NEW EDGAR WALLACE NOVEL COMPLETE IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE!

THE THRILLER

THE NEW PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

“Red Aces”

GRIPPING NEW BOOK-LENGTH STORY BY

EDGAR WALLACE

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE
Chapter I.

THE THREAT.

When a young man is very much in love with a most attractive girl he is apt to endow her with qualities and virtues which no human being has ever possessed. And at rare and painful intervals there enter into his soul certain wild suspicions, and in these moments he is inclined to regard the possibility that she may be guilty of the basest treachery and double dealing.

Everybody knew that Kenneth McKay was desperately in love. They knew it at the bank in Beaconsfield where he spent his days in counting other people's money, and a considerable amount of his lunch-hour writing impassioned and — it must be confessed — rather ill-spelt letters to Margot Lynn. His taciturn father, brooding over his vanished fortune in his gaunt riverside house at Marlow, may have devoted a few moments' thought to the consideration of his son's new interest. Probably he did not, for George McKay was entirely self-centred, and had little thought but for the folly which had dissipated the money he had accumulated with such care, and the development of fantastic schemes for its recovery.

All day long, summer and winter, McKay, senior, sat in his study, a pack of cards before him, working out averages and what he called "inherent probabilities," or at a small roulette wheel, where, alternately, he spun and recorded the winning numbers.

Kenneth McKay went over to the bank in Beaconsfield every morning on his noisy motor-bicycle and came back every night. Sometimes very late, because Margot lived in London. She had a small flat where she could not receive him, but they frequently dined together at the cheaper restaurants and sometimes saw a play. Kenneth was a member of an inexpensive London club which sheltered at least one sympathetic soul. Except Mr. Rufus Machfield, the confident in question, he had no friends.

"And let me advise you not to make any here," said Rufus.

He was a military-looking man of forty-five, and most people found him rather a bore, for the views which he expressed were vehemently, on all subjects from politics to religion. He had acquired that morning from the leading article of his favourite daily. Yet he was a genial person and a likeable man.

He had a luxurious flat in Park Lane, a French valet, a couple of horses which he rode in the Park, and no useful occupation. "The Leffingham Club is cheap," he said, "the food's not bad, and it is near Piccadilly. Against that you have the fact that almost anybody who hasn't been to prison can become a member.—"

"The fact that I'm a member—" began Ken.

"You're a gentleman and a public school man," interrupted Mr. Machfield a little sorrowfully. "You're not rich, I admit——"

"Even I admit that," said Ken, rubbing his mutton-chop beard.

Kenneth was tall, athletic, as good-looking as a young man need be, or can be without losing his head about his face. He had called at the Leffingham that evening especially to see Rufus and to confide his worries to that amiable gentleman. And Kenneth's worries were, at the moment, enormous. He looked haggard and ill; Mr. Machfield thought it possible that he had not been sleeping very well. In this supposition he was right.

"It's about Margot——" began the young man.

Mr. Machfield smiled. He had met Margot, had entertained the young people to dinner at his flat, and twice had invited them to a theatre party.

"We've had a row, Rufus. It began a week ago. For a long time her reliance has been bothering me. Why the devil can't she tell me what she did for a living? I wouldn't say this to a living soul but you—" he was horridly disloyal to her, and yet it isn't. I know that she has no money of her own, and yet she lives at the rate of a thousand a year. She says that she is..."
"He was elderly—fifty—not bad-looking, God! I could have killed them both! Margot was coldness itself, though she changed colour. But she didn’t attempt to introduce me or offer any kind of explanation."

"Her father—" began Rufus.

"She has no father—no relations except her mother, who is an invalid and lives in Florence—at least, I thought so," snarled Kenneth.

"What did she do?"

"The young man heaved a deep sigh."

"Nothing; just said, ‘How queer meeting you!’ talked about the beautiful day, and when I asked her what it all meant and what this man was to her—he had walked on and left us alone—she flatly refused to say anything. Just turned on her heel and went after him."

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Machinfield.

"You have seen her since?"

Kenneth nodded grimly.

