wood in the box, and would not have been there had Splinter lived to build a fire the following morning. We may safely assume that it was torn off the bacon on the evening of the murder.

"Now," he went on, taking a slab of bacon from the cupboard and exhibiting it, "the knife marks in the rind of this bacon, which has not been cut off, indicate that ten slices have been cut. About the amount two hungry men would eat, along with other food. There may have been more bacon, of course, and this piece may have been the reserve supply, although I can find no other rind here. We are going to assume that two men sat down to supper that night. I think that will prove to be correct."

Calhoun gave his attention next to the corner of the room set aside for sleeping quarters. There were two bunks against the wall, one above another.

"A straw-tick in the upper bunk, but no blankets," he reflected aloud. "Seldom used. Lower bunk in constant use, and the blankets are spread neatly over the tick. Another evidence that the killing took place after supper and before bedtime."

"How do you account for the blankets being spread so neatly over the tick, and all the rest of the room in disorder?" Murdock queried.

"I was considering that," Cal returned. "I think the inference is very clear. The killer found what he sought before he reached the bunk, else it, too, would have been disturbed. Yes," he went on positively, "that bunk tells the story. The killer got the loot he slew for. No doubt about it. Now let's take a look at the ax he used for a weapon."

On the floor beyond the fireplace, where it had evidently been cast after the killing, lay a double-blade ax, commonly referred to as a double-bitted ax. Cal picked it up. The helve was blood-stained and there was hair on one edge. It was beyond doubt, the instrument of death.

"Hughes finished doing the dishes that night," he said, eying the ax attentively, "then sat down and filled his pipe for an after-supper smoke. The pipe is there on the floor near him; tobacco in it, but no evidence of its having been lit.

"The killer snatched up the ax, probably when the old man leaned over to get a coal of fire from the hearth with which to light the pipe. He struck, killing Hughes with one blow. The position of the wound indicates that the victim was bending over when struck."

He placed the ax on the table and went over to where the dead hound lay. After studying the animal for a moment, he got down on his knees, Murdock watching his every movement attentively, and pried its mouth open.

"Cloth," he muttered, abstracting a triangular bit of material from the dog's jaws. "Doesn't mean much," he went on, "as it is jeans, and virtually every man in the Sunken Lands wears jeans trousers."

Murdock nodded agreement, and waited.

"When the killer struck," Cal resumed, "the dog attacked. Probably bit him on a leg, tearing the trousers. The killer thrust the hound off and killed him with the ax."

He took up the implement again, examined it critically, and nodded.

"Black hairs with the white," he remarked. "Dog's and master's. Same man killed both, and with the same ax. One man only, Tom, I'll bet my commission."

Murdock nodded vigorously. "Right!" he declared. "Anything else you can read on that ax-helve? Does it hold any more evidence—"

The put-put-put of a motor boat caused the ranger to break off, and both went out.

"Lundsford!" Murdock ejaculated disgustedly when, a few minutes later, the burly form of the sheriff of Poinsette County broke cover and came across the clearing. He was followed by half a dozen deputies, and a crowd of native swampers brought up the rear.

Cal nodded, a grim smile playing about his lips.

III

SHERIFF LUNDSFORD, a skillful politician, held office in Poinsette because he was a good vote getter. Once in office, with all secure, he was content to draw salary and fees, attend public gatherings in the county, where he was afforded opportunities to strut and brag, and otherwise follow his indolent inclinations.

As a law officer he was a total loss. While he attempted to hide the fact, the rangers' activities in the Sunken Lands, embracing the northern half of his county, galled him bitterly. He held them up to ridicule, when out of their sight and hearing, whenever opportunity offered, and always interfered with the operation of the organization when possible. Jack Calhoun was particularly obnoxious to him.

Calhoun, who had no room within himself to hate any man, disliked Lundsford for his officious, interfering tendencies, and for that reason never overlooked a chance to show the sheriff up. Lundsford amused, and, at the same time, disgusted him. He watched the burly sheriff amble across the clearing, apparently unconcerned.

"Hello, Cal!" Lundsford roared. "Hi, Murdock! Reckon you two famous hounds have done nosed out the trail, so there ain't any use of me here, eh? Who done it, and why?" There was attempted sarcasm in his voice, and his words were as insulting as he dared make them.

"Howdy, Lundsford," Cal greeted. "We've done very little, so far; just looked the ground over and made a few deductions. Your turn now."

He stood aside and allowed Lundsford to enter. Murdock followed the sheriff inside, but the inspector stood on the doorlog and looked the crowd of natives and deputies over. Perhaps a score were there.

Beeswax Brown, a trapper and bee-hunter from Brush Lake, Nate Billings, from the headwaters of Little Caney, Joe Hampton, from Buck Island, and a tall fellow named Eph Diggs, who combined farming and trapping, were among those the inspector recognized. There were many others, all of whom were more or less known to him.

"You boys stay outside until Lundsford looks the place over," Cal bade them. "Seems like the news spread pretty rapidly," he went on suggestively. "A lot of you here."

It was Eph Diggs who answered:

"I war comin' up frum Marked Tree," he said, "an' met Frogeye goin' down. He told me."

"Same here," said Beeswax.

"Frogeye told me, too," Joe Hampton explained.

It seemed that Frogeye, after keeping his mouth shut until he reached the rangers' headquarters, had thereafter opened it wide.

"Any of you fellows see Splinter Hughes during the past three or four days?" Cal queried.

Nat Billings had gone down Little Caney to the St. Francis, thence to Marked Tree, four days before, but had not stopped off at Splinter's place, nor had he seen him. Eph Diggs had gone down the day following, and Splinter had not been seen by him. No one else had seen the old trapper for several days past.

"He war a dum fool, war Splinter," Billings volunteered during a silence. "Saved up his money, but wouldn't put it in no bank. Kep' it in th' cabin, an' thishere air whut cum of it!"

"How do you know he kept money in the cabin?" Lundsford asked the question, his hard eyes on the face of Billings. "How do you happen to know so much?"

"Well," the native replied hesitatingly, "well, that's whut th' gineral impression is. I don't know fur sure—"

"Then keep your mouth shut!" Lundsford snapped. "Hell is full of men that talked too damned much! Remember that—"

He broke off, eyes narrowing, while he studied a torn place on Billings's right trouser-leg. He said nothing, but motioned Cal into the cabin.

"What do you make of things, Calhoun?" he asked, when inside.

"Murder," the inspector answered.

"Murder, of course!" the sheriff snorted. "But who? Anything here suggesting who the guilty party is?"

Cal nodded. "Not directly to the man," he answered. "But there's evidence indicating the sort of person he is—occupation, for instance. At least one physical characteristic is noticeable, and it should prove no trick at all to name the locality where he probably lives. The case is young yet, of course, and may take most any shape. What do you find?"

Lundsford scratched his head. "Well," he replied, "I find that old Splinter was killed for his money, and it's clear that some neighbor of his done it."

Cal raised his eyebrows inquiringly. "Is that so?" he asked.

"Of course!" Lundsford declared. "A neighbor, knowing about Hughes keeping considerable money by him, drops in for a visit, kills the old man, robs him and gets away. That's about all. And," he lowered his voice, "I already have an eye on a likely suspect."

"Is that so?" Cal asked, astonished. "So soon?"

Lundsford winked knowingly. "You bet!" he declared. "That piece of jeans cloth you took out of the hound's mouth, and which Murdock showed me—that's the clew in this case. The only clew, in fact. Now," he went on, "there's a native out there with a pair of jeans pants on that have been torn on the right leg, and a scrap of cloth is missing. How's that for observing things?"

"You mean Billings," Cal replied quietly. "I noticed the tear in his trouser-

leg. Billings, however, is an old acquaintance of Splinter's, and often at his cabin. That seems to let him out."

"What!" Lundsford exclaimed. "Lets him out! How do you figure that?"

"The hound would not have attacked a man well known to him, even though the man did attack his master," Cal explained patiently. "You know the nature of the native hound, Lundsford—or should. You could not set one on a man well known to him, even if you tried. The man who killed Splinter was a stranger—at least to the hound."

Lundsford gave the inspector a look of disgust. "There you go," he exclaimed, "dragging in theory and unimportant matters! Billings has a piece of cloth missing from the leg of his pants, and the dead hound had a scrap of the same cloth in his mouth! I say—watch Billings!"

"Would Billings be likely to wear the trousers, knowing the dog had torn them?" Cal asked. "A pair of new ones would be more significant."

"Hell," Lundsford replied, "these natives are all damned fools! He wouldn't think anything about it."

"There's where you make a mistake, Lundsford," Cal corrected. "The natives are not damned fools, or anything like that. They are shrewd and wary, for the most part. Why not try and fit the scrap of cloth to the rent in Billings's trousers?"

"All in good time," said Lundsford. "You don't agree that the killer was a neighbor of Splinter's. Why?"

"For very good reasons," Cal replied. "The bit of cloth is unimportant. The ax is the clew. Look it over carefully—"

"Pshaw!" Lundsford interrupted. "What's to learn from the ax? It was one of Splinter's, kept in the cabin, of course. The killer found it handy, and used it. That's easy to see!"

Cal shook his head negatively. "The ax did not belong to Splinter," he stated. "It was the property of the killer, and he did not bring it here for the purpose of committing the murder. He used it because, when he made up his mind to do the deed, it was ready to his hand. After he used it, he flung it aside and forgot to take it with him when he went. Observe the ax, Lundsford—particularly the splitting edge."

IV

LUNDSFORD stared, puzzled. "Reckon you'll have to explain that," he said after a bit. "An ax is an ax, and that's all you can make out of it. What you mean?"

"An ax, Lundsford, has individuality," Cal replied. "Rather, it has the individuality of its owner. The careless, inaccurate axman, for instance. The handle of his ax will be splintered and scuffed where it enters the helve. That of the careful, accurate axman will be the contrary.

"That is merely one instance of the individuality of an ax. Let us look at Splinter's ax, which is yonder near his wood pile, and see what we can learn from it."

Followed by the sheriff, Calhoun went to where Hughes's ax lay, and took it up.

"This is a home-made handle," he pointed out. "Few natives ever buy a ready-made ax handle. He can make better ones himself. Notice that this one, while a good, serviceable handle, lacks smoothness. Hughes was not expert with a drawing-knife, and did not give his work the fine, smooth finish it could have had."

"Humph!" Lundsford exclaimed. "I can see that, but what of it?"

"The handle in the ax used by the murderer," Cal pointed out, "is smooth, so expertly done as to leave no sign of a drawing knife. The maker probably sandpapered it. It is undoubtedly a home-made handle."

"Well," the sheriff growled grudgingly, "go on. I agree that you are right about the handle. What about that splitting edge you spoke of?"

Cal held the double-bitted helve up and traced one edge with a long forefinger. "This is what is known as a chopping or cutting edge," he explained. "Notice that the blade is ground far back, coming down gradually to a fine, sharp edge. Such an edge is solely for chopping, since it bites deep and throws out a big chip. Do you follow me?"

Lundsford nodded. Cal then indicated the other blade, showing that it too was ground to a chopping edge.

"Let's look at the killer's ax," he proposed, leading the way to the cabin, observed with deep interest by the crowd which lounged around near by.

"Now," he said, holding the blood-stained ax up for Lundsford to observe, "note that one edge of this ax is ground for chopping."

The sheriff examined the implement critically, then nodded. "It is," he said.

"But," Cal went on, exhibiting the other edge, "the blade is not so ground. The slope does not extend nearly so far up, and the edge is considerably blunter—more on a bevel. This is what is known as a splitting edge. In splitting a block of wood, Lundsford, the idea is not to cut it down its length, of course. That is impossible. A single stroke of a blunt-edge ax, in the right place, will split it through.

"A sharp, chopping edge, often bites deep into the wood and hangs there, with no resulting bursting apart of the fiber. Hence the splitting edge is required. This ax has one edge ground for chopping, and one ground for splitting."

"Well," Lundsford said, seeing the inspector was through, "now you've gone and explained all this, what good is it? How does it help catch this killer?"

Cal looked at him steadily for a moment. It was in his mind that here was a dumb man, but he did not allow the thought to show in his face. Presently he said:

"This edge, the splitting edge, is the clew in this case. It narrows our field down to a very small area. Can't you see that?"

"Nope," Lundsford declared. "Can't see anything in that idea. Just one of your fine-drawn theories, Cal. No practical use at all. You asked me, and I'm telling you."

Cal laughed. "Glad you're frank about it," he said good-humoredly. "And, to show you that I'm not offended, I'll point out something else I have learned from these two axes."

He took Hughes's implement in hand, extended it at arm's length, and sighted down the handle. "See, Lundsford," he said, "how the handle of this ax bows slightly to the right. A right-handed man habitually swung this ax."

He laid it down and took up the ax of the murderer, sighting down the handle as before. "This handle bows the other way, which indicates that it was used by a left-handed man. All this stuff, Lundsford, is elementary. Any woodsman could have pointed it out to you. However, the story told by the two axes does this:

"It tells us that the ax used as a weapon was not the property of Hughes, and that the owner swings his ax left-handed. That does not mean that he is left-handed in all things. Many right-handed men chop and hoe left-handed, as you surely must have observed. But the killer undoubtedly uses an ax left-handed."

Lundsford could not escape the logic of that; it was too clearly drawn. But he was not willing to admit that Cal's deductions had brought him one inch closer to the solution of the mystery than he had been to start with.

"Granting all that," he said, "where does that get you?"

"This far: I want a man who does a bit of splitting with his ax, but not enough to warrant him in buying one and grinding both blades for the purpose. One blade, so ground, is sufficient for his needs. The other blade, ground for chopping, makes the ax a two-purpose one.

"This man is left-handed, insofar as using an ax goes, and he is neat in his work, skillful with a drawing knife, and, probably, with other carpentering tools. That, Lundsford, is where my deductions from the ax gets me."

"And you say those deductions narrows your field?" Lundsford queried.

"Absolutely."

"How? Don't every native in the Sunken Lands own axes? And don't they grind 'em like this killer's ax is ground?"

"Yes, to the first question. No, to the second," Cal replied. "Nearly all the native axes are double-bitted, it's true, but when did you ever see a native swamper sawing up a tree trunk and splitting it into wood? He almost invariably chops down a few poles, drags them up to his cabin, and chops them into the desired length.

"A native, as you probably know, never travels any distance at all without two things—his rifle and his ax. Go down to the boats at anchor, Lundsford, and examine the axes you'll find there. I'll wager there will not be a splitting edge among them."

"Well," the sheriff pondered aloud, "that is the same as saying that the killer is not a native. You mean that?"

"Not at all," was the reply. "He probably is a native."

"Damn it all!" Lundsford exploded wrathfully. "You make out to lead a feller in a straight line, when all you do is to take him around in a circle! First you prove, by an ax, that no native done the killing; then, by hokey, you say a native did do it! You go ahead in your own way, Calhoun, and I'll go mine. I'm betting I get my man—and I won't need to read no solution on the helve of no ax!"

The angry sheriff stalked off, leaving Calhoun smiling to himself.

V

CALHOUN stood on the door log and watched Lundsford going about among the natives, interrogating them in his habitual bullying manner. At intervals other swampers dropped in, having heard the news, and each fresh arrival was a fish for the sheriff's net.

Presently, tiring of watching, Cal strolled down to the creek where the boats lay at anchor. At the expiration of an hour he had accurately appraised the contents of each craft there. Then he returned to the cabin.

Lundsford was sitting on the door log, a complacent grin on his heavy countenance.

"Well, what luck, Mr. Sheriff?" Cal queried, pausing near him.

"I got my man all but pinned to the wall," Lundsford exulted. "Going to wait awhile before nabbing him, though. Won't do to be too hasty. My men are watching him, so he can't get away. After the coroner has come and held his inquest, I'll have him in irons. Aim to bring out the evidence against him at the hearing—and I won't leave him a leg to stand on."

"Fine!" Cal exclaimed. "As you say, it doesn't pay to be too hasty. That bringing out the evidence at the inquest is a good idea. Stick to it, and you probably will be glad you did."

Lundsford shot a suspicious glance toward Cal, but found him serious of face. The twinkle far back in his eyes went unobserved.

"What you going to do, eh?" the sheriff asked.

"Going to take a trip up Little Caney," was the reply. "Murdock can handle our end of things here, and I've a little matter to see after up the creek. Might as well do it now, while we wait for the coroner, and save myself a trip later. So long."

After giving certain instructions to Murdock, Calhoun took to the creek in his dugout and made speed toward the east. He had a five hour journey ahead of him, and wished to return to the cabin in the early hours of the following morning. The inquest would probably be held then, and he meant to be there.

At eight o'clock the following morning he returned to the clearing before Hughes's cabin, and paused at the outer edge of a crowd which had gathered before the door. It looked as though every native within a radius of twenty miles had appeared for the inquest. Lundsford was speaking in loud and confident tones.

"Billings," he interrogated, "you say you came down Little Caney from your place above, on the morning of Monday, four days ago?"

"I shorely did," Nate Billings answered.

"And you did not see Splinter Hughes?"

"Never seed hide ner hair of him."

"You didn't stop off at his cabin?"

"I done told you-all that I never seed Splinter," was the hot reply. "Whut makes you go on an' ax me them questions?"

"You answer 'em!" snarled the sheriff, shaking his fist at Nate. "You answer, or I'll take you in right now! I'm giving you a chance to avoid trouble, and you'd better make the most of it!"

"Go ahead an' ax," Billings said, his tones denoting uneasiness. "I'll answer as best I kin."

"Billings!" Lundsford suddenly shouted. "Don't you know that I know you are a liar? Ain't you lying?" he advanced toward the shrinking native, stiff forefinger leveled under his nose. "Didn't you come down here last Monday night, kill Splinter Hughes with an ax, rob him, and then go on to Marked Tree? Didn't you? Of course you won't own up! I don't expect you to! But you did just that, and I know you did!

"I'm going to arrest you for the murder of Splinter Hughes—and you're going to swing for it! How did you get that hole in the right leg of your pants?"

Billings fumbled the hole with trembling fingers. "I—I don't rightly remember," he stammered. "I jist got it thar, somehow or ernother—"

"You got it when Hughes's hound attacked you in the cabin, after you had struck down his master!" Lundsford shouted. "That's how you got it—"

"No sich a dang thing!"

The interruption came clear and emphatic, startling the group and causing Lundsford to wheel toward the speaker, astonished, his manner threatening.

It was "Coonskin" Barnes, a grizzled swamper, who spoke. He gave Lundsford look for look, advancing until he stood well within the circle formed about the sheriff.

"Shut up, you!" Lundsford bawled. "When I want anything out of you, I'll let you know!"

"Reckon you'd better do a little shuttin' up yoreself, Lundsford," the old trapper retorted, calm and unimpressed. "You aim to fasten thishere crime on Nate Billings, as squar' a man as ever run a trap-line or drawed a net.

"You-all ain't keerin' much, one way or ernother, whether he air th' guilty one or not. All you-all wants is somebody to put your dang handcuffs on and throw in th' calaboose. Well, mark me, you ain't goin' to take Nate Billings outten this swamp for somethin' he didn't do!"

Lundsford, almost speechless, finally recovered sufficiently to speak after a fashion. "What—what do you know about this matter?" he demanded, his voice thick.

"I knows how Nate cum by that hole in his pants leg," the old man replied. "I remembers, even if he don't. He got it frum snaggin' it on a limb when him an' me cut a bee-tree, a month ago. Scratched his hide a little, too. Tore out a piece of th' cloth. Anybody but a dang nincompoop could tell that's an old tear, an' not one made a few days ago."

"You tell him, Coonskin!" a native called.

"L'arn him how to be a sheriff!"

"We-all air with you, Coonskin!"

Clearly, Coonskin had many backers. Lundsford and his deputies began to show distinct signs of uneasiness.

"Fuddermo'," Coonskin went on, "Nate couldn't of kilt Splinter, an' fur this reason: He went down to Marked Tree on Monday mornin', as a dozen men here will swear. They seed him thar, an' whilst he war on his way."

"Shore did!"

"I seed him! Went down frum th' mouth of Caney with him!"

"I knows he war thar!"

Many testified thus. Lundsford was not now nearly so confident as he had been. His deputies began to draw closer to him, as though expecting trouble—as well they might, should the sheriff persist in his former tactics.

"What does that prove?" Lundsford asked. "He may have killed him that morning, and then—"

"No sich a dang thing!" Coonskin declared. "Fur I seed Splinter an' talked with him las' Monday atternoon, erbout three o'clock. Seed him an' talked with him, an' he war alive an' well!"

The crowd became suddenly silent. Then, after a moment, Tom Spear, a young native, spoke up:

"See, men, how a dang no-account law officer kin cum in amongst us an' hang one of us outten hand? See how easy it is? He don't keer nothin' erbout us—jist so he gits somebody to hang!"

The crowd began to mutter angrily, and to mill about, flaming eyes on Lundsford and his men. It was a ticklish situation, one loaded to the muzzle with danger. Lundsford saw his position, and attempted to temporize.

"Let's look further into this matter, men—" he began.

"To hell with you an' yore lookin'!" Spear snapped. "We got enough of you an' yore ornery ways! It's time for you to git, an' them as cum with you!"

"Wait!"

Calhoun uttered the command, stepping forward as he did so. There was a general turning of heads in his direction, and the crowd, recognizing the ranger, waited silently for him to speak further.

"You've fumbled this, Lundsford," Cal said quietly. "Now it's my turn."

VI

LUNDSFORD'S face reddened, and he started to make hot reply. However, he took a second look at the ranger, and closed his mouth.

It was a different Calhoun who stood in the circle of men that morning; he was no longer the smiling, good-natured, easy-going chap of the day before.

Cold of eye, alert of manner and grim of face, he looked more like a tawny panther than he did a human being.

Calhoun began speaking, his voice calm but penetrating.

"Nate Billings had nothing to do with the killing of Splinter Hughes," he asserted positively. "The murderer, as I told Lundsford yesterday, was a comparative stranger to his victim. He is a native swamper who recently moved into these parts, and had never mixed much with his fellows.

"Hughes knew him by sight, but his hounds did not. I am going to tell you just what occurred on last Monday afternoon and evening—the time when Splinter Hughes met his death."

He paused, his glance searching for and finding Murdock. The latter watched his chief with concentrated intentness, as a well trained hound watches its master in anticipation of some quiet signal or order.