"That same night she came to Marlow to see me. She begged me to trust her—she was really wonderful. It was terribly surprising to see her there at all. When I came down into the dining-room and found her there, I was knocked out—the servant didn’t say who she was, and I kept her waiting."

"Well?" asked his companion, when he paused.

"Well," said Kenneth awkwardly, "one has to trust people one loves. She said that he was a relation—she never told me that she had one until then.

"Except her mother who lives in Florence—that costs money, especially an invalid mother," mused Rufus, fingering his long, clean-shaven upper lip. "What is the trouble now? You’ve quarrelled?"

Kenneth took a letter out of his pocket and passed it across to his friend, and Mr. Machinfield opened and read it.

"Dear Kenneth, I’m not seeing you any more. I’m broken-hearted to tell you this. Please don’t try to see me."

"When did this come?"

"Last night. Naturally, I went to her flat. She was out. I went to her office—she didn’t answer when I knocked. I left the bank, and got a terrible rebuff from the manager. To make matters worse, there’s a fellow drumming me for two hundred pounds—everything comes at once. I borrowed the money for dad. What with one thing and another, I’m desperate."

Mr. Machinfield rose from his chair.

"No, no!" he said, "I can’t afford to repay—"

"As for the money—"

"No, no, no!" Kenneth McKay was panic-stricken. "I don’t want to borrow from you—I won’t! God! I’d like to find that old swine and throttle him! He’s at the back of it! He has told her not to have anything more to do with me."

"You don’t know his name?"

"No. He may live in the neighbourhood, but I haven’t seen him—I’m going to do a little detective work."

"He’s a detective," explained Kenneth.

"He has a big bank practice. He was down at our place to-day—queer-looking devil. If he could be a detective anybody could be.

Mr. Machinfield shook his head.

"He’s a detective," explained Kenneth.

"He was in that railway robbery, wasn’t he? J. O. Reeder—yes. Pretty smart fellow."

"He’s an old-as—well, he’s pretty old. And rather old-fashioned."

"Why do you mention him?"

"I don’t know. Talking about detective work brought him into my mind, I suppose."

"Rufus snapped his finger to the waiter, and pointed it at Kenneth.

"You’ll have to take pot luck, but Lumaine is a wonderful cook. He didn’t know that he was until I made him try."

"So they went together to the little flat in Park Lane, and Lumaine, the pallasque, middle-aged waiter, who spoke English with no trace of a foreign accent, prepared a meal, that justified the praise of his master. In the middle of the dinner the subject of Mr. Reeder came again."

"What brought him to Beaconsfield? Is there anything wrong at the bank?"

"Rufus saw the young man’s face go red.

"Yes, there has been money missing—the very large sums. I have my own opinion, but it isn’t fair to—well, you know."

"He was rather incoherent, and Mr. Machinfield did not press the inquiry."

"I hate the bank, anyway—I mean the work. But I had to do something, and when I left Upplingham the governor put me there. The bank, I mean. I was the old governor, he lost his money at Monte Carlo or somewhere—enormous sums. You wouldn’t dream that he was a gambler. I’m not gnawing, but it is a little trying sometimes."

"Mr. Machinfield accompanied him to the door that night, and shivered."

"Cold."

"Shouldn’t be surprised if we had snow yet."

"In point of fact the snow did not come until a week later. It started as rain and became snow in the night, and in the morning people who lived in the country looked out upon a white world; trees that bore a new beauty, and hedges that showed their heads above sloping drifts.

="Two hands reached out of the darkness and gripped her wrists."
MURDER!

There was a car coming from the direction of Westport. The horseman, sitting motionless in the centre of the snowy road, watched the lights grow brighter and brighter. Presently, in the glare of the headlamps, the driver of the car saw the mounted policeman in the centre of the road, saw the lift of his gloved hand, and stopped the machine. It was not difficult to stop, for the wheels were resting on the surface of the road, which had frozen into the worst qualities of glass. And snow was falling on top of this.

Anything wrong?
The driver began to shout the question, and then he saw the huddled figure on the ground. It lay limply like a fallen sack; seemed at first glance to have nothing of human shape or substance.

It drifted on, and the man lay where the snow had frozen over the landscape. The policeman’s horse strained to the side of the car and thrust his nostrils over the cold. He was not uninterested.

Taking his bridle with a shaking hand, the second man stepped out of the car and joined the other two.

It is old Wentworth,” said the policeman.

“Wentworth! Good God!”
The first of the two motorists fell on his knees by the side of the body and peered down into the grimace.

Old Benny Wentworth!

“Good God!” he said again.

He was a middle-aged lawyer, unused to such a horror. Nothing more terrible had disturbed the smooth flow of his life than an occasional quarrel with the secretary of his golf club. And here was death, violent and hideous—a dead man on a snowy road—a man who had telephoned to him two hours before begging him to leave a party and come to him. Though the snow had begun to fall all over again.

“Do you know Mr. Wentworth?”

“He has told me about you.”

“Yes, I know him. I’ve often called at his house; in fact, I called there tonight, but I was shot up. He made arrangements with the chief constable that I should call—He’m?”

The policeman stood over the body, his hands on his hips.

“You stay here. I’ll go and phone the station,” he said.

The figure moved into the light. He was slight, and even more middle-aged than Mr. Wentworth. He wore a flat-topped hat, and his fingers were covered with long, brown, felted gloves. About his neck was an enormous yellow scarf, and Mr. Wentworth noticed, in a numb, mechanical way, that his shoes were covered with snow.

“Am I wrong in thinking that you are in the same predicament?” asked the new-comer. “I was unprepared for the—con—result. It is lamentable that one should have overlooked this possibility.

“Did you pass the policeman?” asked Mr. Wentworth.

Whomever this stranger was, whatever was his character and disposition, it was quite possible that he should have been a policeman in the vicinity.

“Policeman?” The square-hatted man was surprised. “No, I passed no policeman. At any rate, it was very diffi—

“Going towards you—on horseback,” Mr. Wentworth said, “I passed a mounted policeman.”

He said that he would be back afterwards. Mr. Wentworth—although he was not sure. He felt it was a moment for conference.

“Delighted!” murmured the other.

“We’ve met before. My name is Mr. Henry Green.”

Mr. Wentworth took a step forward.

“Not the detective? I thought I’d seen—look!”

He stepped out of the light, and the heap on the ground emerged from the shadow. The lawyer made a dramatic gesture. Mr. Reed came forward slowly.

He stopped over the dead man, took an electric torch from his pocket and shone it steadily on the face. For a long time he looked, he studied. His melancholy face showed no evidence that he was sickened or pained.

“I’ll be Mr. Reed,” he said, and got up, dusting the snow from his knee. He stumbled in the recesses of his overcoat, produced a pair of eyeglasses, set them crudely on his nose, and surveyed the lawyer over their top.

“Very—um—extraordinary,” he was on his way to see him.

Mr. Reed took the case from the lawyer's hand.

“Mr. Reed considered this question.

“Mr. Wentworth, you have no presence—

“I—er—did—er-know him? No; I had never met him.”

The lawyer felt that his own presence—

“This is my clerk, Mr. Henry Green.”

Mr. Reed bowed slightly.

“Why happened this?”

It began with a detailed and graphic description which began with the recounting of what he had said when the telephone call came through to him at Beaconsfield, and how he was dressed, and how the police were called, and then when he found his boots (her first husband had died through an ill-judged excursion into the night air on a foolish journey), and how much trouble he had had in starting, and how long he had had to wait for Henry.

Mr. Reed gave the impression that he was not listening. Once he walked out of the binding light and peered back the way the policeman had gone; once he went over.
to the body and looked at it again; but most of the time he was wandering down the lane, searching the ground with his hand-lamp, with Mr. Edward following at his heels lost any of the narrative he lost.

"Is he dead? I suppose so," suggested the lawyer.

"I don't have never seen anybody—err—dead," said Mr. Reeder gently. "I should, with all reverence and respect, that he was—or—extraordinarily dead."

He looked at his watch.

"At nine-fifteen you met the policeman? He had just discovered the body? It is now nine-thirty-five. How did you know that it was nine-fifteen?"