Presently Cal's glance shifted, seemed to rove over the crowd, then came to rest at a point directly across the circle from him. Immediately, Murdock dropped back behind the crowd, and when next Cal saw him he was standing across the circle, near the point his glance had indicated. Thereupon the inspector resumed.

"This newcomer," he went on to say, "had not been here long before he heard talk concerning Splinter Hughes; his rather miserly habits, and the reputed storing up of his earnings in his cabin. That sort of talk interested him, because money was the one thing he cared most for in life. He needed it. Finally, after much thought, he determined to look into things at Splinter's cabin.

"Whether he intended to kill the old man last Monday night I cannot say. I know, though, that he set out for Marked Tree, timing his departure so as to reach needed it. Finally he determined to look into things at Splinter's cabin.

"Hughes, knowing him slightly, invited him to come in and eat, and he did so. After supper, possibly before the meal, the murderer managed to get an invitation to remain overnight, and continue his journey in the morning—not a difficult thing to do, as all you swamp men know. A fellow living alone, as Hughes did, is only too glad to have company of his own kind.

"The killer accepted, and he and Hughes went down to the creek and brought up his dunnage; his blankets, rifle, ax, and the like. Possibly he went alone, but whether he did or not is immaterial. What is material is the fact that he did have his dunnage in the cabin at the time of the killing—especially his ax.

"During the time he had been in the cabin the killer managed to satisfy himself that Hughes really kept money there. Probably started talking about the insecurity of banks, which would, of course, lead Splinter into a discourse on his favorite topic: Distrust he entertained toward banks.

"The opportunity to slay the old man came when he sat down, filled his pipe and leaned over to get a coal from the fire. When he did that, the murderer snatched up his ax, which stood near at hand, and slew him with one stroke.

"A hound, belonging to Hughes, was in the cabin. At sight of the violence done his master, the hound attacked, only to be slain in his turn.

"Having committed the deed, the next thing was to gather the fruit of it. The killer tossed his ax aside, and began a feverish, hasty search of the premises. Just where the money was hidden I am unable to say, but I do know that it was discovered before the searcher reached that part of the cabin devoted to sleeping quarters.

"An empty tomato can, standing on the table, showing signs of having been cleaned thoroughly, leads me to believe that Splinter kept his roll of bills in it; probably he kept it on a shelf of the cupboard among other cans. Where the money was, however, does not matter. The killer got it. Having got it, he hurried away and set out for Marked Tree.

"In his haste to leave the scene of the crime, he made a fatal error," Cal went on. "He forgot the ax with which he had done the deed. That ax, when queried, told its owner's name as plainly as though it spoke it in words."

He paused, surveying the crowd, which hung breathless upon his words.

"All of you men know what a splitting edge is," Cal continued. "This killer's ax had one splitting edge and one chopping edge. When I observed that, I asked myself this question: Who would have need of an ax ground in such a manner, here in the swamp? There is not, at this season, any bolt or tie cutting going on here. Besides, one who made a business of cutting bolts and ties would have both blades of his ax ground to a splitting edge. After thinking that over, I came to this conclusion:

"The owner of that ax was doing a bit of farming; fencing a small patch of ground with rails. He would have need of only a few rails, and he was engaged in splitting them when he had leisure from other tasks. Hence he ground one blade of his ax for splitting, and the other for chopping.

"Now, where should I look for a man who was doing a bit of farming? Not in the low grounds, certainly. Where, then? Why on a bit of ridge land, of course. You swampers who live in the flood area never split rails, because the first rise would wash them away. If you have need of a corral you cut poles and fasten them to trees, so they will not float off.

"A man on a ridge, desiring to fence permanently and securely against hogs and stock, could safely do so with split rails. That narrowed the field of search. There is only one ridge within twenty miles of here—Hogback Ridge. All of you know the place.

"My man, then, lived on Hogback Ridge, was doing a bit of fencing at odd times. That much seemed certain. Last night I went to Hogback, and found the place I sought. Before I went, though, I examined the contents of the boats at anchor at Splinter's landing. In only one of them did I fail to find an ax. But the owner of that boat had no torn place in his trousers, as the murderer must have had, since the hound, when he attacked, tore a bit of cloth with his teeth. The man I suspected had no such torn place in his trousers.

"Then I thought of his coat. It was rolled, and in his boat. I examined the coat, men—and found what I sought. The hound had torn a bit of cloth from the coat—"

A commotion across the circle from Cal caused him to break off. Eph Diggs, the trapper-farmer, had suddenly leaped away from where he stood, his right hand gripping the butt of a revolver. His eyes were red and fiery, his lips drawn back and showing yellow, houndlike teeth. He swung his weapon up, its muzzle bearing on Cal.

"Damn you!" he shrieked. "Damn you, I'm goin' to pay you out before I go—"

At that moment Murdock fired, his bullet shattering the gun arm of the killer. The next moment he was a prisoner.

"And you reasoned all that out, just from looking at the ax!" Lundsford exclaimed in an awed voice, a short while later.

"No," Cal corrected. "It was the splitting edge. Had both blades been ground alike, the ax might have told me nothing. As it was, however, it narrowed the field, as I told you. That splitting edge pointed unmistakably toward some one who had only an occasional need for splitting. Following that lead," he finished, "I got my man."

"These cigarettes are extremely good. What make are they?"

THE CROOKED TRAIL

By Walter Archer Frost

OUR STARE GREW WILD AS RUGGLES AND I READ THE NOTE: "THIS PAPER HAS TRANSMITTED TO YOU A DEADLY DISEASE: YOU ARE DOOMED!"

CHAPTER I

THE LETTER

"DON'T turn around yet," Ruggles said guardedly, "but, after a moment, take a look just behind us at that middle-aged man, tall, slender, walking with a limp just behind us—I say; he's following us."

We had just come down the steps of our snug little apartment on West Eighty-Sixth Street for a little fresh air in the late afternoon. I at least was exhausted by our work on a particularly dangerous and exacting case we had finished not two hours ago, and I was in no mood immediately to start in on a new one.

Ruggles's word, however, that a man was following us had a warning in it which I could not ignore. So, at the next crossing I looked idly back, then, as we walked on, I said:

"I've spotted the man, but I don't believe he's following us."

"All right," Ruggles said; "we'll keep on down here to Riverside Drive, then turn back, and you will see that he will."

Ruggles was right; the middle-aged man, keeping always on the opposite side of the street from us, now turned and stepped down off the curb, crossing diagonally as if about to speak to us, narrowly escaping being run down by a taxi while doing it.

"This is a new turn in an old situation," Ruggles said, as we walked slowly back in the direction of our apartment.

"I don't see anything new in it," I said. "This man is following us for some reason, and a good many men have done that. Probably he's working for some of our friends who are trying for a pot shot at you. We'd better walk on up to the subway and go down town, giving him the slip in the crowd."

"No," Ruggles said, "I don't want to give him the slip. You've missed the new turn I told you about; this man is not working for any of our enemies; he is an anxious amateur. In addition to that, he is utterly exhausted. I was wrong in saying he walked with a limp—in his case the reason is physical weakness."

"Then let him go to his doctor," I said. "The thing for us to do is to dodge this invalid—"

"No," Ruggles said. "We'll go home and let him follow us in; then we can hear his story before he collapses. Hold on, there he goes now—down on the sidewalk!"

Ruggles forced his way through the crowd which instantly had gathered about the man who now lay, conscious, but too weak to rise, on the sidewalk.

"You wanted to speak to me, I believe," my companion said, bending over him.

"Yes," the man said hoarsely. "I must talk with you while I can, Mr. Ruggles. At your rooms, if you will—"

"Crane and I will take you there at once, and you can rest first, then tell us what you desire to. Here, taxi!"

For a moment, I wondered if the traffic officer, who had come up to disperse the crowd, was going to question us. I knew that, if he did, Ruggles and I would be hard put, for, though the man called Ruggles by name, neither of us had ever seen him before—and now we were putting him in a taxi, in effect were running away with him.

The policeman did not question us. We lifted the man into the taxi. Ruggles pointed up the street to where our apartment was, and we started.

Our mysterious guest spoke suddenly: "Open the windows!" he commanded weakly.

"Do you feel faint?" Ruggles asked.

"Yes," the other said, "but that is not the reason why you must instantly open the windows. I am coming down with a serious illness, I believe, and I do not want to give it to either of you."

"No danger of that," Ruggles reassured him, throwing open one of the doors and holding it as we drove along. "With this wind blowing through, it will be all right. Don't try to talk in this racket; we shall be at my apartment in no time. It is just up the block, here."

"I know," the man said with difficulty. "I watched you come out of it—then I began following you."

When we had assisted him to the couch in our quiet living room and he had seen us lock the street door and pull the heavy portières across the windows, our guest said in panting breaths:

"I must warn you again that I am stricken with a dangerous illness—"

Ruggles nodded, and said humoringly: "We will disinfect this room if you will feel any easier; it will take only an instant."

We went to the bathroom and Ruggles poured fresh into an atomizer some of the strong antiseptic he kept always on hand; then, when we had shot it through our noses and throats, we went back into the living room.

As we did so, I whispered to Ruggles: "He certainly looks like a dead man!"

But I do not think Ruggles heard me—after one quick sniff of the air, he darted to the front door, threw it open, and looked sharply up and down the sidewalk; then he flung open the windows, letting in the strong, fresh wind from the river.

"What's the matter?" I cried. "Going to leave everything open so that the whole town can come in?"

"The first thing to do is to get this gas out."

"Gas?"

"Yes," Ruggles said, "and a deadly gas, too. There, this is better. Now we are all right! He was quick about it; shot the gas into the room, then rushed down the front steps and hid himself in the crowd! Undoubtedly I saw his back; but there was no way I could tell which he was."

Ruggles, leaving me staring in bewilderment, went back to the motionless figure on the couch.

"But how did it get in here," I demanded, "this gas you're talking about? The front door was locked and everything shut—"

"Everything but the keyhole in our front

door," Ruggles whispered to me over his shoulder. "The gas was shot through the keyhole from a tiny gas-pistol which, by a queer inconsistency of the law of this State, any individual is permitted to carry."

"I still don't see—"

"The gas was sent in here as easily as the antiseptic was sent from the atomizer into our throats and noses—just the pressure of a rubber bulb and the air in the bulb pushed the gas through the keyhole into the room."

"It's good you noticed it."

"It was good that this fine wind blew in through this room—there was undoubtedly enough gas in the gun to kill all three of us; this man here is not dead, only unconscious. I'll go through his pockets before he comes to."

Ruggles had his practical, skilled hands in and out of the man's clothes in a moment, bringing from the man's inside right breast pocket something which made us wonder: a letter which made us stare:

RICHARD GREW:
This paper has transmitted to you a deadly disease: you are doomed.

Ruggles put the letter back in the envelope which he had taken out with it; then he put the envelope back in the unconscious man's pocket.

"Boiling water kills every known germ," my companion said. "Open that door into the kitchen—I don't want to touch it with my hands—put on a small saucepan of hot water from the pipe there, then give it the biggest burner on the gas stove!"

I obeyed him instantly. We watched the water in the little saucepan wriggle, then begin to quiver; then it began to boil, first lazily, then furiously. Ruggles darted his hands in, then dried them.

"Now turn off the gas, Dan," he said.

CHAPTER II

BEYOND HOPE

"FEELING better, I hope," Ruggles said, as we saw Richard Grew open his eyes and look about him.

"Yes, I am better, but it will not be for long, I think. Let me talk to you while I am able to." He lifted himself on his elbow. "I have a letter in my pocket—"

"I read it," Ruggles said. "There was no time to wait. I have sterilized my hands. There is no danger. Who sent you that letter? Do you know?"

"I believe that I do, but—"

"Tell me who he is! Where is he? Rouse yourself!" Ruggles put his strong, sympathetic hand on the weak shoulder. "Tell me, and I promise—"

"I dare not tell you, for this man is a fiend in human form. Save my daughter! Go to my house, where she is, and stay with her—that alone can protect her sufficiently. Not even you can do anything for me; he has struck, and his blow is sure." His elbow, on which he had leaned, gave way, and he slid down on the couch on his side.

"You are ill, as you have said," Ruggles cried. "Let me call in your family doctor to care for you!"

"No," Grew said with an effort. "Not that. Think only of my daughter, Margaret!" He collapsed then, and his voice trailed off in a groan that was more a gasp.

"Undo his collar," I cried. "If we get him more air—"

"He is burning up with a fever," Ruggles said, "and must be taken at once to a hospital. Phone to Dr. Whittimore to come with an ambulance! Then, God help us, we'll run down Richard Grew's murderer."

"Murderer?"

"Yes," Ruggles said, "for I believe, as this man does, that he is suffering from a fatal malady brought on by his having touched that letter."

I was at the phone in a moment, and almost as soon, Dr. Whittimore arrived. He was a grave-looking man, whose office was only a few doors from us; we had called in Whittimore in many a case before this, but I had never seen him look more anxious than when he had completed his swift examination.

"The ambulance will be here immediately," he said. "There's its bell now. Help me carry him, will you?"

When they had gone down the steps and Ruggles had returned for an instant with the

doctor, Whittimore said in a swift and guarded undertone: "I know you're used to queer things, Ruggles, and take long chances when it comes to another man's gun or knife, but there are things even more dangerous than those, and you ought to realize it."

"Speak out, Whittimore," Ruggles said.

"I will. How long has that case, that's now on the way to my hospital, been in this room with both of you?"

"Half an hour, perhaps."

"I hope you're alive to-morrow."

"I mean to be. Crane and I have flushed our throats and noses with a strong solution of—"

Whittimore smelled our atomizer. "That stuff," he said, "is perfectly good when it come to nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand, but it may not be strong enough for the present case; I can't say definitely yet, but it looks to me as if this man were suffering from one of those excessively virulent tropical diseases—"

"I tell you, I've taken adequate precautions!"

"Oh, I know, Ruggles, you've managed to pick up an extraordinarily lot of practical knowledge somehow about poisons, antidotes, and such stuff, surgery and medicine generally, and most diseases won't fool you much, but when it comes to—"

"Amazon fever, you mean?" Ruggles asked.

"What did you say?" Whittimore snapped.

"I said Amazon fever. I think Mr. Grew is suffering from that."

"You mean those eruptions on his hands?"

"No, those are only Natal sores."

"Natal—" Whittimore stopped, staring open-mouthed.

"Natal sores," Ruggles repeated. "They come from getting some of the red earth of Natal in an open cut or scratch—anywhere the skin has been broken. Mr. Grew is evidently just back from Natal."

"Where's that?" Whittimore demanded blankly.

"South Africa."

"Is he just back from the Amazon, too?" Whittimore scoffed. "I'll admit, as I just said, that your head is stocked with all sorts of out-of-the-way knowledge, and you've surprised me and a lot of other people more than once; but you've tripped yourself this time—how could that man in my ambulance have just got back from Natal, South Africa, and yet have been on the Amazon, in South America, recently enough to come down with Amazon fever only now?"

"I did not say he had been in South America," Ruggles replied, rather sharply, I thought.

"But you said he had been, I mean that he had Amazon fever," Whittimore insisted, "and you ought to know there's none of that disease in this country—he simply couldn't have developed it here. He'd have had to go to South America to get it. I tell you, you've caught yourself this time, Ruggles!"

"No, I haven't; he could have caught it by going to South America or—"

"Or," Dr. Whittimore laughed, "on second thought, don't you think he may be suffering from sleeping sickness? That's an African disease, and he might have caught it when he was in Natal, South Africa, getting those Natal sores you spoke about on his hands."

"He has not sleeping sickness," Ruggles said; "and, even if he had, he could not have caught it in Natal, for the tsetse fly, whose bite causes sleeping sickness, is never found south of Delegoa Bay."

"All right, all right," Dr. Whittimore said in a bewildered way, and putting his hat on back to front, "I'm only a general practitioner, and when you get into that sort of thing—sub-equatorial stuff—I've got to admit you get too deep for me. I guess our man's got Amazon fever, if you say so, but I'll phone you from the hospital."

"Do so," Ruggles said. "Here," scribbling on a piece of paper, "is your patient's name and address. To send for his daughter, Margaret, will be to subject her to unnecessary danger from contagion and profit her nothing, for her father will not recover consciousness."

"I'll phone you," Dr. Whittimore repeated, taking the bit of paper from Rug-

gles. Then he went down the steps and swiftly out to his car.

CHAPTER III

A COMPELLING REASON

"AND now," Ruggles said, "this letter and my laboratory—though I believe that an examination of the germs is unnecessary." He took the letter from his pocket as he spoke.

"But," I said, "I thought you put that back in Mr. Grew's pocket."

"I did, the first time; but I got it again after he had refused to tell us the name and address of his murderer. No, Dan," Ruggles went on as I started to enter his laboratory with him, "I would not come in if I were you; you can't help me in the least, and these things are in the highest degree dangerous—hand me that face-mask there, will you? And those skin rubber gloves? Thanks.

"Now run out. I'll be as quick as I can, then I'll tell you what I've found. Give your nose and throat another good flushing with the atomizer, as I'm going to do, in the meantime!"

He closed the door into the laboratory a moment later, and all I could do was to follow his instructions and wait for his verdict.

I had not long to wait; the laboratory door soon opened. Ruggles had taken off the face mask and the skin rubber gloves he always wore when making his more dangerous examinations, and he was drying his hands on a towel.

"Just as I thought," he said; "enough germs of Amazon fever on that letter to give the disease to fifty men."

"On the letter?" I asked.

"Yes—put there by the man who wrote the letter and did not sign it."

"There must be finger-prints."

"Yes, but they will probably prove to be only those of Richard Grew, the victim. The man, who staged this, wouldn't be fool enough to leave finger-prints."

"Then all we get from this letter is the fact that it held enough Amazon fever germs to kill Grew and forty others?"

"No," Ruggles said, "the letter tells us far more than that; it tells us that the man who wrote this letter knew there was no need of his signing the letter; and this corroborates Grew's own statement—he said that the man had struck and that his blow was sure; the writer of the letter knew that his victim would know who had struck him down."

The telephone rang then and Ruggles answered it. It was Dr. Whittimore, calling up from the hospital to say that Richard Grew had just died without recovering consciousness and that his malady had been diagnosed, by the hospital experts, as Amazon fever.

"Don't tell his daughter," Ruggles said, "until I have had a talk with her. Be sure of this and have the others there understand it—I must talk with her before she is told. What?" There was a pause. Then Ruggles went on:

"Well, of course, it can't be helped now, but I am afraid that a grave mistake has been made. She undoubtedly is at her home, and Crane and I will go right over. Thanks, Whittimore. Oh, of course, you'll record the name and number of any calls that come in asking how Mr. Grew is. Yes, that's the ticket!"

Ruggles rang off and turned to me, saying: "One of the young doctors notified Miss Grew of her father's death and she has all but collapsed—rushed to the hospital, not allowed to see her father for fear of contagion, and all that; had to be taken back to her home with a nurse.

"The family doctor, Spaulding, happened to come in, and, of course, got the facts and gave the nurse and all the hospital staff, including Whittimore, particular thunder. Spaulding is taking care of Miss Grew at the Grew home and now we've got to go there and see her."

As we entered our car and drove in the direction of West Seventy-Sixth Street, toward the address which Richard Grew had given us, Ruggles said:

"We've got to move very carefully, Dan, for the man who killed Grew by giving him those germs in that letter knows you and me and, having failed in his first attempt to kill us, will soon try again."

"You say he tried to kill us? When?"

"Why, when he shot that poison gas through the keyhole into our living room."

"But I don't see how that proves that he was trying to kill us."

"Don't you? Look at it this way! The man knew that Grew was as good as dead from the germs on the letter. The poison gas was for you and me, and if we'd breathed a little of it, we'd have been dead as the petrified bodies the scientists dig up among the ruins of Pompeii.

"It was what is known as Saccari's gas, invented by an Italian; it gives off, for the first moment, the odor of almonds and that odor is harmless; that was the odor I got and it warned me. In another minute or two we'd have been dead as Hector."

"But," I said, "if his poison gas was so deadly and so sure, why didn't this man go to Grew's house, late some night, and gas him to death in his bedroom? That would have been much easier and quicker than hunting up these Amazon fever germs and getting them into Grew's system by the medium of a letter."

"That's perfectly true," Ruggles admitted. "The fact that our man killed Grew in this roundabout way shows that he had some compelling reason for doing it—probably to throw suspicion on some other man, Dan. See if I'm not right."

"Do you think we shall find out anything from Miss Grew?" I asked.

"Nothing to-night, I think. I should not be surprised if the family doctor refuses to let us see her, at least until considerably later in the evening."

Ruggles looked at his watch. "It's only six now. I thought it much later. We'll get dinner first, then go to the Grew home right after that. I hate to intrude on her at such a time, but whatever she can or will tell us now we can use to the greatest advantage."

"What will you do if the doctor, Spaulding, Whittimore said, didn't he, won't let us see her?"

"That depends on what sort Dr. Spaulding is. We can't tell that until we've seen him."

At half past seven, we rang the doorbell at the Grew home and we were received by Dr. Spaulding. He was medium-sized, slender, energetic, and in his late forties, restless, rather handsome, and accustomed, evidently, to carrying things with a high hand.

He said at once: "I am glad to see you, Mr. Ruggles and—" He looked at me, bowed, and waited for Ruggles to introduce me. "Of course, Mr. Crane," the doctor said, frankly holding out his well-shaped hand to me. "I should have remembered, as I do now, what the newspapers said of your part in the capture of Foley, the murderer."

"It was an interesting case," I said, "and Foley gave us some busy moments when the show-down came."

Dr. Spaulding nodded, then turned to Ruggles and said: "Sit down, both of you, won't you? You will excuse me for standing, but this tragedy has upset me a good deal. Grew and I were such old friends, and to have him go off like this—I can hardly believe it, even now!"

The family doctor took a turn about the room, then came back to where we were sitting and stood, facing us, leaning on the center table before the open fireplace.

"You did not know Mr. Grew well. I did, and yet at times I felt as if he were the completest stranger. He would go away for weeks, months at a time, taking only his daughter, and wandering with her—"

"Had he visited Africa before his recent trip there?" Ruggles asked abruptly.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," Dr. Spaulding replied in a way which showed me he had not paid the least attention to Ruggles's latest question. "I know your record, Mr. Ruggles, and that was why I sent Grew to you.