"I heard the church clock at Woburn Green strike the quarter." Mr. Edward conveyed the impression that the clock struck exclusively for him. Henry faltered the glory; he also had heard the clock.

"At Woburn Green—you heard the clock?"

"Yes—nine-fifteen."

The snow was falling thickly now. It fell on the heap, and lay in the little folds and creases of his clothes.

"He must have lived somewhere about here?"

Mr. Reeder asked the question with great deference.

"My directions were that his house lay off the main road—you would hardly call this a main road—fifty yards beyond a notice-board advertising land for sale—desirable building land.

Mr. Edward pointed to the darkness.

"Just there—the notice-board. Curiously enough, I am the—er—solicitor for the vendor."

His natural inclination was to emphasize the desirability of the land, but he thought it hardly the moment. He returned to the question of Mr. Wentford's house.

"I've only been inside the place once—ten years ago, wasn't it, Henry?"

"A year and nine months," said Henry exactly.

"His feet were cold, his spine chilled. He felt sick."

"You cannot see it from the lane," Mr. Edward continued. "Rather a small, one-storey cottage. He had it especially built for him, apparently. It is not exactly—a palace."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Reeder, as though this were the most striking news he had heard that evening. "In a house he built himself? I suppose he lived, or had, a telephone?"

"He telephoned to me," said Mr. Edward; "therefore he must have had a telephone."

Mr. Reeder frowned, as though he were trying to pick holes in the logic of this statement.

"I will go along and see if it is possible to get through to the police," he suggested.

"The police have already been notified," said the lawyer hastily. "I think we all ought to stay here together till somebody arrives.

"I am in the square hat, now absurdly covered with snow, shook his head. He pointed.

"Woburn Green is there. Why not go on and arouse the—un-local constabulary?"

That idea had not occurred to the lawyer. He instinct urged him to return the way he had come and remain touch with realities in his own prosaic parlour.

"But do you think—" he blinked down at the body. "I mean, it's hardly an act of humanity to leave him—"

"He feels nothing. He is probably in heaven," said Mr. Reeder, and added "Probably. Anyway, the police will know exactly where they can find him."

"There was blood on his hand certainly."

"You know that, Mr. Edward? I haven't been near him?"

Alas for our excellent system of secondary education! Henry was reverting to the illicitte stock whence he sprang.

"How D'you Do?"

The policeman stood over the body, his hands on his hips," Edgar Wallace dictates a thrilling incident of his remarkable story "Red Aces."

WILL be folly for me to imagine any reader of "Red Aces" pausing in the beam of J. G. Reeder's torch to peruse my editorial chat. No doubt each one of you has previously turned this page. I am not offended. In passing on you have paid me the compliment of providing you with a story as absorbing, so tense, so thrilling that it held your whole attention from first to last.

"Send in the heavy!"

I wanted it that way. So did Edgar Wallace. When sending along this manuscript he wrote: "Bob (his secretary) agrees with me that this is the best story I have written for a very long time."

I am certain this week will bring a deafening "Hear! Hear!" from all parts of the land, and, later on, from every corner of the earth.

"I am in the preparation of "The Thriller," neither money nor pains have been spared to secure a really first-class programme. The best "thriller" writers of the day have been secured.

Authors whose work is eagerly sought after have rallied around and given of their best for the success of the new venture. Edgar Wallace—Sydney Horler—Hugh Clevely—John G. Brandon—Stacey Blake—Leslie Charteris—to mention only a few of the famous names amongst our contributors."

From the pens of these masters of mystery have come stories thoroughly up to the standard of their well-known books, so that for a modest twopenny a week readers of "The Thriller" will be able to secure yarns of a type and quality hitherto only available at bound-new prices."

You will find details of our immediate programmes on page 22. Next week's issue will contain a thrilling book-length complete story of the underworld, by Hugh Clevely. I have no hesitation in saying that "Mollie Lynch Law"—reaches fully as high a standard as the one you have just read.

You will revel in the amazing adventure of Michael Lynch, the problem of whose identity sets the underworld in a ferment of fear and bewilderment.