"He insisted that he was ill, but I examined him without discovering a sign of anything. When it seemed to me that he was in deadly terror of some one, and that soon became evident, I realized that it was a case where he needed you more than he needed his family doctor—so I gave him your address and sent him to you."

"What did he say," Ruggles asked, "which made you think he stood in deadly terror of any one?"

"He kept telling me," Dr. Spaulding replied, "that some one, whose name he told

me he dared not give me, had poisoned him through the means of a letter and that, as a result, he was coming down with a fatal illness.

"I repeat: I examined him then, and found no trace of anything beyond an extreme excitation of the nervous system. I sent him to you, then, hoping that he would tell you more than he told me and that you could either laugh him out of a delusion, if you believed his case that, or be enabled, by what he confided to you, to get on the track of his enemy, in case you concluded that he actually had one.

"My plan was that, after he had seen you, he would return to me, I should examine him from time to time, and of course if any malady revealed itself, I would treat it instantly. That letter! Did he show it to you?"

"No," Ruggles replied, with as keen disappointment as I had ever seen him show. "When he spoke of it, I asked him, of course, to let me see it, but he refused point-blank. Then he lost consciousness and I got Dr. Whittimore, who immediately had him taken to the hospital in an ambulance. I did not know at that time of your position in the household, Dr. Spaulding."

"Perfectly all right," the family doctor said. "You did exactly the right thing! But about that letter: we've got to get hold of that."

"Yes," Ruggles said, "and we may be said to have a right to open it now." He rose to his feet, "Let me use your phone for a moment, will you?" In an instant, Ruggles had Whittimore at the hospital, and was saying, "Whittimore, this is Ruggles. Of course all Mr. Grew's personal effects have been saved? Yes, that's what I felt sure of.

"Say, Whittimore, I wish you'd seal up that letter in a big envelope and keep it for me. I'll be right down after it, Crane or I or perhaps Dr. Spaulding, Grew's family doctor. What? Not there?" There was a pause, then Ruggles said, "Whittimore, it's impossible that that could have got lost. Look again, like a good man."

There was another pause, this time long. Then Ruggles said over the telephone, "Well, there's no good in crying over spilt milk. Must have been lost—got out of his pocket, maybe, while your men were carrying him down the steps and into the ambulance; and the wind there was blowing then would have carried it anywhere—we'll never see it again. All right. Get along without it. Good night, Whittimore."

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST SIGN

RUGGLES hung up, then turned to Spaulding and me, saying:

"You heard what I said. Letter's gone. Got to do without it."

Spaulding said nothing, just stared at Ruggles, cupping his heavy chin with his muscular hand. Then he said shortly, "We've got to find that letter!"

"Of course, on the face of it. But, from a practical standpoint, how about it? The time lost in hunting for it, I mean! No, I prefer, all things considered, to get along without it. That's why I'm here, doctor: to see Miss Grew and find whether her father said anything to her—"

"She's too ill to be seen now," Dr. Spaulding said; "but, in a couple of hours, say at half past nine, that's about an hour and a half. Come back here then. Now wait: half past nine—she ought to be in bed and asleep then. Come at half past eight—that's about an hour from now; and, if her condition warrants it—"

The family doctor seemed to have fallen into the habit of not finishing his sentences. He looked off, straight ahead, in the distance and began again, "I'm sure she won't have heard anything about the letter: her father regards her as a child, though she's no longer one, and wouldn't have bothered her with—" Again his voice trailed off.

"Do *you* know anything about the letter?" Ruggles asked abruptly.

"Only what you have told me and what he told me—what I have said to you."

"All right," Ruggles said. "Now, look at this angle of it: it is a fact that Grew died of Amazon fever and it is equally true that Amazon fever could have been given him only through germs of the disease.

"He was sure he had been given the germs of a disease. The disease proved to

be Amazon fever. Who could have given him Amazon fever germs?"

"Who, indeed?" asked Dr. Spaulding.

"Do you know whether or not Grew had any active enemy?"

"As a detective, whom Grew consulted," Dr. Spaulding said thoughtfully, "you probably have the right—I might even say it was your duty to ask me that question. But, as his friend and his family doctor, I am not sure that I have a right to answer it."

"Very well," Ruggles said, "is that all you care to say?"

"No," Spaulding said, choosing his words very carefully, "if I were a detective, handling this case, I should take into consideration the ages of the respective members of the Grew family and their friends and acquaintances—I should go through that list with my imagination alive and my eyes open—"

"Look here," Ruggles broke in, "why don't you speak out?"

"Because," Spaulding said, looking Ruggles squarely in the eye, "what I would say would be only conjecture, and I don't want any man hanged through a chain of circumstantial evidence I might unconsciously have started.

"It's just that, if I were you, in addition to what I said a moment ago, I would find the man who recently brought Amazon fever germs into this country."

"Why did he go to South Africa?" Ruggles said.

"He didn't," said Dr. Spaulding.

"I mean Mr. Grew."

"Of course," said the family doctor. He lighted a cigarette and puffed out thick clouds of smoke without inhaling. "About Grew—" he said, behind the smoke cloud, "I don't know why he went to Africa, except that he was fond of traveling. Oh, pardon me!" He took out his cigarette case and held it out to Ruggles.

"Thanks," Ruggles said, taking the cigarette Spaulding handed him. "Oh, sorry! Thank you!" The cigarette had fallen from his fingers and Dr. Spaulding picked it up from the floor and gave it back to Ruggles.

My companion took out his holder, struck a match, and, after inserting the cigarette, puffed it gratefully, saying, after a moment: "These are extremely good. What make are they?"

"Some I have my tobacconist put up for me. I shall be glad to send you some. The blend was recommended to me, by the way, by a young man whom, for excellent reasons, Richard Grew forbade coming to his house.

"Grew had met him traveling somewhere. However unsavory his reputation was from a Puritan's standpoint, he smoked excellent cigarettes; and he was very clever, too—sent to almost every part of the world as a bacteriologist."

"An interesting experience, that must be," Ruggles said idly. "Does he live in New York?"

"Part of the time."

"I may have met him without knowing his history. What is his name?"

"If you are trying to save me the trouble of getting my tobacconist to put up some of these cigarettes for you," Dr. Spaulding said with perfect composure and a slight, shrewd smile, "you may save yourself your anxiety: I shall be only too happy to arrange your receipt of the cigarettes myself. As a matter of fact, you would find this young man not a desirable acquaintance—I might say even a dangerous one: he is a civilized savage who will stop at nothing to attain his ends."

"Stop at nothing," Ruggles said quietly. "Would not stop at deliberate murder, you think?"

"No," Spaulding said evenly, "not even at deliberate murder. I say this unwillingly, but I believe it is the truth. I think of him with anxiety, Mr. Ruggles, for the reason that only recently I have made a mortal enemy of him."

Spaulding slowly turned his wrist so that he could see the small, jewel-set watch on it. "You will return at half past eight?" he asked.

"Yes," Ruggles said. "And let me acknowledge your assistance in this case, Dr. Spaulding."

The family doctor bowed, but said nothing, and went down the front steps to the street in silence.

"What sort of a cigarette was that he gave you?" I asked, after a few moments, as we drove slowly uptown.

"I will tell you that," Ruggles said quietly, "after I have analyzed it in the laboratory."

"What?"

"I said," Ruggles repeated, "after I have analyzed it in our laboratory."

"But you smoked it. I saw you do it!"

"No, I didn't smoke it, Dan. I dropped it, and while Dr. Spaulding was picking it up I got out one of my own and palmed his when he gave it to me a second time: the cigarette which I put in my holder and lighted and smoked was my own.

"It fooled you, who were watching me, and it undoubtedly fooled Spaulding, who had turned his eyes away from me for the fraction of a second. By the way, did you notice his right hand, when he handed that cigarette to me?"

"I noticed a small, freshly-made cut on the top of his first finger, between the first and the second joint."

"It is that small cut that I mean," Ruggles said, "and it could have been made by a screw which had worked out of the metal frame about a keyhole—a screw whose head has been broken by a screwdriver leaving a tiny, jagged fragment of steel sharp as glass."

"What under the sun do you mean?"

"It could have been made," Ruggles went on, "if a man had thrust the small barrel of a gas pistol through that keyhole; his first finger, between the first joint and the second, would have come smartly against the sharp, jagged bit of screw head. You may understand now, Dan, why I did not care to smoke Dr. Spaulding's cigarette."

"But," I said, "couldn't a hundred other things have cut his finger that way?"

"A hundred or a thousand other things could have, but they didn't. Believe it or not, our torn screw head was what tore that finger of his; and I wouldn't smoke his cigarette for all the gold the Spaniards stole from the Aztecs.

"Wait until we've got home and I've analyzed this attractively put together combination of tissue paper, tobacco, and whatever deadly thing Dr. Spaulding has hidden in it. Then I think you'll believe me."

"I believe you now," I said.

"Wait," Ruggles said quietly. "I'd rather show you than hurry you."

CHAPTER V

WITH ALL HIS POWER

As soon as we got back to our apartment, Ruggles hurried into his laboratory, and before he closed the door I saw him put on the mask and the skin rubber gloves I had seen him don an hour earlier.

Then he closed the door and I went through our living room into our vestibule and from there to our front door, for I wanted to have a look at the screw which Ruggles said had worked loose in the metal under our keyhole.

And there it was—loose as he had said, its protruding head twisted nearly off at some time by a screwdriver, raising a tiny, upstanding sliver of metal, jagged and sharp as broken glass.

Carefully avoiding this knifelike sliver of metal, I worked the screw out with my fingers and, bringing it into the living room, held it to the light—and there, on the screw's head, was a freshly dried drop of blood.

I was as sure, then, as anything in the world could have made me, that that was Dr. Spaulding's blood, let out of his first finger when he had thrust the tiny barrel of his gas pistol through that keyhole, and had sent those deadly gas fumes into our living room.

It was all clear to me now. But how had Ruggles the power so surely and swiftly to identify the criminal and understand the workings of the criminal mind? That extraordinary power of his bewildered and amazed me more with every revelation he gave me of it.

Where had he learned all that he had of the Criminal and Crime? What hard school had he gone to, and when? More than once he had said to me:

"I'm a near-crook, Dan, but I wear better." What he meant by that, I was probably never to know. So far, he had

never explained, and I had never asked for an explanation. And yet there were times when I asked myself how any man could know the underworld as Ruggles knew it without having been, at some time in his life, a member of it.

Was there, in his life, a past which some detective, or some enemy, one day would drag forth? And how would Ruggles's resourcefulness and shrewdness serve him then? I couldn't banish this thought.

For he knew the underworld so intimately and well; its most subtle secrets; he could tread so unerringly the darkest jungles of the worst districts of the world's greatest cities! How had he been able to master so perfectly their crime-code? How had he learned to anticipate and checkmate, as he invariably did, organized crime's efforts at merciless discipline and quick revenge? Ruggles alone could answer this.

In age, he was still in his early thirties, and he was marvelously equipped to tread the dark and dubious ways along which his strange profession called him; he was well over six feet in height, weighing always between two hundred and two ten stripped, he had the tremendous hitting power of the best heavyweight, and he combined with that the speed and endurance and catlike activity of foot which one expects to find only among the lighter weights.

If he had the hatred and fear of the chiefs and lower officers of the best organized and most highly financed syndicates of crime in Manhattan, as well as those of London, Vienna, Paris, Petrograd, and Berlin, he had their grim respect, too—they knew that, in addition to being their most dreaded enemy, he had always fought them fair.

He knew them—all of them were on his list. With the precision and steadiness of a perfectly operating machine and the inevitableness of destiny, Ruggles was capturing and convicting one after another of Manhattan's most dangerous and clever criminals—he was working on down the list and now had got to where those, whom he had not yet come to, realized that their only means of escape from him lay in bringing about his death.

It was a little over four years since I had begun to work with him as his assistant, and in that time I had learned not to be surprised at anything which he, or our enemies, might do.

He had an extraordinary knowledge of biology, natural history, surgery, and medicine; and I believe that he had no equal when it came to a practical knowledge of poisons, ancient, medieval, and modern, and their antidotes—and this knowledge he had to have, to keep ahead of our sleepless antagonists.

He was an extremely clever mechanic, and this had saved our lives many times—infernal machines, for example, like the one Slade had put in our open fireplace, or the one Stanfield had placed behind the picture in Roger Sterling's bedroom in that strange case where we had our final reckoning with Quin Lash, the alligator hunter, all were familiar to Ruggles.

His restless and eager mind was a veritable storehouse of information on every subject under the sun, always ready at the call of his photographic memory; and his power of quick and accurate deduction baffled me more with every revelation he gave me of it.

He insisted to me that he was not a detective, and certainly he had no connection with any detective agency. He was the unfailing ally of the innocent who, without his help, could not prove their innocence. But the predatory animal, whether the head or the unsuspected protector of crime, or the savage executor of desperate violence, Ruggles handled without gloves, showing them no mercy, for well he knew that they would show him none when the final show-down came.

If he broke the law—and he frequently did—it was always to right a wrong and never for his own gain; his sins were always benevolent.

Our capture of Dr. Webster, murderer and master hypnotist, had brought us again a publicity we had not wanted; this had resulted in our receiving a flood of new clients. Most of these, Ruggles turned over, or rather directed, to the local authorities, keeping for us to handle only those cases which seemed to him to present

some special need or to offer points of unusual interest.

Our present case had come to us out of thin air. Providence might have been said to have sent Richard Grew to us, not soon enough to save his own life it was true, for the germs of the deadly Amazon fever had worked too long in his system for that; but there remained his daughter, Margaret.

Her father, with his last conscious words, had begged Ruggles and me to save her, and Ruggles, in the small laboratory behind that closed door at my back, now was working for Margaret Grew's safety with all his power.

CHAPTER VI

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE

THE laboratory door opened and he came in, saying: "More Amazon fever germs, Dan."

"Where?"

"In the cigarette."

"Dr. Spaulding's?"

"Of course."

"We'll arrest him to-night."

"No, we **won't.**"

"Why not? **We've** got evidence enough."

"Enough to convict the ordinary criminal, but not enough to convict Dr. Spaulding."

"What defense can he offer?"

"A hundred different ones."

"But if you testify to having found these deadly germs on the cigarette he gave you—"

"That wouldn't bother him a bit."

"Not when coming right after his patient, Richard Grew, died of Amazon fever? Wouldn't those two things, coming together, convict Spaulding?"

"Not necessarily. Dr. Spaulding would argue that some one had undoubtedly tried to kill him by means of germs—put them in his cigarettes, don't you see?—germs like those which had killed Richard Grew. You get it now, don't you? Abundant evidence to cause his arrest, but not enough to convict him."

"How about that little cut on the first finger of his right hand? There is a drop of dried blood on that screw-head. Here it is. I took the screw out of the metal around our front door keyhole."

"Even if we proved that was Spaulding's blood, he could probably convince a jury that he had come here to see us and, in jiggling the doorknob, had cut his finger on the loose screw; it would not prove that he had shot poisoned gas into our living room.

"I am sure he killed Grew and that he tried to kill us; but as yet I can't prove it. We've got to move very cautiously or he will see we suspect him, then he'll be more careful than ever."

"It strikes me he hasn't been very careful so far."

"He has, though. He didn't do a thing until he got perfectly well set—some one he could throw direct suspicion on, I mean this bacteriologist. We've got to locate this man; but first we've got to see Margaret Grew, the woman in the case, who is probably in love with the bacteriologist."

"What makes you think that?"

"If she hadn't been, why would Richard Grew have forbidden the young man to come to the house? Doesn't that show us not only one thing, but two: that he was in love with Miss Grew and that she was in love with him? Doesn't it, as a matter of fact, show us something else also: that Dr. Spaulding was in love with Miss Grew and that he found another man was her accepted suitor and so, to get this rival out of the field, trumped up a bad reputation for him?

"We'll see Margaret Grew and Dr. Spaulding together; the way he acts will show us whether or not this theory of mine is right. Come, Dan; it's a quarter after eight; we're due there at eight thirty; that means it's time we started."

"I don't like going there," I said; "it means getting into Dr. Spaulding's clutches again, and, this time, there's no telling what he'll do to us."

"What I'm thinking about," Ruggles said, "is how he's going to look when he sees I'm apparently healthy though he's sure he saw me smoke one of his cigarettes. On my soul, Dan, I don't know yet whether Spaulding is innocent and stupid or guilty and clever.

"One thing, we'll know in a few moments—whether or not he's in love with her. Come, let's get started! If this is the last time we ever see these rooms of ours, Dan, we've at least had interesting experiences in them."

The family doctor received us at the Grew home without any sign of surprise and, it must be admitted, without any particular show of interest.

I thought once that his keen eyes lingered on Ruggles's bronzed face and athletic carriage, but I knew I might be mistaken—that I was, in short, looking for it and so might imagine it. I remembered, too, that Spaulding might be innocent.

Spaulding offered Ruggles another cigarette and, this time as an hour and a half before, Ruggles palmed it, substituted one of his own for it, and smoked it pleasurably. I had, as it happened, sworn off smoking for a month, and had told Spaulding that at our first meeting, so now he did not offer me tobacco.

Looking at Ruggles, the family doctor said: "Now, if you would like to talk with Miss Grew for a few moments, I am sure I can arrange it."

"If you think it will be all right on her side," Ruggles said, "we should appreciate it."

Spaulding pressed a bell; a maid entered; he gave her his instructions, and she returned in a moment saying that Miss Grew would receive us in the upstairs living room, and we followed the maid up the stairs.

Miss Grew was perhaps twenty-three, tall, erect, and strikingly lovely. Her dark eyes were heavy from weeping, and her voice was not steady when she pronounced our names as Spaulding introduced us. After that, she sat silent and motionless, looking, I noticed, not at us but at the family doctor, as if waiting for him to speak.

He said: "Margaret, just before your father was taken ill, he went to Mr. Ruggles's rooms to consult him. Mr. Ruggles and Mr. Crane are detectives."

"Yes," the girl said, "he told me—" Then she stopped short, hesitated, putting her hands to her forehead, as if trying to recall what she had been about to say. "I cannot—remember," she faltered. "I am not—sure." She looked at Ruggles and me vaguely.

"That is natural, just now," Ruggles said. "Your father told me—"

"You can understand, Margaret," the family doctor broke in, "that your father spoke confidentially to Mr. Ruggles. That, under the circumstances, would be expected. He—"

The telephone rang then on the floor below and a maid answered it, appearing in the doorway a moment later and announcing that the call was for Mr. Ruggles.

A look of sharpest annoyance for a moment showed on my companion's face; then he excused himself and followed the maid down the stairs.

While he was out of the room none of us spoke, and the only one to move was Dr. Spaulding, when he lowered a window-shade to keep a faint ray of light from the street from entering the room. The man, for some reason, was suffering now from something more pronounced than nervousness. He could not take his eyes from the girl, who sat motionless, her head resting on her hand, opposite him.

As Ruggles entered the room he was scribbling a note, which he handed to me, saying: "Dan, I wish you'd take that to Captain Shannon at police headquarters. Read it and add anything you like to it, then give it to him."

"All right," I said, starting into the hall. I excused myself to Miss Grew, and in a moment was out on the sidewalk, reading the note in the light from the first store I came to.

The note read:

> I had told Mrs. Watts, our honest housekeeper, to telephone Dr. Spaulding at this time, but she got things mixed and called me up instead.
>
> Go out, now, will you, and call Spaulding up—this will give me a couple of minutes alone with the innocent cause of all this tragedy, all that has taken place and all that I can see coming if we act quickly enough to save M. G. and C. S.

I read the note again, and this time got the last paragraph: M. G., of course, was Margaret Grew; and C. S. meant Dr.

Spaulding It meant that Ruggles, in his uncanny way, had solved the puzzle already: instead of a murderer, Dr. Spaulding was innocent and so needed to be helped, in fact to be protected, rather than to be watched and dreaded.

I went into the first drug store I could find and called up the Grew home, asking, in a disguised voice, if Dr. Spaulding were there and being told by the maid, of course, that he was, I asked to speak to him.

The maid left the wire then came back saying that Dr. Spaulding was engaged and would call me later if I would leave my name and my telephone number.

There was no way, then, but to say that I was an old friend of the doctor and would keep him only a moment, but that I wanted to have him dine with me at my hotel tomorrow. I said that I wanted to surprise him, and for that reason would not give my name to him.

"What's this nonsense?" Dr. Spaulding's voice broke in so abruptly that it seemed to me he must have been listening on a branch telephone, and so harshly, too, that it almost surprised me into replying in my natural speaking voice. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

I wanted to get away from that voice, which snarled at me now most disagreeably.

"Who are you?" Spaulding demanded again. "I'm waiting."

I remembered then what Ruggles had said: I must keep Spaulding on the telephone so that Ruggles could have a word in private with Margaret Grew. So I said, in the disguised voice I had adopted:

"Don't you recognize my voice? I'm waiting!"

The hook came down with a crash.

"Did you get your party?" asked the operator.

"Yes," I said. Then I hung up and went out to the sidewalk. My brain was in a whirl. I had given Ruggles his chance with the girl. That was all right. But Spaulding's rasping, furious voice came back to me prophetic of ill, full of savage hate, and in every way menacing.

I wondered if, after all, he had recognized my voice; and again that uneasy, disquieting suspicion came over me: had he been listening on a branch instrument? I had not altered my voice so much when speaking to the maid.

All the world loves a lover; and I had felt, as I finished rereading Ruggles's note, that it meant that Spaulding and Margaret Grew were in love with each other—Ruggles had written as much when he said, in the note, that we must "act quickly enough to save M. G. and C. S."

To me that had meant that some unknown person, unknown as far as I was concerned, was threatening them. But, if Ruggles had meant that, why had he needed to have a word in private with Margaret Grew?

I walked a few blocks, turning this over in my mind and reaching no conclusion. Then, remembering that Ruggles, in the hearing of Spaulding, had told me to "take the note to Captain Shannon at police headquarters," I went into the next shop that had a public telephone booth and got Shannon on the wire, saying:

"Shannon, this is Crane, Ruggles's assistant. Remember, old man, if any one telephones you and asks if I called you up, just say I have!"

"Sure," Shannon replied. "An' say, Crane, I got that straight the first time."

"What?"

"Sure. You give me the same message five minutes ago."

"No, I didn't," I said, "but it's all right."

"Well, it was your voice, all right," Shannon said. "I'll be—"

"I feel the same way," I interrupted him, then I hung up. Spaulding had done that, I knew—Spaulding or some person who, secreted in the next room, had overheard what Ruggles had said to me.

CHAPTER VII

INSIDE AN HOUR

WHEN I got to our apartment I found Ruggles there.

"Of course," he said, when I had told him, "it doesn't prove anything, as you say; but it is something to keep in mind. One thing is sure, though: Spaulding has completely given himself away—he

is wildly, insanely in love with Margaret Grew. The Malays, you remember, call love 'the madness,' and I am inclined to agree with them."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, while many men will do many things for money, many men will do anything for love, and Spaulding evidently is one of them. He is infatuated with her, perfectly desperate."

"Why desperate?"

"Because she hates the sight of him."

"Then why does she take orders from him? You saw how she waited for him to give her the cue for what he wanted her to say."

"That was because she is deathly afraid of him."

"For herself?"

"No, for the man she loves."

"How do you know that?"

"She told me so, while Spaulding was talking with you on the phone. He is Cyril Stanhope, the bacteriologist. You see how the thing is rounding out—how the net about Spaulding is closing in?"

"No, I don't see that yet."

"You will see it inside of an hour. She is afraid of two things: that Spaulding, who she is sure killed her father, will kill young Stanhope, her lover; or, if not that, that Spaulding will be able to bring about the conviction of Stanhope for the murder of her father."

"Say, Ruggles," I broke out, "you go too fast for me. What, if any reason, had Spaulding for killing Richard Grew?"

"Reason enough," Ruggles replied. "Grew had told Spaulding that he could never marry Margaret; to protect Stanhope, whom he really liked, Grew pretended to believe the evil repute Spaulding had fastened on Stanhope, and thus Grew forbade Stanhope to come to the house or have any communication with Margaret.

"But, the girl says, Spaulding surprised her and Stanhope and Mr. Grew together, and, though Spaulding showed no sign of ill feeling at the time, Margaret is sure that he killed her father and now will kill Stanhope—that or have him convicted of the murder of her father."

"But that is impossible," I cried.

"It may prove less impossible than you think," Ruggles said. "I have warned her to be most careful of what she says, but she has admitted to me that, for some strange reason, young Stanhope was wildly jealous of Dr. Spaulding and had quarreled with her father because the latter had permitted Spaulding to come to the house."

"That's not so good," I said.

"And, what is a great deal worse," Ruggles said, "is the fact that Stanhope, as a bacteriologist, recently has brought Amazon fever germs back from South America and now has them in his laboratory at his rooms. However, she is sure that Stanhope is innocent."

"Where are you going?" I asked, as Ruggles put on his hat.

"I'm going out and shan't be back before half an hour or more. Stay here, will you, so I can get you on the phone if I want to."

"One thing," I said; "why did you tell Spaulding that the letter Grew received, with the germs on it, was missing?"

"I wanted to see if he wouldn't show some signs of relief, Dan; but he didn't show any. Just the same, I believe he's guilty of Grew's murder and tried to murder you and me. And I'm pretty sure that, inside an hour or more, we'll have seen him prove the truth of this. I'll give you a ring in a little while."

Ruggles went out, putting his automatic in his right hand coat pocket.

It was nine fifteen in the evening then. At ten he called me up on the telephone and said that he had arrested Cyril Stanhope, the bacteriologist, for the murder of Richard Grew.

Ruggles said that he had been trying to get Dr. Spaulding on the wire, but had not succeeded and now wanted me to go at once to Spaulding's office, the address of which he gave me, and tell Spaulding that Stanhope was under arrest. To this, Ruggles added:

"Stanhope is ill. Tell Spaulding that and say I want him to prescribe for Stanhope; I'll have Stanhope at our apartment by a quarter of eleven. I want Spaulding to see him before I surrender Stanhope to the police—tell Spaulding that, too.

"Now jump into a taxi and beat it down to Spaulding's apartment, tell him, then beat it out to the taxi and have him rush you to 61 West Seventy-Sixth Street—61 West Seventy-Sixth Street. Write down the number. Now step on it!"

Sure that I had received Ruggles's extraordinary statement correctly, and yet scarcely able to believe it, I took a taxi at once to Dr. Spaulding's apartment, the address of which Ruggles had given me.

The family doctor heard me through without a word. Then he said, looking at me with that concentrated intentness which had impressed me so disagreeably at our first meeting:

"I have nothing to say, Mr. Crane. I have no reason to attempt to pass judgment on the wisdom or the unwisdom of what Mr. Ruggles and you have done. Do not call me to the witness stand, when Mr. Stanhope is tried for this terrible crime.

"Do not call me, that is, if you can in any way avoid it. My position is delicate. And, for Mr. Stanhope's sake, though I owe him nothing in this world, do not manufacture evidence to support a conclusion you have jumped at!"

"You do not know Ruggles," I said a little impatiently.

"That is true," Dr. Spaulding said with what seemed to me to be just a trace of mockery. "He is said to be the cleverest detective in New York City, but he is a detective for all that, and they're much alike. Tell Mr. Ruggles, when you report to him, that I shall visit Mr. Stanhope, this evening, at your rooms, in my professional capacity."

The family doctor walked with me through the doorway, and as I went down the steps thanked me for coming.

I could not make him out, and I knew it. Great capacity, there was in him, for both good and ill—it was just a question which would be uppermost. I had believed him guilty of the murder of Richard Grew. I now believed him capable of anything.

I walked along until I could stop a taxi, then told the driver to make his best speed to 61 West Seventy-Sixth Street, arriving in a few moments.

Ruggles had told me he would be waiting for me, and he was, dragging me through the open front door of the house, closing and locking it after him, then saying guardedly:

"Now up those stairs quickly. He'll be here any moment! We've no time to lose!" Ruggles turned on his flash light and bounded up the stairs past me.

I followed him, finding myself soon in what seemed to be a small storeroom at the back of the house. Then I knew where we were: in the laboratory of Cyril Stanhope, the bacteriologist, who had used his scientific knowledge to such desperate ends.

For, all about, neatly arranged and carefully labeled were glass jars of bacteria and cultures—enough, it seemed, to sweep the great city about us with a thousand different devastating plagues.

"See this one?" Ruggles asked, pointing to the label. "Amazon fever germs." Tapping it, Ruggles said evenly: "Probably a thousand of them, Dan, kept in the best health and ready to be started on their errand of death at any time."

I stepped back from that terrible jar, saying huskily: "Whose private inferno is this? Stanhope's?"

"Of course. But don't look at that door; we're not going away yet. Get behind those portières over there!" He thrust me swiftly behind them, saying: "I've cut holes for us to look through." Then, as he followed me behind them: "Now don't move or make a sound!" He turned off his flash light.

In that jetty darkness we waited—waited—waited, scarcely breathing. The atmosphere had the moist, disagreeable warmth of a greenhouse, and I shuddered at the thought of the innumerable deadly agents with which that silent room was tenanted.

Then, when it seemed to me that my nerves must snap under the ever-increasing tension, I heard the sound of swift feet on the stairs up which Ruggles and I had come, the door was thrown open, there was the hard, dazzling glare of a flash light which slit the inky blackness, and some one came swiftly in.

It was a man, from the weight of his step, and the sound was that of a man's

hard breathing. Through the holes Ruggles had cut in the portières which now hid us, I saw the flash light sweep the row of jars nearest us, then come to a stop on the one labeled "Amazon fever germs."

The man laid the flash light on the table at such an angle that its light played full on that jar; next he took off the cover of the jar, and poured some of its contents into a bottle. Then he replaced the cover of the jar, put it back in its place and snatched up the flash light.

As he did so, there was a crisp click, and the electric glare from a single, high-powered bulb near the door showed clear as day every detail of the room and Dr. Spaulding standing there motionless, in one hand his flash light and in the other the small bottle which he had just filled from the jar.

For one instant he stood there like a man turned to stone, then, so swiftly that my eyes could hardly follow it, he shattered the electric bulb with the first jar he could reach. Darkness fell like a pall, and we heard his desperate rush down the stairs toward the street.

"Out of this room on the double-quick," Ruggles whispered, "for there's no knowing what was in that jar. All of them are open, as a matter of fact, for they are alive and must have air to live; but the germs are kept in by the thinnest of gauze; this jar he has broken is all over the place now, though. Here's the window!"

In a moment, Ruggles had it up and we were drawing in deep breaths of the sweet night air.

"No fire escape," Ruggles said; "but we're only on the second floor. Catch my feet." We were sitting on the window sill. "And I'll lower myself until I'm hanging by my hands, then you can drop, and here's hoping you find something soft to land on!"

I did—soft turf, for a wonder; the house was one of the very old ones with a fringe of grass still there along the side—turf softer than ever for the recent rain. I called guardedly up to Ruggles, and in a moment he was standing by my side.

"Now to our rooms," he said. "Spaulding will go there at once, and we must beat him to it lest he be suspicious of us."

CHAPTER VIII

GRIM MOMENTS

RUGGLES led the way swiftly to where he had parked our car, round the next corner. "He has only a moment's start of us and hasn't had time yet to catch a taxicab; I'll bet he's hurrying along the sidewalk cursing like a wild man, under that cold, collected exterior of his.

"I phoned Mrs. Watts not to let any one in, even the President of the United States, until you and I had got in through the back of the house, so we're O. K."

As he drove swiftly along, Ruggles went on with the exclamation I had hoped was coming: "Spaulding is wild with anxiety now and will suspect any one of turning on that electric bulb, there by the door—may even suspect you or me of doing it."

"As a matter of fact, you did do it, didn't you?" I asked.

"Yes," Ruggles said. "That was one of the things I had to do, when I went out, this evening: connect up, with Stanhope's help, that electric light bulb with a wire and a switch I could turn on from behind the portières.

"Here's our street. We'll run the car round to the tradesmen's entrance at the back, and in that way."

"Has any one telephoned?" Ruggles asked, when we were standing in our living room.

"No," a man's voice called quickly.

"That's good," Ruggles said. "Come, Dan, it's time you met Mr. Cyril Stanhope."

Ruggles led me into our extra bedroom and up to the bed on which lay a man in his late twenties, a man light-haired, blue-eyed, and handsome, ordinarily of fine strength, but now wan-looking, weak, and haggard.

"This is Mr. Crane," Ruggles said, "who assists me in all my cases. I've told you about him." Ruggles turned the light full on Stanhope's face, then nodded, saying: "You'll do very well, Mr. Stanhope; but if you're really to look ill enough to

fool Dr. Spaulding, you'll have to have a little more—"

Ruggles broke off abruptly, left the room, and in a moment was back with his make-up box open.

"I ought to make you look another ten pounds under weight," he said critically, "and I'm going to do it."

He did, with that extraordinary skill of his—grease paint, powder, and the shadows deepened under the eyes and cheek bones.

Then Ruggles suddenly closed his make-up box, and looked earnestly down at Stanhope, saying:

"I must warn you again that what is coming will put you in the most serious danger. Spaulding is desperate now. I have told you that I am sure he killed Richard Grew, and I am certain that he is about to try to kill you.

"From the moment he enters this room, Crane and I will have him covered; but, in order to carry out the plan I outlined to you—to perfect our evidence against him, we must let him go to your side and examine you, and he may have a knife ready."

"I know that," Stanhope said steadily, "but I am going through with it."

"Prepare yourself, then," Ruggles said in a tense whisper, as our front doorbell rang. "The time for the final show-down has come. Have your gun ready, Dan! Do not shoot except as a last resort; but then shoot to kill!"

Stanhope extended both his hands. Ruggles snapped a pair of handcuffs on Stanhope's wrists. Then Ruggles, his face more grave and anxious than I had ever seen it, went to our front door, opened it, and admitted Dr. Spaulding.

In he came, bowing to us with that cold, collected, impassive manner of which Ruggles had spoken; and it struck me then that a great actor had been lost to the world of drama when Dr. Spaulding adopted the profession of medicine.

Or his may have been the medical man's professional calm.

He laid his hat on a chair, took off his gloves, then the light overcoat he wore, and lifted his doctor's bag from where he had first put it, on the floor, to our center table.

"You have called me in to prescribe for your patient," he said in a colorless voice. "Is he—"

"I will show you," Ruggles said. Then, diffidently and in a whisper, "You said that you knew Mr. Stanhope?"

"Yes," Dr. Spaulding replied.

Ruggles came a step nearer and said in a still lower whisper:

"Perhaps I might better have called in another doctor—under the circumstances, you may not find attendance on Mr. Stanhope—agreeable?"

"It will not be agreeable to either him or me," Spaulding said. "On the other hand, please remember, both of us are men of the world; furthermore, I am attending him only in my professional capacity. He knew you were calling me in, did he not? And did he oppose it?"

"A prisoner," Ruggles said, "is not in a position to oppose much of anything. But he did not express himself against your coming."

"Then," Spaulding replied, "I see no objection." He took up his medical case, and Ruggles led the way into the bedroom.

They were both men of the world, as Spaulding had said, but their self-control was not the same; or it may have been their difference in temperament. Young Stanhope's face went a fiery red as their eyes met, but no color showed in the face of the family doctor—only his eyes changed: a glaze seemed to have come over them, and behind that strange glaze they glowed cold and cruel as a snake's eyes.

Spaulding went to Stanhope's side and said: "What seems to be wrong with you, Stanhope?"

"I do—not—know," the younger man said, clearing his throat and speaking huskily. "I have no strength, for some—reason, and something seems to be pressing on me—here." He lifted both hands from under the bedclothes, and his handcuffed hands went to his forehead.

"Any fever, do you think?" Spaulding asked. "Let me—"

Spaulding took no notice of the handcuffs on the man he hated so. The family doctor said nothing.

But another did: the front door, which

Ruggles had not closed, was thrown open, and Margaret Grew cried:

"Cyril? Cyril?"

"Here," young Stanhope cried hoarsely. "Here, Margaret."

Ruggles signaled to me to bar the door of the bedroom, but she passed me in a flash and in an instant was kneeling beside the bed.

She must have seen Dr. Spaulding, but she did not speak to him; she had no thought or consciousness of any one but the man she loved.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST ACT

"CYRIL," she cried brokenly, holding him with her arms, "why are you here? You look so ill. It frightens me! Are you—" Her voice broke, then, into a gasping cry of horror, as, for the first time, she became aware of the handcuffs on her lover's wrists.

She sprang up then and faced us like a tigress. "Take them off! Take them off!" she cried over and over. "Take them off!"

"That cannot be done," Ruggles said evenly. "I am sorry to have to tell you that he is under—arrest."

"I do not care," she shrieked. She tore at them with her soft hands.

"Margaret," young Stanhope said weakly, "you cannot—"

A look of ghastly realization came over her face; she swayed, caught at the air for support, then, before any of us could catch her, fell fainting across the foot of the bed.

"It is nervous exhaustion only," Dr. Spaulding said after a swift examination. His set face now was white as chalk. "Like you, Stanhope, she needs only something to make her sleep. I'll leave you something."

Spaulding was making every effort to steady himself back into the professional calm. He looked fixedly at his successful rival. "May I ask how long it is since you have eaten anything?"

"Nothing to-day or yesterday," Stanhope said. "I have been too desperate."

"You must eat, for all that," Spaulding said. "I am going to give you both something now. Mr. Ruggles, may I have two cups and some milk, and some hot water?"

"The kitchenette," Ruggles said, "is right in through that door. You will find milk in the ice box; there is a saucepan on the gas stove—I will show you—and cups on the shelf in the pantry."

"Thanks, I can find them," Spaulding said. "I shall be only a moment." He left us, the pantry door swinging to behind him.

After a few moments he returned, bringing two cups of milky substance, handed one to Margaret and the other he held to Stanhope's lips.

"Drink it," he said quietly. "It will—"

But Ruggles snatched the two cups, handed them to me, and then turned like a flash on Spaulding, saying:

"Up with your hands! Those are the last doses of poison you will ever try to give!" He sprang at Spaulding.

But the family doctor darted aside and drew an automatic with which he instantly covered Ruggles.

"You trapped me," Spaulding said hoarsely, "and you are right about the stuff in that milk: there are germs there like those I gave to Richard Grew. But you have caught me too late!"

Still covering Ruggles and me with his automatic, Spaulding swiftly took from an inner pocket a small glass phial, with his teeth tore off the gauze which had covered the phial's top, then scattered the dustlike contents in the air.

"For God's sake," Stanhope cried, "open a window, Mr. Ruggles."

"Quite correct," Spaulding said with grisly composure, "as Mr. Ruggles is about to see demonstrated—for no one is going to open a window. You did that with the gas I shot in through your keyhole, Mr. Detective, but you will not have a chance to in this case. I will shoot to death any one who makes such a move."

Ruggles dove at Spaulding's feet. The family doctor's bullet went high. Before he could fire again, Ruggles jerked from under Spaulding's feet the small rug he stood on, throwing Spaulding off his balance and making him drop his gun.

Before Spaulding could recover it, Ruggles had snatched it up and tossed it to me, crying: "Open every window and the front door!" Then he sprang in again at Spaulding.

I let in the fresh air, then turned just in time to see Spaulding meet Ruggles's rush with a crashing blow from a blackjack. As Ruggles reeled back, I brought my gun up, but Ruggles cried:

"Don't, Dan; I'm going to take this fiend alive!" Then Ruggles was in again; this time he evaded the swing of the blackjack and with a left hook knocked Spaulding unconscious.

"And that's the end of the family doctor," Ruggles said when, ten minutes later, Ruggles had turned Spaulding, now conscious, over to the police, and Stanhope, his handcuffs off and his face clean of the paint and powder, had left to take Margaret Grew to her home. "Stanhope did admirably—a fine, brave chap; and Miss Grew did precisely what I had told her to."

"Why did you bring her in that way?" I asked. "She certainly made it realistic, but—"

"That was what I was after," Ruggles said. "Spaulding had to be made desperate, by seeing Margaret's love for Stanhope—then Spaulding revealed himself in his true colors. He would have done it anyway, I guess; but having her there made it sure."

"But why did you tell me that you had arrested Stanhope for the murder of Richard Grew, ask me to tell that to Spaulding, and tell Spaulding to come here to prescribe for Stanhope's illness?"

"It was all a plant," Ruggles said. "It was this way: As soon as you told Spaulding that Stanhope was under arrest in my custody, Spaulding knew that the coast was clear—being under arrest and with me, Stanhope could not be at his rooms; that meant that Spaulding could go to Stanhope's rooms and get more of the germs.

"My adding that I wanted Spaulding to prescribe, as a doctor, for Stanhope made Spaulding see a chance to administer the germs to Stanhope immediately, and this double-headed chance was more than Spaulding could resist."

"But why did he try to kill Margaret Grew, when he loved her?"

"He knew he could not have her himself and he meant that no other man should have her. He walked into the trap the whole way."

"One more question," I said. "When did you first suspect Spaulding? Was it when we first saw his adoration of Margaret Grew?"

"No, before that," Ruggles said. "It was in our talk with Richard Grew—he said, you remember, that he believed he was stricken with a fatal illness. I asked him if I should not call in his family doctor, and he replied in the most emphatic negative.

"That set me thinking that he believed the worst of his family doctor, whoever that man was. He said, then, that, though we could do nothing for him, we must save his daughter. There is one thing, Dan, which we never shall know all about, but my guess is this: Richard Grew had found, in Spaulding's past life, some reason to believe that Spaulding was capable of using his medical knowledge to poison one who became his enemy.

"It may have been some slip Spaulding had made in his talk at some time or other; be that as it may. Grew, though, had never forgotten it, and it came up in his mind when, after receiving that threatening, indeed hideous letter, he soon began to feel ill. The letter said, you remember:

> "This paper has transmitted to you a deadly disease: you are doomed.

"That meant, to Grew, that Spaulding had sent fatal germs to him, and Grew was absolutely right."

The telephone rang. I started to answer it, but Ruggles took the call. It was from the police, stating that Dr. Spaulding had just died in his cell!

"I expected that," Ruggles said quietly. "Whatever was in that phial, it was strong enough to kill him, even the little of it he got into his mouth when he tore off the gauze on its top with his teeth."

THE END

Suddenly the singing stopped and he sprawled forward on his face

THE ELUSIVE GIANT

By Henry Gollomb

THE WHOLE WORLD WAS HIS COURT, AND FOR HIS CRUEL GRACE FAIR LADIES AND BRAVE MEN BARTERED THEIR LIVES

A Story of Fact

SIX foot three, massively built, strikingly featured, he was the focus of all eyes. When he was present all things centered about him. The crimes he enacted filled the mouths of men and the pages of the newspapers. Governments knew him well, millionaires were his companions, many women loved him, but withal he was the most invisible of men.

He appeared out of the mist of the unknown and loomed like a mountain. He vanished like a mirage. The police of many nations sought him, but when he was caught he squirmed and was gone. He was Franz von Veltheim, master rogue, king of blackmailers and despoiler of women.

All of the foregoing may sound bombastic, but he carried with him an atmosphere of the dramatic, the theatrical, and minor adjectives are insufficient to describe him.

He was murderer, blackmailer, polygamist, thief; but he had a charm and a magnetism that inspired faith, that made his victims believe, his judges to doubt their judgment.

Germany bore him. Karl Kurt was born in Brunswick in 1857, and with him came into being a truly criminal soul. His family was of the lower classes, but somewhere in its earlier generations there must have been a left-handed infusion of nobler blood; for here was Karl, in appearance an aristocrat, in manners, when he so willed, a gentleman, but in nature a blackguard.

The strict discipline of German family

life left him untouched. Just as soon as the years developed his physique, and experiences his wit, he became the leader of the younger thieves of the city.

The prisons were his schools, jailbirds his teachers. From them he learned the tricks of evasion, the fine points of crime, the need of a cold heart in his profession. All these came to him with ease, they were the gifts of his birthright.

Until 1880 he was Karl Kurt. But the name did not fit. His appearance spelled romance, his carriage aristocracy. So he changed his name. And he stole even that. The German navy called him to service.

He came, with a mental reservation that his stay would be short. He climbed ropes, he manned guns, he saluted his captain—and stole his watch. The captain raged, questioned, threatened, but Karl Kurt had faded away; how, no one could reveal.

A London pawnbroker saw him next. A magnificent-looking stranger, his English barely tinged by a German accent, wished to pawn a beautiful gold watch, an heirloom. Name? Franz von Veltheim. See, there it was, cleverly engraved under a coat of arms which had been his family's insignia for centuries.