More star stories to follow. In our third issue we have a return of Edgar Wallace and the inimitable J. G. Reeder, whilst further yarns from this world-famous author will follow at intervals. Never before in the history of popular weekly journalism has such a galaxy of talent been brought together. Never before has the work of so celebrated a group of authors been available at such a price.

Without a doubt "The Thriller" is the last word in the field of fiction. It is different. It baffles! It entertain's! On no account must you miss a single issue! Avoid disappointment by asking your newsagent to reserve your copy for you.

Sincerely yours, until we meet again amidst the thrills of next week's issue,
He came back to the door, and stood debating, with himself what steps he should take. He had seen in the darkness two small white squares at the top of the door, and he had thought they were little panes of the thick-stained glass such as one sees in the tops of such doors. But, probably in a gust of wind, one of them became detached and fell at his feet. He stooped and picked it up, it was a piece of diamonds. He put his lamp on the second; it was the ace of hearts. They had both apparently been fastened side by side to the door, but there was something that had broken them. Perhaps the owner of the house had put them there. Possibly they had some significance, fulfilled the function of mementos.

No answer came to his knocking, and Mr. Reeder levered a door with his shoulder. It was locked. He turned the wheel and unlocked the door. He found, as he had expected, a light which he turned on. He went into the room, and his heavy breath, his breathing heavily, though he was a man of considerable strength.

There were only two ways to go into the house; one was the first, the other the head.

He looked around, and saw a small garden gate on his right, set between two unkempt hedges. The gate was open, and this method seemed to him the best way of examining it by the light of his lamp.

He expected to find blood, and found it—just a smear. No bloodstains on the ground; but, then, the snow would have cleaned them out. He investigated, and found the print of footsteps going up the winding path. They were rather small, and he thought they were recently made. He kept his light upon them until they led to the Christmas card which was played behind the door.

In another second the light had vanished. But there was somebody in the house.

The footsteps led up to the door. Here he paused and knocked. There was no answer, and he knocked again more loudly. The chilly wind sent the snowflakes swirling about him. Mr. Reeder, who had a secret sense of humour, smiled. In the remote days of his youth, his favourite amusements had been to capture a sparkling Father Christmas knocking at the door of a wayside cottage. He pictured himself as a felt嘉ted Father Christmas, and the whimsical fancy slightly pleased him.

He knocked a third time and listened, and, when no answer came, he stepped back and walked to the room where he had been. He closed the door, and tried to peer between the doors and windows, but there was only a thud—but it was not in the house. It may have been the wind. He looked round, and listened, but the wind was not repeated, and he returned to his ineptual starlings.

There was no sign of a fire. A candle came back to knock for the fourth time, then tried the other side of the building, and here he made a discovery. A narrow casement window, deeply recessed, and made of iron, was singing in the wind, and beneath the window was a double set of footsteps, one coming and one going. They went away in the direction of the lane.

He peered into the house of death.

Mr. Reeder locked round the room. It was pleasantly furnished—not luxuriously so, but pleasantly. Evidently a sitting-room. Except that the mantel-board had fallen, or been dragged down by the wind. The hearth was littered with broken china pots and vases; the hearth itself was still held in position at one end by some attachment to the mantel-piece. That and the blue hearth rug before the fire, which was curiously stained.

There were other little splodges of darkness on the surface of the carpet, and a flower-pot was knocked down near the door.

He saw a waste-paper basket and turned over its contents. Covers of little books, apparently—there were five of them—but no contents. By the side of the fireplace was a dwarf bookcase. The books were dummies. He pulled one end of the case, and it swung out, being hinged at the other end.

"Hum," said Mr. Reeder, and pushed the shelves back into their original position.

There was a cap on the door by the table, and he picked it up. It was wet. He examined, thrust into his pocket, and turned his attention to the girl.

"How long have you been here, Miss—"

"I think you had better tell me your name." She was looking up at him; he saw her wet her dry lips.

"Half an hour. I don't know—it may be longer."

"Miss?" he asked again.

"Lyn—Margot Lynn."

He pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"Margot Lynn. And you've been here half an hour. Who else has been here?"

"Nobody," she said, springing to her feet.

"What has happened? Did he—did they fight?"