And the pawnbroker, gazing at the name and the man could not doubt they belonged to each other. With fifteen pounds in his pockets the newly baptized adventurer vanished from Europe, where as Karl Kurt he had interested the police too deeply for his comfort.

As Baron Franz von Veltheim he made an undeniable impression upon the best people of Melbourne, Australia. His manners were perfect and he was modest in his references to the vast estates of which he was the heir. But he did mention them occasionally in the presence of one of the financial leaders of the city.

The latter was somewhat hard-headed and dubious, but his daughter had no such questionings. She fell thoroughly in love with the handsome adventurer. But the father remained hesitant and von Veltheim swept the girl into a hasty marriage. This was the first wedding ceremony in which he participated, and it was the only legal one.

Love for another had no part in his make-up, and when his wife's father failed to provide in the manner fitting a baronial son-in-law, the latter found himself handicapped by a poor investment, a wife who could not support him.

Never again did he make that mistake. Every woman he married thereafter, and there were many, came to him with a carefully investigated financial statement. But how well he convinced them that it was love only that drew him, that money meant nothing to him!

With the utmost nonchalance he told his wife that she was to sail for London and wait there for him while he went to South Africa to settle one of his "estates."

In response to her natural curiosity as to the reason why she could not accompany him, he pleaded diplomatic intrigues, political dangers in which he did not wish to involve her. And she believed him.

South Africa was later the scene of von Veltheim's most notorious exploits, but on this occasion he found Capetown an unfruitful field. His criminal efforts for the moment were confined to the types of thieving with which he was familiar, and though his harvest was poor, his elusive skill kept him from trouble with the police.

He left behind him an impression of his personality which was to return both to plague and to help him in the future.

Back in London again he found his wife living on an allowance from her father. That was sufficient to insure his companionship for a time, a doubtful blessing which brought the poor disillusioned woman little besides sorrow. She referred casually to the kindness offered her by an elderly English general who had taken pity on her loneliness during the long trip from Australia.

Immediately the spark of an idea flashed illumination into the man's fertile mind. It awakened a sympathetic reflex in his character. Blackmail! Here was the keynote of a profitable future. Conscience, decency, scruples, these were but empty words to him.

The well-meaning general received the impressive-looking visitor with cordiality.

"Baron von Veltheim? Happy to know

you, sir. I met your charming wife en route to England."

"Indeed you have!" thundered the apparently furious baron. "And I have come, sir, to demand satisfaction!"

"But—but—but—" stuttered the bewildered officer.

"Your actions in respect to my wife made her the gossip of the ship. I repeat, sir, I demand satisfaction—either on the field or in court."

But the poor officer could not afford to meet the baron either in field or court. He had entered politics and though he was perfectly innocent in mind and deed, the resultant publicity would have been fatal to him.

He soon perceived the nature of this man's indignation, and the upshot was that for the consideration of the sum of five hundred pounds the baron declared that the afront to his honor was satisfied.

Delighted with the success of his first effort in a new criminal field von Veltheim discarded all pretense with his wife and proposed to her a career of blackmail with herself as decoy.

But he encountered an absolute negation. She loved her husband and her love survived disillusionment and mistreatment, but it was not proof against her conscience. The result was that he deserted her shortly after.

Von Veltheim was a nomad, a true internationalist. Europe, Asia, Africa, America, all were one to him. He was at home in the mines of the Transvaal and the boudoirs of Austria. For several years he flashed through the continents, leaving everywhere a trail of broken-hearted, impoverished women. He was not a Don Juan.

It was not for love or passion that he sought and drew this feminine army to him. It was purely a business proposition. They had money; he wanted it. But he did this sordid phase behind such a romantic, dashing personality, such a verisimilitude of ardor, an enchantment of tongue, a fascination of physique, that most of his victims loved and remembered him long after he had forgotten their existence.

He was no philanderer; he married with bell, book and candle every one of these women whose money and jewels he coveted. If the lady already possessed a husband his *liaison* with her ended as soon she ceased to be a source of financial profit to him. He was never prosecuted, because he always chose his prey from among the families that he knew would shun a scandal.

His aliases were many, but he always returning to the one he had come to believe his real name. And it was as Franz von Veltheim that the police systems of various countries knew him.

For it was not only women whom he victimized. His talents were varied. Hard-headed business men succumbed to the spell of his fluent tongue and convincing manner. The truth of the matter was that he possessed a great deal of practical ability and more than one of them sought to employ him.

As a matter of novelty he worked hard and honestly for a time. Advancement was rapid and the prospects before him were excellent. But the incubus of his criminal nature bore down upon him and he disappeared, taking with him his prospects and his employers' money.

Warrants had been issued for him in many cities for crimes of larceny, blackmail, bigamy and Heaven knows what else; but to serve them was a task almost beyond police powers. He appeared here, there, as himself, under an alias or disguise, chose a victim, struck, vanished.

He was as evanescent as a shadow, as intangible as a breeze. Scotland Yard would hear of him in London. A heart-broken wife would sob out the tragedy of her honeymoon. "My husband—newly married—is missing—find him." A few questions. Her money? Gone. "No, no, don't accuse him. He was too wonderful. He couldn't do such a thing to me."

Hot on a new trail the man-hunters would strain to the utmost. Another day, another hour and he would be in their hands. Then would come a report from Vienna. Von Veltheim has just paid his respects to this city. He has appropriated a noble lady's jewels. But he cannot be found. Will Scotland Yard be so kind as to watch out for him?

The vigor of the chase is redoubled. The jumpy nerves of the police causes the arrest of many innocents.

It was a foggy morning in January, 1896. A London Bobby was patrolling his beat, which included the shorefront of the Thames below London Bridge. He was vigorously swinging his arms against the raw chill of the day and humming "God Save the Queen" to warm his loyal soul.

Suddenly both the swinging and the humming stopped short, and he sprawled forward on his face. He had stumbled over a large object which the fog had kept from his view. He righted himself with an exclamation, which turned to a whistle of surprise when he saw what had tripped him. It was the body of an enormous, powerfully built man tightly bound up with a length of heavy rope.

The forehead and part of the face had been shattered by a terrible blow, but the policeman was able to distinguish that he had been a German.

He blew his whistle until some longshoremen ran up; whereupon he dispatched one of them to fetch the police sergeant and a wagon. Meanwhile he searched the man's clothes, but found absolutely nothing in them to indicate who he was or to furnish a clew.

When the sergeant arrived with the wagon the corpse was conveyed to a mortuary where an inquest was held. No one appeared to identify or claim the body, and after a short stir in the papers it was buried.

About three weeks later the editor of a London newspaper which possessed a great deal of influence with the government, was informed that a Mme. Franz von Veltheim wished an interview with him.

"What, another?" he exclaimed. "Show her in at once."

Von Veltheim was always news, and the paper had been gently prodding Scotland Yard for its inability to locate the notorious blackmailer.

An unusually handsome woman entered. She was wearing black and showed signs of deep grief. The editor greeted her, asked her to be seated and then remarked: "You say that you are Mme. von Veltheim. May I inquire which one of them?"

"The only one," she replied. "I am the lady he originally married, and though he has deserted me many times, I have always loved him."

"When did you last see him?"

"About two months ago."

"Have you heard from him since?"

"That is what I have come to see you about. I have received a marked copy of the *Times* describing the finding of a body near the Thames a few weeks ago. I feel sure that it was my husband. I beg of you to use your influence with the home secretary to have the body disinterred and settle my doubts."

The editor was delighted. Here was the makings of a big story, and after he had satisfied himself of the truth of the woman's claim, he started a campaign of publicity to accomplish his object. Scotland Yard supported him, and after some delay the secretary issued a permit to exhume the body.

This was done. It was laid out on a slab in the mortuary and Mme. von Veltheim was brought in. She approached it shudderingly and forced herself to gaze at the face. Then she shrieked, "It is my husband!" and fainted.

When she revived, a police official urged her to look again and make sure. Again she cried, "Yes, it is he," and burst into violent tears.

When the Yard was informed, there was much jubilation and relief. The man who had set them by the ears so easily and for such a long time was gone. Word was immediately flashed to police centers all over the world; and everywhere the same feeling of release from strain was experienced. But in Capetown the chief of police frowned deeply when he read the cablegram.

"Too bad," he murmured. "Life is full of disappointments." Then he sent a return message to London: "Identification of von Veltheim a mistake. Known to be in Cape Colony." And he was.

The body was later identified as that of a German spy who was known to von Veltheim. Whether he had any connection with the murder has never been discovered. One theory was that he had a hand in it and sent the marked copy to his wife in

order to allay the pursuit, which had become uncomfortable. If that were so, he almost succeeded.

Meanwhile, under an alias, he had insinuated himself into South African affairs, which at that time were in a chaotic state. The friction, which a couple of years later resulted in the Boer War, was becoming acute. South Africa was in a turmoil of conflicting interests. The diamond and gold discoveries in the Rand and the Transvaal had greatly enhanced its value in the eyes of the world.

England, with its large number of colonists, was anxious to establish it as a colonial dependency of the type of Canada and Australia. The Boer settlers, in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, were divided. Most of them desired a free Boer Republic, as did their president, Paul Kruger, but others, chiefly of the wealthier classes, felt that their financial condition would be better under a British protectorate. This bit of history is necessary for the better understanding of the following occurrences.

Von Veltheim never showed more remarkable cleverness, more amazing ability to make people believe in him, than he did in "running with the hares and hunting with the hounds" in this South African involvement.

He was openly and loudly a friend of the Boers, a "defender of the downtrodden," a "savior of the oppressed." The Boer farmers, cattle raisers and miners swore by him, refused to believe the rumors that were rife in connection with him.

And at the same time he was working and plotting against them in the pay of one of the enemies of Kruger's policies, the diamond millionaire Woolf Joel. The latter was one of a group of wealthy Boers who favored consolidation with England, and his political activities included much that could not bear daylight.

Von Veltheim was a wonderful tool, but he was a tool with two edges directed by a brain and nerve quite capable of turning sharply and cutting the hand that was wielding it. In Johannesburg, capital of the Transvaal, Joel and the adventurer met and worked secretly together for awhile. But the millionaire was deceived.

He thought he had purchased a faithful hireling, one to be manipulated while useful and discarded when no longer needed. But he soon realized that this man was learning too much about his affairs; worse than that, was attempting to use that knowledge for his own enrichment.

They met on the street one day, and Joel spoke briefly and decisively. "We are through," he said. "I will have nothing more to do with you." Then he walked on.

Von Veltheim looked after him with a sardonic grin on his face, and a bystander heard him murmur: "You will not? How wrong you are."

The next day Joel was alone in his private office when von Veltheim entered and carefully closed the door behind him. The clerks in the outer room heard the mutter of the conversation change rapidly to exclamations of anger. Then—a shot!

When they burst into the room they saw Woolf Joel's body lying slumped back in his chair, his right hand clasping a pistol. Von Veltheim was standing on the other side of the desk, also holding a pistol from which smoke was rising. He made no attempt to resist arrest, and, in response to questions, said only, "I did it in self-defense."

Feelings ran very high in Johannesburg while preparations for the trial were going on. The prevalent idea among those who knew of the relationship between Joel and his slayer was that von Veltheim had attempted to blackmail the millionaire and had reënforced his threats with a revolver. The foolhardy Boer had clutched his own weapon, but not quickly enough.

This version had strong evidence in its favor, and it seemed as if the adventurer's career had come to its conclusion.

The trial lasted for several days, and from the beginning von Veltheim dominated the atmosphere of the court. The prosecution had built up a strong case, aided by evidence as to his character supplied by police headquarters from all parts of Europe.

But there were two powerful elements working in his favor. One of these was the influence of his individuality; the other was the faith and favor with which rank and

file of the Boers regarded him as a defender of their cause. The jury was composed of these, and he made the most of it.

He was his own lawyer and could not have possessed a better one. He met attack after attack with a ready wit, a plausible lie, and, above all, an effective *sincerity* of manner which rapidly overcame the handicap of his weak legal position.

His version of the shooting was as follows:

Moved solely by his sympathy with the cause, he had come to persuade Joel to cease his opposition to the aims of the Boer Republic. He acknowledged that he possessed information concerning the millionaire which the latter was anxious to keep secret.

When persuasion failed, von Veltheim threatened to use this knowledge to ruin his plans. In a rush of anger the Boer reached for his revolver, whereupon von Veltheim, fearing for his life, drew his own and fired first.

In cold type the story sounds rather incredible, but related in his vivid language and convincing manner to a well disposed jury the effect was undeniable. And the verdict was justifiable homicide. The spectators cheered the prisoner and the jury. Von Veltheim was a hero.

But the same night he received a visit. A delegation of strongly built, grimly silent men invaded his room. Very little was said, but there followed an uninterrupted night journey. By daybreak von Veltheim was well on his way to British territory, with instructions to remain away from the Transvaal.

For a time his luck seems to have left him. In Cape Colony he was among enemies, and was forced to make shift as a manual laborer for several months. He worked his way eastward, avoiding capture with difficulty, but at Delagoa Bay the police picked him up as a vagrant without recognizing him.

With a number of other vagrants he was placed on a ship for deportation to England, which was the last place he cared to visit. The ship's officers were not aware of the identity of their passenger, and taking advantage of their laxity, he disappeared from the ship at Capetown. Then, like a bad penny, he turned up again at the Transvaal.

Two things could be said for him. He possessed plenty of courage, and he had the utmost confidence in his own ability to extricate himself from any difficulty. So again he boldly walked the streets of Johannesburg. Too boldly.

Solly Joel, brother of the late Woolf Joel, passed by and glanced casually at him. A few minutes later a gentle tap on the shoulder conveyed a familiar message to him. A Transvaal policeman, gun in hand, quietly requested his company to the station.

With an equal lack of fuss he was conducted to jail. Charge? Oh, anything. British spy, for example. And it was as a spy that he was imprisoned for the period of the Boer War.

The British captured Johannesburg. The prison records revealed the existence of an English spy in its cells. Whereupon von Veltheim was given his freedom with honors, and began to blaze a new trail of misadventure throughout Europe.

Once more he was the elusive giant, badly wanted in many countries; almost caught time without number; always vanishing with one name, reappearing with another; living riotously, squandering a fortune during one month, haunting the docks the next.

In 1901 Trieste, the seaport town on the Mediterranean, was garrisoned by the pomp and glittering uniforms of Austrian military aristocracy. The general in command was fond of display, an adorer of rank, and—short of money.

One day there appeared in his quarters a man after his own heart. He was tall, finely built, displayed a uniform more gorgeous than his own, claimed high rank in the German army, and—promised the general the opportunity to make much money.

How? That would come later. Would the general introduce him to his officers and later to the best society of the town? The general would.

He gave a resplendent dinner for which von Veltheim supplied the funds. Colors

flashed, white shoulders gleamed, military music resounded. At the commanding officer's right hand sat a figure which held the eyes of all the women present.

Warmed with noise, laugher and wine, the general spoke with fervor. He wished to introduce to the favor of the distinguished company the son of one of the highest officers of the German army, who would relate to them the narrative of his marvelous adventures in South Africa.

The stranger rose to a clatter of applause. His language was simple, straightforward. He attempted no forensic effects. But the dignity of his bearing, his air of natural power gave his words the significance of truth.

He briefly sketched the preliminaries of his career in the Transvaal. As a personal friend of Paul Kruger's he acted as his right hand man during the war—a war fought for the holy cause of liberty. He had suffered in that war, prison, torture, malignment. But it had not been without reward. First, the reward was a happy conscience; second, the strong possibility of a material payment.

"I possess a secret, my friends," he said, "a secret of a buried treasure. Paul Kruger, my poor, persecuted comrade of the dead republic, shared this great secret with me before the end; before the final victory of that tyrant, England.

"An immense store of gold from the heart of the Transvaal, a vast wealth of diamonds from the mines of Kimberley lie buried far out on a lonely veldt. And I, dear friends, helped to bury it. This is the secret which has been locked in my bosom, and, sooner than to permit it to pass into the hands of the ravisher of Africa, I shall die with the knowledge hidden in my breast.

"There are millions and tens of millions, and none but black savages and the animals of the wilds tread the soil that covers them. What happiness it would bring to me, what joy, to share them with you, my newly-found comrades. The dangers I must pass through to reach that Golconda, to bring it back, they are nothing.

"But my sorrow is this: I have lost my all in the war of oppression. I am a poor man. And so to you, companions in arms of my beloved Vaterland, I offer this wealth. For myself I ask but a part. To you, if you will, shall go the bulk. All that I ask is that you make this recovery possible. I ask you to form an expedition, to pay the costs.

"I shall give my knowledge, my experience, if need be—my life. But this, too, I ask, nay demand, that one-third of this treasure hoard shall be sent to my poor friend, the heart-broken idealist, Paul Kruger. Else there shall be no search." He folded his arms nobly over his breast.

Buried treasure! The glamour of the phrase! The romance of it! How it dazzles the eyes of the most worldly, the most skeptical. The company broke into a furor of exclamations, questions, offers. Von Veltheim was surrounded by a clamor which he had difficulty in stilling.

Gradually out of the confusion came the coherence of a plan, the formation of a stock company and the selling of shares. It is a commentary on the man's hypnotic powers that there was not a single unbeliever in the gathering.

The reader will smile at their credulity, but perhaps the smile will acquire a somewhat bitter flavor when memory brings back the promises of some oil stock or mining shares which proved to have no greater existing value than von Veltheim's buried treasure.

Twenty thousand pounds! That was the sum placed into his hands by those of simple faith and simpler heads. Then—pouf—the man was gone. And with him went the wife of one of the officers—and her jewels.

America came next. A favorite with society, silencing rumors with a glance, an accusation with a brilliant lie; an outwitter of business men, who admired him the more for fooling them. Wealth poured in and flooded out. Several years of crest and trough.

Naples and a duel; Switzerland and a marriage to eight thousand pounds; Paris and a girl who killed herself for him. Fifty years of age, still a freeman, still a wanderer—but a tired one. What would be the end? He wanted peace and rest, but the

devil of his nature drove him. One last coup for millions and he would stop—if he could.

His memory traveled back. What did he know that could give him this? The secrets of Woolf Joel. The scandals that would tarnish a great name. Solomon Barnato Joel, multi-millionaire race horse owner, living in England, would pay well to keep these skeletons in their graves.

In 1908, ten years after the death of Woolf, von Veltheim and "Solly" Joel met again. The blackmailer wasted no words.

"These are the things I know," he said. And he recited them. The other man eyed him coolly and speculatively.

"How much?"

"Fifteen thousand pounds."

The calm brain of the Boer was at work. "It would be only the beginning," he thought silently. Aloud he said: "That is too much."

"Nothing less."

"Ten thousand?"

"No."

"Give me time to think it over."

"Three days." He left, exulting.

Joel made his decision. Better an immediate operation than a corroding cancer. He visited Scotland Yard and told his tale. There was joy in the Yard.

Three days later the two men faced each other again.

"Well?" asked von Veltheim.

"I agree," replied the other. The money passed hands. Then Joel tapped his fingers on the desk. "Now we've got you," he said quietly. The blackmailer looked up. Several Yard men had quietly surrounded him, guns in hand. He shrugged his shoulders and rose.

"When I get out of this I will pay you," he said venomously to his Nemesis. And, in spite of his success, the millionaire looked grave.

While he lay in prison awaiting trial, von Veltheim spent his time inventing a complete history of his life to present before the court. He never doubted his ability to put it over.

London was thrilled. Old Bailey, the famous criminal court, was the Mecca for society, magnates, novelists, playwrights, princes. The fame of his career, the promise of piquant revelations, brought them crowding into its gloomy precincts.

As a king into his throne room von Veltheim strode to the bar. Stern, erect, splendid, his firm mouth, cold gray eyes and calm bearing spoke for him strongly. People began to doubt their knowledge. That man could not be a criminal, a blackmailer. It was impossible that such a noble appearance could comport with the tale of his indictment.

The record of his life was read. Crime after crime, against men, against women, against government, stripped in their telling the nature of this man. And still they could not believe.

He made his defense. He parried, evaded, denied. But ruthlessly the past marched against him. His own words, uttered a decade before at the Johannesburg trial, testified by their contradictions.

Sir Charles Gill, the prosecutor, was a man of ice and facts. The figure of romance, the effective pose of the man in the dock touched him not at all. Like a surgeon with his scalpel he cut with his questions, he stabbed with his facts. The other felt the wounds, but he smiled at them. Once he was pierced to wincing.

"A cruel and purposeless crime," Sir Gill called the killing of Joel.

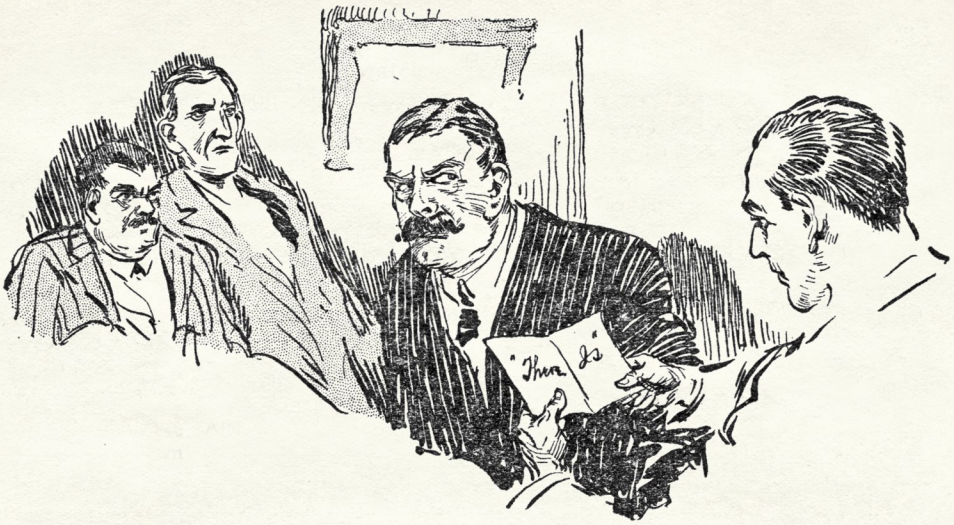
"It is a lie!" shouted the prisoner. "It was my life or his. He was a fool!"

A stern word from the judge silenced him. Then he became a statue and said no more. The verdict of guilty came as expected, but still some shook their heads.

The solemn voice of Justice Phillimore intoned the words: "Twenty years at penal servitude."

A moment of impassivity and then the man finally broke. "That means life," he gasped. And with four warders supporting his bulk he staggered away.

But it was not life. Six years later came the Great War, and an internment camp. Four years later the armistice, and the parole of all the German prisoners in England. And von Veltheim—Germany felt him, South Africa saw him again, and then—he disappeared, still free, still the elusive giant.



The Citadel man studied the paper carefully

NOT

By Frank Price

"NOT A WORD," WARNED THE MASKED INTRUDER TO THE TWO SERVANTS, "OR I'LL BLOW YOU TO HELL AND BACK. I'VE NOTHING TO LIVE FOR, ANYWAY"

CHAPTER I

BENEATH A CITY

BARROW shifted uneasily in the chair he had occupied since early afternoon and watched with misgiving the dignified approach of the Mother Superior of St. Vincent's Hospital, who was walking down the corridor toward him.

He was in the reception room on the main floor and for hours had been awaiting, hoping against hope, for an opportunity to question one of the patients.

The star investigator of the Citadel Life Insurance Company sensed impending disappointment in the slow and deliberate pace of the nun and she immediately verified his fear.

He arose as she entered the room.

"I am sorry, Mr. Barrow," she whispered, "but Mr. Gulliver passed away without a word."

Plainly Barrow's face reflected the discouragement he felt at this intelligence.

"Thank you for your trouble, mother," he acknowledged with a bow. And as he noted her sympathetic gesture he added:

"I am not one of Mr. Gulliver's family, but I did know him quite well."

A quiet word of consolation from the nun and he left the hospital for the Citadel's Home Office.

"This," he thought as he started for the subway station, "is the toughest kind of break. Wonder what Gresham will do about this?"

There was ample cause for the concern Barrow felt over the death of Dave Gulliver, leading fiction writer of his time and, more significant to the Citadel, one of that company's most heavily covered policyholders.

There had been no hesitancy in issuing whatever insurance Gulliver had asked.

He was in his early thirties, vigorous and a man of temperate habits. All this the company's investigators had learned during the check-up of his application for insurance protection of one hundred thousand dollars.

What was of almost as equal importance, his income justified such coverage. He had plenty of money to carry the load.

The disturbing angle of this tragic end of the young writer from the viewpoint of Barrow's chief, Andrew Gresham, was that Gresham himself had taken Gulliver's application and had seen it through until the protection was in force.

That was a little less than a year ago, and the effort Gresham was now making to solve the mysterious death was motivated not so much by a desire to save the Citadel money as it was by a wish to vindicate his own judgment in putting the policy through.

It had all happened that morning in the subway crush at the Fourteenth Street station of the Seventh Avenue subway. Gulliver, in the midst of the surging crowd that milled about on the narrow platform, had, without warning, thrown up his hands and screamed.

Volunteers had carried him across the street to St. Vincent's and within five minutes of his attack he was on the operating table.

Gulliver was the victim of an attempt at assassination. That was certain. Under his left shoulder blade the surgeons found a tiny wound, apparently made by an unusually slender stiletto, and it had been necessary to perform the most delicate of operations—to stitch the heart.

"Will he live?" Barrow had asked the surgeon who operated.

"Men have been known to," the specialist had replied, "but it isn't common. Frankly, I don't think he will."

But Barrow, who had hastened to the hospital when news of the attack on Gulliver reached the Citadel offices, waited around for hours in the hope that he could get a word with the wounded man. And he was not alone, for police headquarters had assigned two detectives to the same task.

The writer, however, had died without a word that could give the authorities even a slight clew to his assailant or the motive for the murder.

It was an agitated Gresham that greeted Barrow when the investigator returned to the Citadel from the hospital. He knew before his visitor spoke that there had been nothing learned.

"You heard nothing, of course?" The old chief eyed Barrow closely.

Barrow was sorry for Gresham. He knew the rugged honesty of the man and what this meant to him.

"No." He slowly shook his head. "I'm mighty sorry about this, chief."

"Well," Gresham was resigned to the inevitable, "there's nothing we can do about it, of course. There is no question, is there, about it being a clear cut case of murder?"

The investigator agreed.

"As far as we've gone," he observed, "we have found nothing in the way of a clew. But it seems to me that when a man is struck down in a crowded subway station—stabbed in the back—it can be nothing else."

Gresham pointed to the reports that had been forwarded to him from the claim department's files and now lay on his desk.

"That means," he said quietly, "that the Citadel pays two hundred thousand dollars to Gulliver's beneficiary, his wife."

Barrow whistled softly.

"Whew!" he said. "The coverage was double indemnity?"

Gresham nodded grimly.

"It was," he said, "and in this case it will have to be paid. You know the courts have made the ruling so often it does no good to contest it."

Barrow sought enlightenment.

"What ruling?" he asked.

"Why, that when a man meets death 'without expectation' it is accidental and must be so construed. Certainly no man expects to be murdered. Does he now?"

Thus the Citadel, unless proof of some collusion could be adduced, was to be a heavy loser.

"There's just one possibility of repudiating such a claim," Gresham reminded his

investigator, "and I don't think there's a chance in this case. If it can be shown that the beneficiary of a policyholder was in any way connected with the conspiracy to murder, then the claim is nullified."

"Why do you say it is not possible in this case?" Barrow demanded. "Do you know Mrs. Gulliver?"

"Well— And it will be some time before she returns home. I saw her off on the Mediterranean cruise—went down to the pier with Gulliver himself. That angle is absolutely hopeless."

"Have you notified her?"

"Yes. The Albermarle is due at Marseilles to-day. She probably will hurry home. Be at least ten days before we see her, even if she makes decent connections."

Barrow had definitely determined upon his course of investigation from this point and now he proposed it to his chief.

"With your consent," he said, "I'd like to stay on this thing. Perhaps there is something about it that will let us out."

Gresham smiled at the resolute young man before him.

"This is one time, Charley my boy," he said, "that I have no idea—however remote—that we can do anything. To me it is as obvious as anything could be. Some person who harbored a grudge against Gulliver made a daring attack on him and got away with it. Either that or—"

"Mistaken identity," Barrow interrupted eagerly. He had thought of that.

"Exactly," Gresham agreed. "It could logically happen that Gulliver was pointed out in a crowd to a killer who had never seen him before. That has occurred."

A nod from Barrow.

"What I can't understand, though," he spoke now as though to himself, "is how the guilty man got away with the thing in such a crowd."

Gresham chided him.

"Why," he said, "sometimes you are almost childlike in your faith in human nature. To begin with, what assurance have you that a man did the killing?"

Barrow gasped.

"Why, you don't mean that you think a woman—"

"I'm not saying who did it. But we don't know that a man did. Then another thing. If you were in a milling crowd on the Fourteenth Street subway platform and a man suddenly cried out and fell, what would you think?"

Barrow saw what the chief was driving at. And Gresham was right. When Gulliver had fallen everybody near him believed he had fainted and rushed to his side. It was easy for the killer to lose himself in the confusion.

"Well," Barrow commented, "it all at least gives us something to think about, and I believe I'll start in the logical way—on the supposition that Gulliver did have enemies who'd like to do away with him. I have an opinion myself, but I'll forget it for the time being, at least."

"What's that?" Gresham asked.

"That Gulliver has had an affair with some woman and his death may be traced directly to that," Barrow said with finality.

"You'll find that is decidedly incorrect," said Gresham. "Gulliver was not of that type. But go to it, my lad. Do it your own way."

A further exchange of theories and Barrow set forth on his search for a key to the Gulliver mystery.

CHAPTER II

AFTER THE CONFERENCE

IT was an interesting conference that Barrow interrupted at Police Headquarters a few minutes later, when he presented himself at the offices of Bill Druggan, captain of detectives. He was ushered in forthwith and there found the captain in earnest conversation with Inspector Conalan, and O'Connor, Fay and Thomas, headquarters detectives.

"We've been expecting you, Barrow," Druggan greeted him. "You had Gulliver, didn't you?"

"We did," he offered, "for a hundred thousand, with double indemnity."

Druggan's eyes widened.

"Wow!" he exclaimed. "What a shove that is! Two hundred thou. Gonna pay it?"

"That," Barrow smiled, "seems to be entirely up to you."

And he explained his own failure to find anything tangible enough even to begin a search on.

"Have you anything?" he queried.

The inspector here broke in.

"We don't know," he frankly acknowledged, "whether we have or not. Gulliver was identified through papers we found in his pocket. He had lost nothing, so far as we can determine. There is just one discovery that has us a little bewildered. Perhaps you can help us. Show him, Bill."

Barrow should have been flattered by this compliment to his powers of deduction. He knew, however, that Conalan, however friendly, meant no such thing. He was a policeman and was merely covering all possible angles.

Druggan produced a sheet of white paper about six inches long and four wide.

Excepting for two words written directly in its center there was no other mark. These read:

THERE IS

The Citadel man studied the paper carefully. It had been folded once. Finally he glanced up.

"Cryptic, to say the least, isn't it?" he observed. "What does it mean and where did you find it?"

The police inspector looked at his headquarters associates, smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"We don't know and wish we did," he replied to Barrow's first question, and to the second he offered:

"It was found in the left hand pocket of Gulliver's coat."

What importance could be placed upon this scrap of paper, Barrow wondered.

"It must have been a note he had hastily made about something he intended to handle in one of his stories," he offered. "He was a writer, you know, and I understand that they often do that."

Druggan grinned triumphantly.

"Dead wrong, old man," he explained. "This paper was placed in Gulliver's pocket by the bird who stabbed him."

"How do you know?"

"Well, there are no finger-prints on it—that is there were none."

"But what can it mean?"

Conalan again interrupted:

"Why," he said, "it might mean almost anything. The killer undoubtedly meant to convey the idea that—" He hesitated.

"That what?" Barrow urged.

"That—oh, how in the hell do I know?"

And there the matter rested, at least for the time.

The paper, frankly, was a complete mystery to the police. The person who had written the meaningless words had been meticulously careful to avoid leaving tell-tale finger-prints and, since the paper itself was the sort that can be purchased at any stationery store in small tablets, there was little upon which to proceed.

Despite this handicap, however, Captain Druggan and the inspector made every effort to check up on the source of the paper. And when Barrow returned to headquarters the following morning, Druggan was disgusted.

"I have been up against some tough ones in my time, Barrow," he told the Citadel man, "but this has them all lashed to the mast. We haven't learned a thing of any importance."

Barrow noted the peculiar emphasis Druggan had placed on the three words "of any importance."

"Have you learned anything?" he asked.

"Only this. The hall boy in the studio building were Gulliver lived says that Gulliver had a package under his arm when he left home yesterday morning. He couldn't describe it, but we went to his laundry and found that he had left a bundle there. So that's disposed of."

Barrow wondered.

"That means, I suppose," he asked his friend, "that you've about decided that it would be useless to proceed any further?"

"I never look at things that way, Barrow," Druggan replied, and not without indignation. "I never give up when there's the slightest hope. But I will say this: If I've ever known of a murder that offers as little in the way of clews as this one does, I can't recall it. We have absolutely nothing to go by."

The detective captain strummed his desk angrily.

"What gets my goat," he said savagely, "is that it was done in the midst of a crowd, and we have to admit our helplessness. All the yellow rags in this town will be taking a shot at us now. I feel sorry for the commissioner."

Druggan's experience had taught him something. Even that very day newspapers were demanding, editorially, that the slayer of David Gulliver be apprehended.

"It is inconceivable," one editorial writer put it, "that the police force would acknowledge such a crime possible. Where are the Petrosinis and Crays of yesterday, the real detectives who held their jobs because of ability and not through an alliance with politicians? Give us back our police efficiency."

Barrow sympathized. He knew that a clever criminal had perpetrated this killing after exhaustive planning, perhaps, and that he had covered his tracks so well, apprehension would be exceedingly difficult if ever accomplished.

The Citadel man further realized that it would be impossible to muzzle the opposition press. The less Druggan said in justification of the failure of his men to bring in Gulliver's assassin the better off he would be, so far as undesirable publicity was concerned.

"I'd let it go at that," he advised the captain. "Any man with half a grain of sense knows you are doing your best. Why worry about the others?"

Druggan seemed pleased at this confidence.

"What does this mean to your company?" he asked the investigator.

"Nothing much," was Barrow's frank acknowledgement. "I'm satisfied that Gulliver was murdered and that this is strictly a police affair. When his wife returns we shall pay her the two hundred thousand dollars rightfully coming to her and write the policy off the books as just another unanticipated death. We have them right along, you know."

Druggan nodded.

"Of course," he said absently. He leaned forward toward Barrow.

"You don't suspect that Mrs. Gulliver had anything to do with it?" he asked.

Barrow explained Gresham's acquaintance with the Gullivers and how the Citadel claims chief had seen the writer's wife off as she started on her Mediterranean trip.

Slowly Druggan nodded his head.

"That," he observed quietly, "seems to settle any such idea. Well, if anything turns up, I'll let you know."

Barrow arose and started for the door.

"Of course," Druggan said, "you won't concern yourself with this case again, will you?"

The investigator shook his head.

"No," he replied. "Not unless you find the guilty man. Then I may want to talk with him a bit."

He smiled. "Good luck," he waved, and was gone.

CHAPTER III

NUMBER TWO

THE days passed without a let-up in the caustic newspaper attacks. Gulliver's aged mother and father had arrived in New York from their Vermont home, and much was made of their grief over the untimely end of a devoted son.

The commissioner, Inspector Conalan and Captain Druggan were excoriated for what was termed their "indifference." The papers gave little consideration to the earnest desire of these men to avenge the writer's death and their long hours of personal investigation. They were not satisfied. Such is the other side of justice.

The flood gates of pathos were opened when the handsome young widow arrived from Europe. Interviewers besieged her aboard ship and columns were written of the pathetic picture she made as she greeted her parents-in-law.

Druggan sat in his office awaiting the arrival of Mrs. Gulliver, whom he had asked to visit headquarters. He was reading the accounts of her arrival and winced at the attacks on the police that held a prominent place in all the stories.

In the midst of these disturbing thoughts the widow was announced and he arose from his chair to greet her. She was bitterly resentful of his failure to snare the culprit.

"Would there be objection," she demanded after they had exchanged greetings, "to my employing some real detectives on this case?"

Druggan was courteous.

"None whatever," he assured her, "but I wish you would believe that we have done everything in our power to see that justice is done."

Her reply hurt him.

"I'm convinced of that," she said, "and that is why I wish to try it myself."

Briefly he told her of the sparse clews upon which his men had been working, and cleverly he strove to learn something from her which would give him something more definite upon which to proceed. She could tell him nothing helpful.

Gulliver, she told him in verification of what his men had already learned, was a man of better than average habits. He spent most of his time with her, when she was at home, and so far as she knew he had never made an enemy.

"Of course," she said, "I can't answer for his conduct while I was away. You should know something of that."

The detective captain nodded.

"I do," he agreed. "We have, of course, inquired very thoroughly about his habits and while our findings should be gratifying to you they are not in the least helpful in solving this mystery. His conduct has been exemplary since you left America."

This appeared to please Mrs. Gulliver and she was just about to speak when the door of Druggan's office opened. A uniformed attendant entered quietly and spoke softly to the captain.

"What!" Druggan leaped to his feet. "Send him in here."

When the attendant withdrew, Druggan turned to his visitor and said quickly.

"This will interest you, Mrs. Gulliver."

Again the door opened and a huge man stepped through it. Druggan greeted him tersely and presented him to Mrs. Gulliver.

"May I present Detective Thomas?" he introduced. "One of my staff and one of the men who has been working on the death of Mr. Gulliver."

Thomas bowed.

"This has nothing to do with Gulliver," he said as he turned to Druggan, "although in one way it has."

"Go ahead," Druggan replied. "Mrs. Gulliver may hear it."

Thomas proceeded:

"It's just this, chief," he said. "Fred Tasney, editorial writer of the *Morning Sphere,* was found dead in his office this morning, when the cleaners went in to straighten up."

Druggan knew what was coming.

"He had been stabbed to death," Thomas resumed, "with a long, slender stiletto."

"In the heart?" the captain prompted.

"In the heart," Thomas nodded, "from behind. The knife was stuck in under his left shoulder blade."

"Any clews?"

The big detective wiped a perspiring forehead.

"Only one," he returned. "They found a piece of paper on the editor's desk. It was the same kind of paper we found on Gulliver, and had the same thing written on it."

Mrs. Gulliver gasped. Druggan was impressed.

"What did it say?" he whispered, as he raised his face to his man.

"Two words, that's all," Thomas repeated in that aimless way characteristic of one whose mind is fixed on something else. "All it said was 'There is.'"

The speaker shifted on his feet.

"Hell, chief," he blurted, "I can't make it out."

Druggan shook his head dolefully.

"Neither can I," he conceded, "but I do know that one thing's certain. Either we're dealing with the cleverest criminal we've had to handle in my experience or with a raving maniac. Which is it?"

Thomas shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, either," he said, and he turned to Mrs. Gulliver.

"You see, madam," he observed, "the police business is not all brass buttons and blue coats. I hope you are convinced that we are trying to do our best."

Druggan dismissed Thomas, and after a short talk with the widow was convinced that she could do little to enlighten him.

"I wonder," he mused as he sat at his desk considering this new offense by the "There is" murderer, "whether Barrow's company had Tasney as a risk."

Barrow himself answered this question within the quarter hour when he again walked in on Druggan and Conalan.

"Hell," was the inspector's greeting, "did you have Tasney, too?"

Barrow nodded.

"We certainly did," he affirmed, "but it's not such a blow this time. Twenty-five thousand."

Druggan smiled, in spite of the disturbed state of his mind.

"This thing has to be stopped," he observed dryly, "if for no reason other than to keep the Citadel in business."

Once again Conalan wondered why Barrow should be so interested in a murder.

"You pay claims to the beneficiaries of murdered people, don't you?" he asked.

"We always do," Barrow agreed, "when there is no collusion on the part of the beneficiary."

"Do you think there has been in these two cases?"

"I certainly do not think so," was the reply, "but I'm in the same boat you are in. I don't know. I'm looking for information."

Conalan was a trifle pettish.

"Maybe you can give us some," he sneered.

"Perhaps," Barrow assented. "I've never heard that inspectors of police are infallible. Are they?"

The Citadel's investigator smiled as he sent this thrust home, and Conalan thawed in spite of himself.

"Don't mind me, Barrow," he returned. "I've got a lot on my mind."

Earnestly the three discussed the Tasney slaying. The editor had been one of the most active in the denunciation of the police for failing to find the Gulliver murderer.

He had discussed possible clews, all of them manufactured and having no basis in fact, and had insisted from the beginning that competent investigation would bring the offender to justice.

"There is no such thing as a perfect crime," he had written. "Detectives who know their business will tell you that no major criminal ever planned one whose commission was faultless."

Police knew better, of course. How else could the long list of unsolved mysteries be explained? But Tasney, goaded possibly by a fraternal attitude toward a fellow writer, had made his demands. Now he lay lifeless, victim himself of an attack similar to that of which he was so bitterly critical.

"What I can't understand," Barrow observed, "is how the killer got Tasney alone in his office. He must have been seen going in."

Druggan knew the facts. In the interval following Mrs. Gulliver's visit and Barrow's appearance he had received them from his men. Briefly they were the following:

It was a habit with Tasney to remain in his office after the others on the staff of the *Morning Sphere* had left for the night. He had been at work on a book—a political history of the city—and found the quiet of the early morning hours ideal for writing this.

When last seen by Perry Daniels, a reporter who had been on late duty the preceding night, he was busily engaged at his typewriter—so busy that he failed to respond to Daniels's "Good night."

The reporter had switched off all the lights in the city room, so that Tasney's alone remained lighted on that floor.

Two hours later the cleaners reported for duty and found all the lights out. Tasney's body was discovered by a charwoman who had entered to straighten up his office. A careful search by detectives had failed to reveal a single clew, and, as with the paper found in Gulliver's pocket, there was not a finger-print in evidence.

It was maddening to Conalan and Druggan.

"What," Barrow asked them, "do you make of it, if anything?"

Conalan looked carefully at his questioner.

"Just this," he said with an emphatic shake of a finger. "This has ceased being a case of an ordinary killer. This one is a bird with a homicidal mania, and unless he

is caught, and caught quick, there's no telling what he'll do next."

CHAPTER IV

"THERE IS"

WHEN Barrow returned to the Citadel office he found Gresham eagerly awaiting news of this killing. The old chief of claims listened carefully to Barrow's recital.

"It looks as though we had better pay the Tasney claim without delay, doesn't it?" he asked when Barrow had finished.

"Of course," was the investigator's ready response. "It seems a tough break that we had to be on both these risks, but it just happened that way. I certainly hope this 'There Is' fellow experiences a change of heart."

Gresham rose from his chair and walked around the desk to Barrow.

"Charley," he observed, "there is just one way a mind of that type can be suppressed. That's to corner it and put it where it belongs. Unless they do, you'll find that we haven't heard the last from this fellow yet."

As usual, in matters of this kind, Gresham's judgment was vindicated. It was exactly ten days later that Barrow was summoned to the office of the chief of claims.

"Seen the afternoon paper yet?" the chief asked.

Barrow had not. Gresham handed it to him, pointing to the glaring headline that ran across the top of the entire first page:

"THERE IS" GETS $100,000 PARBERRY GEMS

"No killing?" Barrow asked, frankly surprised.

"No," Gresham answered, "not this time."

Barrow read the story with interest.

The Parberrys, wealthy New Yorkers, had returned from dinner to their suite in the Bensonia, exclusive Fifth Avenue hotel, to find their butler and maid securely trussed up and gagged. The suite had been ransacked, but nothing but jewels had been taken.

The story told by the two servants was related by each alone and found to check up perfectly. They had been seated in the butler's pantry talking when the door leading into the servants' hall opened without warning and both found themselves looking into the muzzle of an automatic. The man who held the pistol was completely masked.

"Not a word," he had warned them, "or I'll blow you to hell and back. I've nothing to live for anyway."

Then he compelled the butler to bind and gag the maid, following which he similarly rendered the man helpless.

Then, at leisure, he looted the suite of all its gems. He had departed the same way he came in. An unoccupied building adjoining offered an ideal place for climbing to one of the Bensonia's windows. The rest had been easy.