He put his hand on her shoulder gently and pressed her down into the chair.

"Did who fight whom?" asked Mr. Reeder.

His English was always very good on these occasions.

"Nobody has been here," she said inconsequently.

Mr. Reeder passed the question.

"You came from—"

"I came from Bourne End Station. I walked here. I've often come that way, and Mr. Watford's secretary."

"In the house of death."

"It is on your sleeve! Ill!"

Mr. Eward stared. There was a red, metallic look of something on Mrs. Eward's sleeve. 

"You had better go on to the police-station," said Mr. Reeder, "and I will come and see you in the morning."

"The red aces."

Mr. Eward climbed into the driver's seat gratefully, keeping a steady distance between himself and his shivering driver. The car was on a declivity, and drove, without trouble. He turned the wheels straight and took off the brake. The machine skidded and slithered forward, and presently Mr. Reeder, following in its wake, heard the score of night birds, and the sound of his own breathing. He peeped out of the window, and was not surprised to see the snowflakes dancing between him and his shivering driver. The car was on a declivity, and his face was right against the window glass. He had hard mail in his shoes. At last he saw a small garden gate on his right, set between two unkempt hedges. The gate was open, and he entered, and immediately passed into the darkness of the house. He had a feeling that somebody was watching him. He was, perhaps, the second one, as the light had vanished. But there was somebody in the house.

The footsteps led up to the door. Here he paused and knocked. There was no answer, and he knocked again more loudly. The chilly wind sent the snowflakes swirling about him. Mr. Reeder, who had a secret sense of humour, smiled. In the remote days of his youth, his favourite amusements had been to capture a sparkling Father Christmas knocking at the door of a wayside cottage. He pictured himself as a felt嘉ted Father Christmas, and the whimsical fancy slightly pleased him.

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The THRILLER

"You walked here at nine o'clock because you're Mr. Wentford's secretary. That was a story, wasn't it?"

She was searching his face fearfully.

"Has anything happened? Are you a police detective? Has anything happened to Mr. Wentford? Tell me—tell me—"

"We are excepting you. You know that?"

She nodded. Her breath was coming quickly. He thought she found breathing a painful process.

"He told me yes. I didn't know what it was about. He wanted his lawyer here, too. I think he was in some kind of trouble."

"When did you see him last?"

She hesitated.

"He called me on the telephone—once from London. I haven't seen him for two days."

"And the person who was here?" asked Mr. Reeder after a pause.

"Who?" she echoed. "I swear there was nobody here!" She was frantic in her desire to convince him. "I've been here half an hour—waiting for him. I let myself in—I have a key. There is it."

He held out trembling hands in her bag and produced a ring with two keys, one larger than the other.

"He wasn't here when I came in. I—I think he must have gone to town. He is not a pauper.

"Mr. J. G. Reeder put his hand in his pocket, took out two playing-cards, and laid them on the table.

"Why did he have those pinned to his door?"

She looked at him round-eyed.

"Pinned to his door?"

"The outer door," said Mr. Reeder, "or, as he would call it, the street door."

She shook her head.

"'I've never seen them before. He is not the kind of man to put up things like that. He is very retiring, and hates drawing attention to himself."

"I'm not retracting," repeated Mr. Reeder. "and hated drawing attention to himself."

J. G. REEDER'S THEORY

Surely in his tone was emphasized the sense he used. She shrank back. Her voice was a whisper: "He's not dead? Oh, my God! He's not dead?"

Mr. Reeder smoothed his chin.

"Yes, I'm afraid—um—he is dead."

She clutched at the edge of the table for support. Mr. Reeder had never seen such horror, such despair on a human face before.

"Wentford was murdered?"

"You're trying to say 'murder'!" said Reeder gently. "Yes, I'm very much afraid it was murder."

He caught her in his arms as she fell, and laying her back on the sofa, went in search of water. The taps were frozen, but he found some water in a kettle, and, filling a glass with this, he returned to sprinkle it on her face, half-mad with fright. That something of the sort was necessary; but he found her sitting up, her face in her hands.

"Lie down, my dear, and keep quiet," said Mr. Reeder, and she obeyed meekly.