But there were no finger-prints, nor anything to identify the marauder save a sheet of paper placed carefully under a silver salver on one of the sitting room tables. It bore the two fateful words:

THERE IS

Barrow looked at Gresham.

"When and where will it all end?"

"No one knows where," said Gresham, "but as for when, it will be when they get him."

And he added with a wry smile:

"It looks as though that moment were far, far away."

Druggan and his associates in the detective bureau found some consolation in the apparent reformation of the phantom outlaw. At least he had not killed the butler and maid when he well might have.

However, this abandonment of the murder urge was not without its complications.

"It's this way," Druggan explained to Barrow when the Citadel man visited the bureau a couple of days following the Parberry robbery. "We were convinced that we had a homicidal maniac with whom to deal. Now we discover that killing is not his only line—that he is a thief as well. In other words, he is not a nut, but a plain bad man."

"And," Barrow interjected, "clever with it all."

Druggan readily assented.

"Is there any doubt of it?" he asked.

"We went over the Parberry's suite at the Bensonia with a fine toothed comb and found nothing. We know that he entered through a forced window looking out over the roof of a building next door, but no one saw him jimmy it, and no one saw him on the roof. He got away the same way.

"Everything he handled or could have handled has been put under the glass with the same result, only a smudge."

"Rubber gloves?" Barrow asked.

Druggan nodded.

"I think so," he said. "We can't tell, of course, but it looked that way."

They sat in silence for a moment. Druggan was the first to break it as he rose to his feet and thumped his desk heavily with a clenched hand.

"It's getting on my nerves, I tell you, Barrow," he cried, and his large frame shook as he spoke. "It's the first time a thing like this has happened to me, and I can't dope it out. What am I going to do about it?"

"I wish I knew," the Citadel man replied sympathetically. "All I can suggest is that at some time or other he'll tip his mitt and the best we can do is wait for him to do it."

He remembered Gresham's comment.

"I am inclined," he said, "to string along with poor Tasney. He said there was no such thing as a perfect crime, you know. Eventually they all get caught, and so will this fellow."

Druggan snorted.

"Yeh, sure," he fumed, "and in the meantime the most perfect detective force in the world is supposed to sit and twiddle its thumbs waiting for the break. Is that it?"

Barrow smiled.

"Not at all," he offered. "I can't visualize you sitting and twiddling your thumbs, Bill."

He felt sorry for the captain.

"Let's be sensible," he urged. "We know that a vicious character is at large in the largest city in the world, a stamping ground that offers him limitless opportunity to carry on his activity.

"Every effort must, of course, be made to trap him, but the fact that he has been so damned clever should not convince any one that he can't make a mistake. It will happen to him."

"Perhaps," Druggan scowled, "but I'll be damned if we're going to let him get away with—"

The captain's telephone sounded an interruption and he reached for it eagerly.

"What is it?" he demanded. A pause.

"What?" he fairly screeched into the transmitter. "I'll be right over."

He slammed the receiver back on the hook and stared blankly at Barrow.

"God!" he exclaimed. "My God, Barrow."

Barrow knew.

"'There Is,'" he breathed.

Dully Druggan answered in the affirmative.

"Yes."

"What is it this time? Murder?"

"No," said Druggan. "A stick-up."

He took his hat from a clothes tree and beckoned to the Citadel man.

"Going over to the inspector's quarters," he invited; "come along."

Inspector Conalan was pacing the floor of his room when they entered. He stared at them in silence for a moment or two, then came the explosion.

"I won't have it, Druggan. I won't, I tell you. It's up to you to get this fellow."

Druggan had not won his spurs without reason. Now, as always, he was as cold as death itself under barrage.

"Any suggestions, inspector?" he smiled maliciously.

"Ye Gods," Conalan sputtered, and dangled his hands before Barrow. "There's a pretty spectacle for you. The captain of detectives asking his inspector for suggestions."

He spun on Druggan.

"What the hell kind of a police officer are you?" he demanded. "Shut up—"

This last as Druggan opened his mouth to answer.

"I'm doing the talking now," Conalan went on, "and you're doing the listening, see? And if you know where your apple pie's pantried, you're doing some wholesale

arresting. Why, damn it all, you haven't even shown me a suspect since Gulliver hit the concrete up at Fourteenth Street. I want some action, get me?"

Druggan saw the futility of arguing further.

Conalan tossed the police report on the mystery outlaw's latest depredation at Druggan and bade him read it.

"Read it aloud," he suggested, "so that Barrow can hear it. Maybe if you do that you'll know that this bird's been raising hell under your nose for the last month."

Druggan read:

> Forty-Second Precinct.—At four o'clock this morning masked man held up and robbed ticket agent on Eighth Avenue "L" line, uptown station, One Hundred and Forty-Fifth Street. Got away with one hundred and six dollars and ninety cents in currency and coin. As he left tossed piece of paper at agent, telling him it was receipt. Paper attached. Agent unable to describe bandit, who was fully masked and armed. No arrest.

Slowly Druggan turned the sheet he had been reading and there, staring up at him as two malevolent eyes, shone the two words of mystery:

THERE IS

"Whew!"

A heavy sigh escaped the detective captain's lungs and he made a gesture of despair.

"Don't it beat hell?" he was speaking to Barrow. "Don't it beat hell?"

The Citadel man nodded emphatically, but Inspector Conalan was cruel in his comment at this.

"I never in all my experience as a policeman," he said, "and it has been considerable, ever knew of a prisoner that was taken with words."

Druggan's lips were set grimly.

"Neither have I," he agreed. "That's why I don't use so many."

CHAPTER V

BALCOLM'S LAST BOW

DRUGGAN was worried after he had left the official presence, and there was cause for his restiveness. His climb to his present position in the police department was not made without its obstacles. Time and again he had risked all to bring offenders to justice, and the thought of losing out now was unbearable.

"That would be hard enough," he told Barrow, "but it's doubly difficult to take what I've just taken from him. He never was a good policeman and never will be. It looks like I'm up against it for certain."

Again Druggan was right. He was up against it. Just after Barrow left him he was summoned to the commissioner's office and told by the chief executive of the department that perhaps a new captain was needed for the detective bureau.

"It looks to me, Druggan," the commissioner told him, "that maybe you are going a little stale. Have you thought of that?"

"I have, Mr. Commissioner," Druggan replied, "and I am not. The truth of the matter is that we have a super-crook, one who is unbelievably adroit and clever, to deal with and he has every man in the department stumped.

"The newspapers are raising hell about it and somebody has to be the goat. It looks to me like I'm tagged for the honor. I didn't think this administration was operating that way."

The commissioner was human. He liked Druggan.

"Pull a chair over here and sit down," he directed him.

Druggan sat down.

There ensued five minutes of earnest conversation—one-sided conversation with Druggan supplying none of it save an occasional nod.

"And that's the situation, captain," the commissioner concluded. "I'm running this department and there is no politics involved. When I said perhaps you were getting stale I was honest. If you are not you know it better than I do. Stop worrying and try to get your man. I'm with you."

He arose and Druggan, buoyed by this decent gesture from his commanding officer, thanked him.

A sincere handclasp was the commissioner's response, and Druggan took his leave.

It would be interesting and satisfying to

recount that the captain of detectives thereupon sauntered out into Center Street and found his tormentor. But such was not his luck. The days of investigation that followed and left Druggan a bleary-eyed picture of discouragement were as unproductive as the others had been.

Despite the renewal of police activity, the newspapers were as bitter as ever over the elusiveness of the killer-bandit. Druggan, and now even the commissioner, were lampooned by cartoonist and writer.

Citizens began to take mass action, spurred on by this concerted propaganda, and finally one organization, the Voters' Union, which was devoted to attacking anything vulnerable in the matter of civil government, announced a great meeting, the purpose of which would be to demand immediate action by the authorities.

The principal speaker of the occasion was to be Colonel Bosworth J. Balcolm, banker and chairman of the board of the Coastwise Railroads system, a luminary with whom civic virtue was an obsession and who never missed an opportunity to enlist under its banner. Others almost as prominent were scheduled to address the throng of indignant.

The Garden was jammed to suffocation on the night the meeting was held, so crowded that overflow speeches were necessary.

Unhappy were the police who were assigned to maintain order. They heard themselves and their department raked fore and aft for their mutual failings. Grimly they stood their ground and glared defiantly at the emotional men and women who hissed at every mention of the uniform they wore.

And through it all, from the time the chairman uttered his first word, Balcolm sat in his seat on the platform wearing a satisfied grin. Who would forget for some time the speech he made as the crowd listened attentively?

"What utter nonsense they exude," he thundered. "They, the 'finest,' prattle like lisping babes about the 'perfect crime,' and say there is nothing they may do about it.

"We have seen two of our good citizens slain before our very eyes, figuratively, and robbery is rampant. We ask the police who have sworn to protect our lives and property what they are going to do about it. What is the answer?"

A pause, for the effect it might have.

"Nothing," went on Bosworth J. Balcolm, "has been done by them. We are told the perpetrator of these outrages is clever, so smart that the New York police force cannot apprehend him."

He smiled and cast his shot.

"And that," he bellowed, "is probably true."

He went on:

"This prattle of 'perfect crime' is the most arrant nonsense. There is no such thing and they know it. They know as police officers must know that there has been no crime since time began which could not be solved if the proper measures were taken. I say it again and defy contradiction. There is no perfect crime!"

He sat down amid a salvo of applause and listened smugly as the other speakers of the evening made their oratorical appeal to reason.

Presently the meeting adjourned, the band played the "Star Spangled Banner" while the crowd stood at attention, and then a spirited exit march started the mass of humanity for the doors, Balcolm escorted by the chairman. He liked to rub elbows with the common people.

They were passing through the proscenium just outside the arena when the chairman heard an exclamation escape the lips of Balcolm and caught his arm as he stumbled. Those in their vicinity turned at Balcolm's cry and helped him as he assisted the guest of honor to a lounge near by.

Balcolm was gasping painfully as they lay him on the couch. He was unable to speak, and a physician was hurriedly summoned from the crowd.

"It seems to be a heart attack," he told the bystanders, as he thrust his hand into the bosom of Balcolm's shirt.

A look of bewilderment overcast the physician's features as he withdrew his hand. It was covered with blood.

"God!" he exclaimed. "He's been stabbed."

And he hastily turned the banker over and ripped the clothing that covered the wound. A near panic followed among those of the audience who had stopped to witness this unscheduled scene.

Balcolm died immediately, as two stalwart policemen, grimly silent, stood by. The Garden was cleared and police headquarters were immediately notified of the tragedy.

Inspector Conalan, Captain Druggan and the commissioner himself arrived at the Forty-Ninth Street entrance to the big arena at the same time. They entered together and found some of the officers of the Voters' Union with the body, now guarded by uniformed men.

Druggan strode directly to the couch, put his hand in Balcolm's coat pocket, hoping against hope that he would find nothing, and drew forth a piece of white paper. Slowly he unfolded it and passed it to the commissioner. There, centered on the page, were the words:

THERE IS

Balcolm's associates were inclined to be nasty about it. The chairman asked the commissioner:

"Well, what are you going to do about it now?"

Disdainfully the police executive replied:

"I understand you were walking with Mr. Balcolm when they got him," he said. "If you don't know how it happened, how in the hell do you expect the police department to know it?"

"I'm not a policeman," the other retorted.

"That's right," the commissioner sneered. "You're not. From the way you've been trying to run the department I thought you might have been."

They removed the banker's body to his late home immediately, and police headquarters hummed with activity all night. All suspects, all known police characters were rounded up and brought down to Center Street for questioning before they were released.

It was a brave gesture, but the erudite Druggan could have told you before it was done that they would not get their man that night. Its end found him sitting in his office, weary and beaten.

CHAPTER VI

FROM DEAD HANDS

WHEN Barrow arose the morning after the Balcolm murder he had heard nothing of the Garden stabbing. A glance at the first page of the *Sphere* told him enough, however, to send him winging for the Citadel's offices. He had reason to suspect that the mystery man's stiletto had struck heavily into the company's strong box this time.

He immediately entered Gresham's office and found the chief of claims eagerly examining records.

The old man gruffed a greeting and continued his calculation. Presently he looked up and passed a memorandum to Barrow.

"That's all it means to us," he said, his voice trembling.

The investigator looked at the penciled notation and sat down heavily in the nearest chair.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure you're right, Mr. Gresham?"

A nod from the gray head at the other side of the desk.

"Can't be mistaken," Gresham verified. "Eight hundred thousand. We had him for four hundred thousand dollars straight, and it was double indemnity."

He leaped to his feet.

"Barrow," he said, "this is not my money, and the Citadel recognizes its obligations to the extent of wanting to pay just claims, but this thing is getting too damned costly."

The investigator waited respectfully for the chief to finish.

"The police are supposed to suppress murderers. We rely upon them to do that. But the Citadel is certainly entitled to some representation in this man-hunt, I'm thinking. I want you to go out after this fellow. Get him."

Barrow was not keen about this.

"Thanks for the compliment, chief. That's not as easy as it sounds. All the detectives in New York have been trying to for a long time."

Gresham nodded.

"I know they have," he said, "and I think they've tried hard enough, but they haven't done it. I think you can. Take as long as you like. But get him."

Gresham turned away, and Barrow knew further parley was unnecessary.

The chief of claims had unbounded faith in his star investigator, a faith built up by Barrow himself, and it did not occur to him that his man could fail.

So Barrow sallied forth on his toughest assignment.

"To begin with," he told himself, "I'm going to do something now that I never have done before, and hope I never have to do again."

And he went up to police headquarters and borrowed a pistol from Druggan.

To the captain of detectives he told the story of Balcolm's insurance and how Gresham had assigned him to run down the mystery killer.

Druggan smiled wanly.

"I feel as weak as a woman," he told Barrow, "and God knows if you can land this fellow the police department will owe you a vote of everlasting gratitude. You know how we stand."

Barrow nodded.

"I know," he said, "and I'm as much up a tree as you are."

"How are you going after him?" Druggan asked.

The Citadel man had to concede his lack of an idea on this subject.

"I guess I'll just have to dope it out," he told the other.

After a general discussion, during which he learned that the Garden killing had produced not the slightest clew, and that it was considered by the police as a gesture of defiance on the part of the "There Is" killer, Barrow left headquarters for his home, where he proposed to consider quietly the entire mystery from its beginning and then to proceed carefully from that point.

This was orthodox with Barrow. He had never made claim to greatness as a detective. But he had often given it as his conviction that the only logical way to investigate anything was from its genesis.

This fixed the starting point squarely upon the last day of Dave Gulliver's life. Whatever had occurred later, the mystery outlaw's depredations had begun with the deadly attack on the writer, and it was there, Barrow reasoned, that it would be well to begin his study.

He was reasonably certain that robbery had not been the original motive, for in each killing none of the victims had been searched.

"Druggan and his crowd can have their own opinion," he told himself, "but I can't see anything but a mad man in action here. What could Gulliver and Tasney have done to have stirred up hatred of so pronounced a type? And then there was old Balcolm, killed just because he demanded that the murderer be caught."

Another consideration was carefully weighed by the Citadel man. Who but a crazy man would stage the killings so openly?

"It must be," he finally concluded, "that Gulliver in some way offended somebody, either the killer or one of his friends. They might have tried blackmail. At any rate, we'll find out about that phase."

He telephoned to Mrs. Gulliver almost immediately and told her of his mission. She, hopeful that this might be the beginning of an investigation that would bring her husband's slayer to justice, readily assented when he asked if he might see her.

Barrow explained his theory to the widow.

"I should like, if possible," he suggested, "to see Mr. Gulliver's most recent correspondence. Is it available? Did he keep a file?"

"Always," she said, "and there's no objection to your seeing it."

She had put the writer's records away, and now brought them out for the inspection of the Citadel man. There were no letters that would indicate alliances unknown to her, nothing to suggest blackmail or a quarrel of any sort.

She was examining some of the carbon copies of her husband's stories as Barrow finished looking over the letters.

"Hello," she suddenly observed, as she held one of the stories before her. "This

is one I haven't seen and know nothing about."

Barrow was alert.

"A story?" he asked.

"Yes. It's called 'Power.' I didn't know he had done it. He wasn't paid for it, at any rate. I know that."

"Who has the original?" Barrow asked.

Mrs. Gulliver arose and walked over to a small cabinet on a near-by desk. There she opened a card index drawer. Gulliver was that methodical about his work.

"Let's see," she said softly. "'Power.' Here it is."

There was a pause.

"Why," she gasped as she turned to the Citadel man, "he was—why—oh, that can't be—why—"

She was weeping, and Barrow crossed the room and took the card from her hand. There, written in Gulliver's hand was the notation:

"Taken by hand to Parkinson, editor *Master Sleuth*. May 5, 19—"

It was Barrow's turn to register the amazement he felt.

"Why," he said, "he must have had it with him the morning he was—the morning it happened."

"He did," she breathed.

Barrow nodded.

"But it wasn't found by the police," he said. "Perhaps he mailed it instead."

"That," she replied, "is quite unlikely. Dave was very methodical. I'm certain he must have had the story with him when he was—"

"Then," Barrow interrupted her, "it seems to me that our next move is to ask Parkinson, of the *Master Sleuth*, about it."

She agreed, and within three minutes Barrow was on his way to the offices of *Master Sleuth*, the copy of "Power" in his pocket.

Parkinson received him cordially when he told the editor who he was, and spoke to him of the story.

"Have you seen it before?" he asked, as he handed over the manuscript.

"No," Parkinson replied. He read through a page or two before handing it back to the Citadel man.

"It's Gulliver's stuff all right," he said. "I'd recognize it anywhere. But I've never seen this."

Barrow was plainly disappointed.

"Well," he offered, "selling stories is out of my line, but I promised Mrs. Gulliver I'd leave it with you for your consideration. I guess maybe she'd like to see it printed if it's good enough."

Parkinson smiled.

"His stories usually are," he said. "I'll be glad to read it.

Barrow left a card and withdrew. He was off on another track now, his objective this time being the offices of the *Morning Sphere*. He would try to establish a motive for the killing of Fred Tasney.

He had spoken to a number of the late editorial writer's associates, all of whom assured him that, so far as they knew, Tasney had no enemies, when he determined upon another approach to this phase of the killer's activities. He asked that he be permitted to read some of Tasney's editorials dealing with the death of Gulliver.

"It may be," he told Lauter, the *Sphere's* managing editor, "that something Tasney said inflamed the man, just as he resented Balcolm's attack. I'd like to find out."

Lauter produced the clippings from the *Sphere's* morgue, and Barrow sat down to study them.

It was after he had finished the fourth editorial dealing with the mystery outlaw that Barrow began to see a rift in the tangled mass of theories which had grown out of the killings.

Throughout his writings Tasney had placed a peculiar emphasis on the declaration "there is no perfect crime."

Could it be—it undoubtedly was—well, anyway.

Barrow hastily gathered the clippings together and returned them to Lauter.

"Get anything?" the editor asked him.

Barrow was cautious.

"Not a thing," he replied. "It looks hopeless."

Lauter nodded in agreement. The *Sphere* had been offering a reward ever since Tasney's death to any person who might bring his slayer to justice, and Barrow was only one of a score who had gone through the same motions without result.

The Citadel man had not found a clew of importance. But he was convinced by this time that there was special significance in the two-word legend on the slips of death which had been placed in the respective pockets of the victims.

"There is," he repeated as he left the *Sphere* office. "Of course, that's what he means to say. 'There is a perfect crime.' How stupid we've all been."

Even so, this finding led to nothing of importance, and the days dragged slowly for Barrow. He was beginning to tire of the chase, which always led back to the starting point.

The police had been equally powerless, they, like Barrow, finding their sole consolation in the fact that the killer had been under cover since the Balcolm attack.

CHAPTER VII

"NOT"

BARROW returned to his home one evening fagged out. He had been working on the Parberry end of his hunt and the day had been spent in questioning the maid and butler and going over the route the police assumed was taken by the outlaw.

The investigator found nothing to indicate that they had been mistaken, and consequently was as far away to-night as he had ever been from a solution of the mystery.

He found a note on his dressing table.

"Mr. Parkinson, of the *Master Sleuth Magazine,* has been trying to get you all day," the message read. "He says it's very important."

Instantly the fatigue was forgotten. Barrow hastily changed his clothes and sought Parkinson's home telephone number. Throughout the evening he tried every channel of information without success until he thought of the Press Club. There he was told to try the Alcazar, and after several minutes of waiting the editor was raised.

"This is Barrow, Parkinson," the Citadel man said. "You were trying to get me?"

Parkinson assured him that he certainly had been.

"We can't discuss it by telephone, Barrow," he told him. "All the information I have is at the office. Come down early in the morning, eh?"

What was there to do but agree? This Barrow did with good grace and, after a restless night, he presented himself before Parkinson when the editor reached his office the next day.

"I think, Barrow," Parkinson observed quietly, "that what I am about to tell you will be a surprise."

"Yes?" Barrow was intent.

"You recall the manuscript, 'Power,' that you brought down from Mrs. Gulliver?"

Barrow nodded.

"Well," Parkinson went on, "we got another through the mails yesterday, one called 'Leverage.'"

The Citadel man could not fathom the editor's conversation.

"What of it?" he asked.

"I thought you'd ask that," Parkinson smiled. "Not much, only this. It's Gulliver's story in masquerade."

Barrow's eyes glistened.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

Parkinson was certain.

"I've been handling manuscripts twenty years," he observed, "and, even if I hadn't, this steal is too palpable to miss. There are whole pages lifted verbatim. But the story has been considerably changed."

"In what way?"

This was a supreme moment for the editor, and he enjoyed the jolt he handed Barrow as he spoke again.

"In this way: Gulliver's story, as all of his detective yarns had a way of doing, ended with the authorities triumphant, the criminal in custody and the wrongs by the culprit avenged.

"This new version runs the other way about. It deals with the perfect crime, the police are outwitted constantly, there is no arrest and the criminal himself is glorified."

Barrow was no longer doubtful about the significance of this manuscript. Unquestionably the killer had made his one mistake and vanity, together with a desire to boast, were responsible.

At the investigator's suggestion, Parkinson forwarded a letter to the address written on the top of the first page of the story. The author had signed himself "Don Regneva." The letter asked that the man call to see the editor of *Master Sleuth* the following afternoon at three.

"With some exceptions," Parkinson wrote, "I find your story, 'Leverage,' excellent material for our publication. I feel that a short talk will convince you of the merit of our suggestions and that you will be glad to make the changes."

Barrow and Parkinson discussed at length the reception of the suspect, and it was determined that the editor should do all the talking during the interview. Barrow purposed to sit within easy range of the stranger and watch for hostile gestures.

Parkinson himself readily agreed to secrecy, for the Citadel's investigator feared the slightest move might scare off the suspect, who, he was convinced, was responsible for three murders.

Hence, when the following afternoon's excitement began, Parkinson's office was functioning as it always did—with quiet efficiency.

Promptly at three o'clock the door opened and Barrow saw a man step to the information desk and make an inquiry. Almost immediately Parkinson's telephone bell rang and the editor directed that the visitor be shown in.

As the man entered the editor's office, Barrow studied him closely. He was not of forbidding type. Apparently of middle age, he was quietly attired, and save for a peculiar glint in his eyes appeared to be the average American business man. Certainly he was not of the Latin type, as his name implied.

Parkinson introduced himself and then presented Barrow. All three sat down.

"We like your story, Mr. Regneva," Parkinson began, "but we feel that it can be improved by the slight changes of which I spoke in my letter."

The visitor said nothing—just sat and stared wildly at the editor.

"So," Parkinson continued, "we are going to ask you to make some changes. For instance, you hold your criminal, the master mind of the plotting, as a hero, when, in truth, he should not be."

"Why not?" The demand from the stranger was sharp and incisive.

"Well," Parkinson sought to soothe the man, "because magazines are not supposed to run contrary to public welfare."

"In other words," the visitor rasped, "you are not prepared to tell the truth. Is that so? You can go to hell!"

He arose. Parkinson flushed.

"If that is your attitude," he said, "what have you to say to this?"

Barrow had arisen from his chair.

Parkinson flung Gulliver's duplicate manuscript across the desk toward Regneva with a grim smile.

The suspect glanced hurriedly at the papers and thrust his cane toward the seated editor.

"Look out!" Barrow shouted, and as he called he swung hard. There was a crunching thud, a grunt from the lips of the cane swinger and he crashed to the floor.

Parkinson had fallen from his chair to avoid the thrust, and it was well he did, for before the visitor had fallen he had pressed a spring on the handle of his stick.

"Spung!" an eight-inch stiletto had darted from the end of the stick and the lethal weapon now lay slightly stuck in the desk.

"Charming little thing, isn't it?" he asked of the score of office workers who had rushed to the scene. He pressed the spring and, by means of a string, the blade returned to its niche as speedily as it had appeared.

Regneva began to stir, and Barrow hastily procured sufficient rope to securely bind him.

"Why," Parkinson asked the Citadel man, "didn't you kill the dog when you had the chance."

Barrow replied earnestly.

"I never use a gun," he said.

He noted Parkinson's amazement and smiled.

"Oh," he observed, "I did have a gat, didn't I? I had forgotten for the moment."

He reached for the telephone and put in a call for Druggan.

"Hello, Bill," he greeted the captain of

detectives. "This is Barrow. I've got the mystery man and I need some help. Come on down."

Druggan spluttered

"What the hell are you doing, Barrow," he demanded, "kidding me?"

"Nope, I'm not," Barrow reassured the captain. "You'd better bring some men with you, and maybe a strait-jacket."

He hung up after directing Druggan to Parkinson's office, and then turned his attention to the prisoner, who was writhing in an effort to free himself and screaming imprecations at those who looked on. A gag was speedily provided and the suspect silenced.

Barrow had gone to headquarters with the prisoner, and now he was in Captain Druggan's office with the commissioner, the inspector and the captain.

The prisoner, heavily manacled and guarded by two husky detectives, sat before them. At a desk in the corner of the room and out of the prisoner's line of vision sat a stenographer.

Barrow asked gently of Regneva:

"Why have you done these things?"

The prisoner glared back at him.

"They made me sick," he observed. "Always talking about their smart detectives."

He laughed hysterically.

"No such thing as a perfect crime," he chuckled. "I guess I showed them."

"Is that why you killed Gulliver?" Conalan interjected.

"Yes, that's why I killed Gulliver," mimicked the manacled man. "He was always writing about how great the cops were and that they couldn't be fooled. Hell! He was the guy to start with, wasn't he?"

It was the same with Tasney and Balcolm, the prisoner told them.

He had set out to prove that the perfect crime could be committed. The robberies were mere incidents, just to annoy the police further.

"So you killed three men for no reason other than that—to show up the police?"

The commissioner was amazed as the tale unfolded itself. He turned to the others when the prisoner snapped an affirmative.

"Of course, captain," he directed Druggan, "this man is mad. You'll see that he is given every care."

Druggan nodded.

"Yes, sir," he said. "He's raised hell with my peace of mind for a long time, but there's nothing else we can do."

Barrow arose.

"Well," he remarked to the police officers, "I guess I've no further interest in this fellow. We pay. That's all there is to it. I think I'll go home."

As he reached the door he turned toward the prisoner

"You have a peculiar name for a man of your Nordic blood," he said carelessly. "Where did you get it?"

"It's my title," the prisoner smirked. "Spell it backward."

"'Avenger,' eh?" Barrow was amused at this further gesture of bravado. "And what did you mean by the words 'There is' that you left in the pockets of your victims? Do you mind telling us that?"

Proudly the prisoner drew himself erect.

"I meant, and I still maintain," he declared emphatically, "that there is such a thing as a perfect crime."

Barrow grinned annoyingly at the fettered man.

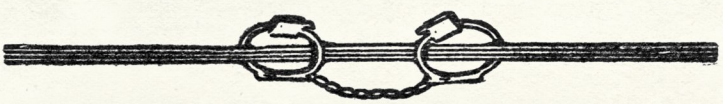
"From the looks of things," he said quietly, "you made a mistake in those notes. You left out something."

"Yeh," sneered the mad man, "what?"

"The word '*Not*,'" smiled Barrow, and he stepped through the door, his ears ringing with the maledictions gushing from the mouth of his captive.

"This," said the Citadel man, as he headed for the Citadel and Gresham, "is one coup that we don't get credit for—at least not in real money. Parkinson deserves the reward the *Sphere* offered."

THE END



Poisonous gases drove passengers and train crew into the open

CASE NO. 57883-D

By Leland Woods

FOR NEARLY FOUR YEARS THIS RELENTLESS SEARCH HAD BEEN THE GREATEST MAN-HUNT IN THE HISTORY OF CRIME AND ITS DETECTION

A Story of Fact

SOUTHERN Pacific passenger train No. 13, southbound, pulled out of the station at Siskiyou, Oregon, on the night of October 11, 1923, slightly behind schedule. The air was crisp. A small wind blew down the mountains. Sleepy passengers aboard the train glanced disinterestedly at the lights of the little town and turned restlessly in their seats.

A short distance south of Siskiyou the railroad pierces the spur of the mountain. In the tunnel the engineman saw a danger signal. He jammed on his air. The brakes squealed. The cars rumbled to a stop. A man in the smoking compartment complained that a tunnel was a mighty poor place to halt a train.

Voices outside attracted the attention of the passengers. A brakeman named Johnson hurried through the cars toward the front of the train to determine the cause of the delay. He swung down from a step. Figures were moving about the mail car. Johnson started toward them.

He was shot dead.

The mail car was locked from within. Again the figures moved on the track. Engineman Sid Bates, a veteran railroader, leaned from his cab window to see the cause of the signal. He was murdered with a high power rifle, at close range. Marvin Seng, his young fireman, stepped across the cab to help him. A shot stopped him. He pitched forward, dead.

In the meantime, E. E. Dougherty, mail clerk, was alone in his locked car. No one

knows what preparations he made to defend himself. At least he did not open the doors. The remaining members of the train crew, moving forward, were halted by shots. Passengers fled to the rear of the train.

The three figures on the tracks worked rapidly. Through the smoky murk of the tunnel they were seen about the end of the mail car. Suddenly they drew back. There was a moment of waiting.

Unprecedented Pursuing

A terrific explosion sounded, far beyond the tunnel mouth and across the hills. Smoke rolled out. Poisonous gases drove passengers and train crew into the open. When rescue parties entered the tunnel an hour later they found the bodies of three trainmen, two in the engine cab, one by the tracks. And in the mail and express car the charred body of Mail Clerk Dougherty.

The robbers had taken four lives, had destroyed mail and express worth probably hundreds of thousands, and had been driven away empty-handed by the poisonous gases they themselves set off in their attempt to pierce the steel end of the car.

That was nearly four years ago. And the man hunt that was begun less than an hour after the crime has never for one minute been relaxed. Last winter one of the three killers was apprehended; some day, sooner or later, the other two will be found.

It has been and still is the greatest man hunt in the history of crime and its detection. A reward of fifteen thousand nine hundred dollars, offered by the Post Office Department, the American Express, the Southern Pacific railway, and the State of Oregon, have spurred thousands of detectives, professional and amateur, on the search.

Before daylight on the twelfth of October, 1923, while rescuers still searched the wreckage in Siskiyou tunnel, sheriffs' posses had started into the hills. There is a large amount of wild timber country not far from the scene of the holdup, and it was guessed that the robbers had fled to its protection.

Post office inspectors and operatives of the express company, representatives of the State government, railroad detectives, county, city and private agency officials joined the search. For days the posses tramped the mountainside and wilderness.

In one of these armed groups, made up from the countryside, a young, soft spoken, well dressed man named Hugh DeAutremont took a leading part. He led searchers up the faces of steep cliffs, pointed out distant thickets where the robbers might be hiding, charged dangerous passes.

And when it was decided that the killers had escaped and the posses came back to town, Hugh DeAutremont remained a day or two, and then disappeared. Last winter he was arrested on a rifle range at Fort McKinley, Manila, Philippine Islands, and confessed his part in the robbery. The other two bandits, his brothers Ray and Roy, still are at large, and still are the objects of a search that literally is world-wide.

Never before have such efforts been made to apprehend criminals. It was several days after the robbery that suspicion first was drawn to the brothers DeAutremont. Postal inspectors, searching for facts, came upon evidence pointing to these boys.

The Scope of the Search

What that evidence was, and where obtained, is one of the minor mysteries of the story. The investigators merely announced, "We have positive information that the men we want are these three brothers."

Handbills were printed. At first by the hundreds, then ten thousand—a hundred thousand—then the presses rumbled day and night—five hundred thousand. Probably a million have been distributed.

That is the story of the crime, remarkable only for its daring, for its absolute cruelty, and for its failure. But the tale of the search is unparalleled in any nation. Scotland Yard, the Paris *bureau,* the *Brigade Mobile,* even the *Cheka* of Moscow have never carried on so relentless a campaign.

The offering of five thousand three hundred dollars reward for each of the men was only a start. Hundreds of officers, the best man hunters in America, have devoted years of skill to the search.

The history of the boys was investigated so thoroughly that practically nothing escaped the officials. Their habits, their physical peculiarities, their likes and dislikes, even their favorite songs and the tones in which they sing them were listed and broadcast.

The leaflets issued by the Post Office Department make the following request on the first of its ten pages:

> All law-abiding citizens, especially peace officers, dentists, opticians, barbers, loggers, jewelers and seamen, please read carefully and retain for future reference.

And in the folder, following the descriptions, are listed various bits of information valuable to each special class of citizen who might come in contact with the men.

The Criminal's Watch

Librarians, for example, are told to watch for Ray and Roy, twins, who are still at large. These two are now twenty-seven years old. They are in the habit of borrowing books on sociology and poetical works from public libraries. They are "forward with women," and are "presuming," according to the lookout. Librarians are further requested to examine their files of signatures, and compare them with the signatures of Ray and Roy printed on the folder.

And because these men are so much wanted, every librarian in the United States and Canada has been furnished with a copy of the handbill. Every barber shop, even to the remotest village, has been circularized, because Ray and Roy sometimes worked at the barber trade.

The employment office of every big industrial plant in America has received photographs and descriptions. Every logging camp has the request on file. Every jeweler and watch repairman has received an earnest request to be on the lookout for a seven-jewel Waltham, sixteen size, open face watch, gold filled case, with gold filled chain and knife attached. The number on the case is 4298547 and the movement number 22444312. The private mark on the back of the case is 11293HB.

The Post Office Department urges every man who has bought a Waltham watch since 1923, no matter what the source, no matter how reputable the firm that sold it, to examine it at once for these numbers. And every time a watchmaker receives a Waltham for repairs he too is expected to examine it at once. It may be the watch Roy DeAutremont had the day of the crime.

It is hardly likely that the men have kept these watches, but, having sold them, they may be traced back. Ray had an Excelsior, size sixteen, with the private mark 8662 on the back of case, and movement number 667501.

Roy and Ray have weak, squinty eyes, and both wear glasses. Every oculist and optician has been requested to watch for them. The prescriptions for their glasses have been forwarded to every optical establishment in America, with a request that a check-up be made on their files.

And then the dentists! Every dentist who could be found by the post office authorities received a description of the mouths of the three. Every tooth, every filling in every jaw wanted is known and described.

A Blot Wiped Away

Then, as if that were not enough, the finger-print classification of one of them, Ray, who served time in Monroe, Washington, during the war, for criminal syndicalism, has been forwarded to every criminal identification bureau in the world!

Every United States post office has the pictures of the three brothers on its lobby wall. Every United States consul has copies. Steamship offices, customs officials, coast guards men, railway ticket sellers, steamer pursers, newspaper men, radio announcers, theater doormen, and a host of other citizens in daily contact with large numbers of people have repeatedly been requested to keep a sharp eye open for the two remaining DeAutremonts, Roy and Ray.

In the meantime hundreds of post office inspectors are keeping everlastingly at it. The Postmaster General recently said: "These unusual steps have been taken not only because of the particularly heinous and cold-blooded crime, but because of the

baffling manner in which they—the brothers —have dropped from sight."

Recently, in a small town in Michigan, the writer attended a meeting at the public high school building. On the blackboard were pictures of the DeAutremonts. The superintendent explained that it was a good moral lesson, that his boys were learning that the government mails are sacred, that United States authority will not permit violation.

In another section of the Middle West two men, resembling Ray and Roy, were seen in a lumber camp. They had gone when post office inspectors, hurriedly summoned, arrived.

But within a week staid, respectable citizens all over that part of the State, farmers and villagers who never were nearer criminal affairs than watching a village marshal lock up a Saturday night drunk, received in their mail boxes official requests to be on the lookout for the DeAutremonts, together with photographs, signatures and descriptions.

With Hugh in custody, the Post Office Department has turned its search to the other two. According to the officer in charge, C. Riddiford, postal inspector at Spokane, Washington, these two men will be found. D. O'Connell, chief special agent for the Southern Pacific railway, and a large force of his men, are assisting in the hunt. They, too, have decreed that Roy and Ray will be apprehended.

So after four years Case No. 57883-D still is provoking the vigilance of the criminal investigation division of the postal service. The Postmaster General is determined to work till the two missing brothers are in his hands.

"The post office inspector has a reputation for getting his man," Postmaster General Harry New said recently. "He never gives up. The postal inspection service is determined to a man to wipe off this blot from their otherwise clean slate."

Since this article was written the DeAutremont brothers have been captured, convicted and sent away for life.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

PRESENTING AN IMPROVED TRANSPOSITION CIPHER: AND REMEMBER, FANS, YOUR OWN CIPHERS ARE WELCOMED HERE, BUT INCLUDE EXPLANATIONS

AS an improvement upon transposition ciphers using a series of exactly similar transposition cycles, E. Myszkowski offers in his *Cryptographie Indéchiffrable*—Paris, 1902—a cipher in which the transposition cycle becomes as long as the message itself.

The Myszkowski system is based upon a numerical key, which is formed upon a literal key derived in turn from a word key agreed upon by the communicating parties. To illustrate the system, the message, SEND REINFORCEMENTS, will here be enciphered, using the key word REDAN.

Having first transcribed the message *(c)* in as many lines as its length may require, the key word is next written letter for letter above it, repeated as many times as necessary, and forming the literal key *(a)*.

Should it happen in any case that the length of the key word is evenly divisible into that of the message, so that the last letters of the key word and message fall together, one or more nulls, at the discretion of the encipherer, must be added at the end of the message before enciphering. Such nulls were unnecessary in the present case, the key word having been used three full times with a remainder of three letters, R-E-D, for the last letters of the message.

The literal key *(a)* is now transformed into a numerical key by numbering the letters in alphabetical order from *1* up, taking repeated letters from left to right. Here, for example, the A's are numbered *1*, *2*, and *3*, left to right; the D's *4*, *5*, *6*, and *7*; and so on, forming the numerical key *(b)*.

This done, the letters of the message are transposed by rearranging them in the order *(d)* indicated by their individual key numbers, Myszkowski writes his cryptogram continuously, using a numerical prefix—"18" in this example—to indicate the number of letters in the message. If desired, this prefix may be omitted, and the message may be grouped by fives, DFMNN ESEIC TROES ERN, in the usual manner.

(a)	r	e	d	a	n	r	e	d	a	n	r	e	d	a	n	r	e	d
(b)	15	8	4	1	12	16	9	5	2	13	17	10	6	3	14	18	11	7
(c)	s	e	n	d	r	e	i	n	f	o	r	c	e	m	e	n	t	s
(d)	18.	d	f	m	n	n	e	s	e	i	c	t	r	o	e	s	e	r	n

The receiver of the cryptogram prepares a numerical key of the indicated length; and numbering the letters of the cryptogram serially from *1* up, restores them to their original order by merely rearranging them in the order designated by the numerical key.

In enumerating the merits of this cipher, Myszkowski points out that it is not too complicated to be practical, and that it is quite undecipherable, no two messages of different lengths being transposed in the same order even with the same key word.

Nevertheless, the system can be deciphered without the key, and exactly the same order of transposition can be effected by a much more direct method which will be fully described next week. In the meanwhile, fans, see what you can do with Mr. Winsor's No. 70, below. This specimen was actually enciphered by the improved method to be given next week. But it may be treated as if it had been done exactly in accordance with Myszkowski's directions.

Did you succeed in building up the key phrase to cipher No. 61 (J. Levine), published in the August 27 issue?

Key phrase: A quick movement of the enemy would jeopardize six gun-boats.

Message: A sentence containing all the letters of the alphabet is used to encipher this message.

As you may remember, each letter of the message was represented in cipher by the two letters before and after it in the key phrase. Thus, the symbol for *Q* would be *AU;* that for *U* would be *QI;* and so on. Letters repeated in the key phrase would have more than one substitute. For example, *E* is variously represented here by *VM, MN, HE, EN, NM, JO,* and *ZS.* In some keys the same symbol might stand for different letters. Here *OT* stands for both *F* and *A;* and *NO* for *T* and *B.*

The solution to last week's No. 65:

Question: What was the French *cabinet noir?*

Answer: An office created during the reign of Louis XV where the letters of suspected persons were opened and read by public officials before being sent on to their destination.

As to No. 66, the colors of the stones, paired off, become substitutes for letters in accordance with the following alphabet, where *DD* equals *A; DG* equals *B;* and so on:

	D	*G*	*B*	*Y*	*P*
(drab) *D*	A	B	C	D	E
(gray) *G*	F	G	H	IJ	K
(brown) *B*	L	M	N	O	P
(yellow) *Y*	Q	R	S	T	U
(pink) *P*	V	W	X	Y	Z

Substitute in this alphabet and you get the message: IF YOU WOULD HAVE MY FORTUNE DISCOVER THE HIDDEN PAPER. In this way the stone wall pictured in the issue of August 20, and explained last week, would have conveyed three different and altogether independent messages, depending upon the *shapes, sizes,* and *colors* of the stones.

This week's ciphers begin with another of the " Q. and A." variety in No. 68, after you have solved which you may be willing to believe almost anything.

No. 69 is an original cipher submitted by a fan who is anxious to see his system put to the test. And accordingly a longer time is being allowed before publication of the answer.

Just a word, in this connection, about reader ciphers. Any cipher which you would like to have the fans try out should be accompanied by its solution and explanation. The " test " period will be adjusted to suit the difficulty of your problem. But the solution is necessary so that the cipher can be explained in a subsequent issue.

If you have already submitted a cipher without its explanation, you may send the latter in now, if you wish, calling attention to your previous letter. All communications should be signed with your full name and address. But your name will be withheld from publication if you prefer.

CIPHER No. 68.

Question: PDT ORK RKB ORG PRAX KWKX IWAXL?

Answer: HW OGA TGL JVQTA YVRJL; GHC OGA TGL WHJ YVIJ ZWKJ ATGH HW OGA; ATJKJIWKJ, GHC OGA TGL HVHJ YVRJL!

CIPHER No. 69 (Myer Stine, Los Angeles, California).

Store No. 1	Store No. 2	Store No. 3	Store No. 4
$ .60	$5.60	$3.00	$5.00
5.00	13.50	8.20	11.00
1.30	9.00	.50	9.00
2.00	13.00	13.50	———
5.00	10.21	.70	$25.00
11.00	1.00	5.00	
5.70	13.60	8.00	
.21	———	———	
———	$65.91	$38.90	
$30.81			

CIPHER No. 70 (Charles Winsor, Boston, Massachusetts).

RISEE	ATFAP	IEVAF	TPRNN
AEREE	RHTTR	RHHAO	RSCVI
FONYE	IETTS	ENGSH	ODRHO
OOPNE	ITITS	AOHCI	RTCP

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

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Combination line rate **$3.00** less 2 per cent cash discount.

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Agents make larger profits selling well known Ho-Ro-Co Soaps, Perfumes, Toilet Articles. Our lower prices give larger profits. Over 50,000 cans La-Em-Strait Hair Dressing sold last year. HO-RO-CO, 2702 Ho-Ro-Co Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

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AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. WE COMPOSE MUSIC. OUR COMPOSER WROTE MANY SONG HITS. MONARCH MUSIC COMPANY, 236 WEST 55TH ST. (NEAR BROADWAY), DEPT. 109, NEW YORK.

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$10 IS ALL I ASK DOWN ON 20 ACRES IN MICH. POTATO BELT. Very easy terms. Near markets, lakes and streams. Write for particulars now. G. W. SWIGART, M-1276 First National Bank Building, Chicago.

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UNUSUAL Comedy Playlets—"The Charming, Independent Widow," "Cigaretta's Beau," "The Misleading Leading Lady," (3 acts); "Amateur Robbers," (comedy monologue); others; variety. Send for Early Fall rates. L. E. Holland, 1924 Fremont St., Chicago, Ill.

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