He looked round the room. The thing that struck him anew was the revolver which hung on the wall near the right-hand side of the fireplace just above the bookcase. It was placed to the hand of anybody who walked his back to the window. Behind the armchair was a screen, and, tapping it, Mr. Reeder discovered that it was of sheet-iron.

He went outside to look at the door, turning on the hall light. It was a very thick door, and the inside was made of quarter-inch steel plate, screwed firmly to the wood. Leading from the kitchen was the bed-room, evidently Wentford's. The only light here came from one old, window near the ceiling. There were no other windows, and about the narrow window was a stout steel cage. On the wall by the bed hung a second pistol. He found a third weapon in the closet, behind a coat hanging in the hall, a fourth.

The cottage was a square box of concrete. The roof, as he afterwards learned, was tiled over sheet-iron, and, except for the window, there was nothing which one might call a window. There must have been an alarm-bell ringing when the window was opened.

There was blood on the mat in the hall, blood in the tiny lobby. He came back to the outer door, and found there was no smell of cordite—and, having seen the body, he was not surprised.

"Now, my dear," he sat up again. "I was a police officer. I am a—gentleman called in by your friend, Mr. Wentford—your late friend,' he corrected himself, 'to do something—I know not what! He called me by phone; I gave him my name. Now, my dear, the reason why he was sending for me. You, as his secretary, may perhaps—"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. He had never mentioned you, or the telephone."

"I am not a policeman," said Mr. Reeder again, and his voice was very gentle; "therefore, my dear, you need not listen to me before telling me the truth, because they won't have any trouble with you. And these active and intelligent men, will probably discover all that I have seen, even if I did not tell them. Who was the man who went out of this house when I knocked at the door?"

"The man's face was deadly pale, but she did not flinch. He wondered if she was as pale when she was not so pale. Mr. Reeder wondered all sorts of queer little things like that; his mind could never stagnate.

"There was nobody in this house—since I have been here."

Mr. Reeder did not press her. He let the eyelids close, shook his head, shrugged his shoulders.

"It's a great pity," he said. "Can you tell me anything about Mr. Wentford?"

"No," she said, in a low voice. "He was in the kitchen; he was coming to know that. He didn't want anybody to know."

He made me swear to tell no one, but that must come out. He has been very particular about that."

"It is an invalid. I conducted his business."

"All this very jerkily."

"Have you been here often?"

She shook her head.

"We usually meet somewhere by appointment, generally in a lonely place where one wouldn't be likely to meet anybody who knew us. He was a stranger at first, and he didn't like anybody coming here."

"Did he ever entertain friends here?"

"No." She was very emphatic. "I'm sure he didn't. The only person he ever saw was Dr. Hulbert, and he was a personal friend."

"You're a private detective, Mr. Reeder?"

"More intimate than private," mumbled that gentleman. "In these days—er—er—of publicity one has—er—little more than the privilege of a goldfish in his—er—crystal bowl."

The sergeant saw something in the wastepaper basket, and pulled it out. It was a

...
small, loose-leafed book. There was another, indeed many. He piled live on the table, but they were merely the covers and nothing more.

"Diaries," said Mr. Reeder gently. "You will observe that each one is digger than the other."

"But how do you know they're diaries?" demanded the police officer testily.

"Because the word 'diary' is printed on the inside covers," said Mr. Reeder, more gently than ever.

This proved to be the case, though the printing had been overlooked. Mr. Reeder had not overlooked it; he had not even overlooked the two scraps of burnt paper in the hearth, all that remained of those diaries.

There is a safe let in the wall behind the bookcase," he pointed out. "It may or may not be full of clues. I should imagine it is not. But I shouldn't touch it if I were you, sergeant," he said hastily, "not without gloves. These diaries belong to the late Mr. Wentford, and he will be here eventually, and they'll be ever so rude if they photograph a finger-print and find it is yours."

Gaylor of the Yard came at half-past two. He had been brought out of his bed through a blinding snowstorm and along a road that was thoroughly vile.

The young lady had gone home. Mr. Reeder was sitting meditatively before the fire which he had made up, smoking the cheapest kind of cigarette.

"Is the body here?"

"Mr. Reeder shook his head.

"Have they found that mounted policeman, Verity?"

Again Mr. Reeder signalled a negative.

"They found his horse. He was discovered on the Beaconsfield Road. There were bloodstains on the saddle."

"Bloodstains?" said the startled officer.

"Stains of blood," explained Mr. Reeder.

He was staring into the fire, the cigarette drooping limply from his mouth, on his face an air of settled melancholy; he did not even turn his head to address Inspector Gaylor.

"The young lady has gone home, as I said. The local constabulary gave you particulars of the lady, of course. She acted as secretary to the late Mr. Wentford, and he appears to have been very fond of her, since he has left his fortune as to two-thirds to the young lady and one-third to his sister. There is no money in the house as far as can be ascertained, but he banks with the Great Central Bank, Beaconsfield branch." Reeder fumbled in his pocket. "Here are the two aces."

"The two what?" asked the puzzled inspector.

"The two aces," Mr. Reeder passed the playing-cards over his shoulder, his eyes still upon the fire. "The ace of diamonds, and, I believe, the ace of hearts. I am not very well acquainted with either."

"Where did you get these?"

"The other explained, and he heard Gaylor's exasperated chuckle.

"What's this, a magazine story murder?" he asked contemptuously.

"I seldom read magazine stories," said Mr. Reeder, between yawns, "but these cards were put up after the murder."

The detective examined the aces intently.

"Why are you so sure of that? Why shouldn't they have been put up before?"

J. G. groaned at his scepticism, and, reaching out, took a pack of cards from a table.

"You will find the two aces missing from this pack. You would have also found that two cards had been stuck together. Blood does that: No finger-prints. I should imagine the cards were sorted over after the untimely demise of Mr. Wentford, and the two significant ones extracted and exhibited."

The inspector made a very careful search of the bed-room, and came back to find Mr. Reeder napping himself to sleep.

"What did they do to the girl—those local blokes?" asked Gaylor coarsely.

Reeder's right shoulder came up in a lazy shrug.

"They escorted her to the station and took a statement from her. The inspector was kind enough to furnish me with a copy—you will find it on this table. They also examined her hands and her clothes, but it was quite unnecessary. There is corroborative evidence that she arrived at Bourne End Station at ten minutes past eight, as she says she did—the murder was committed at forty minutes past seven, a few minutes before or after."

"How the dickens do you know that?" asked the astonished officer. "Is there any proof?"

Mr. Reeder shook his head.

"A romantic surprise," he sighed heavily. "You have to realise, my dear Gaylor, that I have a criminal mind. I see the worst in people, and the worst in every human action. It is very tragic. There are moments when—" He sighed again. "Forty minutes past seven," he said simply. "That is my romantic surprise. The doctor will probably confirm my view. The body lay here—he pointed to the hearthrag—until well, quite a considerable time."

Gaylor was skimming two closely-written sheets of foolscap. Suddenly he stopped.

"You're wrong," he said. "Listen to this statement made at the station by Miss Lynn: 'I rang up my uncle from the station, telling him I might be late because of the snowy road. He answered: 'Come as soon as possible.'"

Silently, stealthily, he crept to the door and gently lowered the safety-catch of his pistol.
as you can." He spoke in a very low tone; I thought he sounded agitated. That knocks your theory about the time a little bit awry, eh?"[10]
Mr. Reeder looked round and blinked open his eyes.
"Yes, doesn't it? It must have been terribly embarrassing."
"What was embarrassing?" asked the purpled police officer.
"Everything," mumbled Mr. Reeder, his chin falling on his breast.

THE MISSING POLICEMAN

"I mustn't trouble about Reeder," said Gaylor to the superintendent in the course of a long telephone conversation, "is that you feel he does know something which he shouldn't know. I've never seen him in a case where he hasn't given me the impression that he was the guilty party—he knew so much about the crime."
"Humour him," said the superintendent.
"He'll be in the Public Prosecutor's Department one of these days. He never was in a case that he didn't make himself an accessory by picking half the clues."
At five o'clock the detective shook the lesser awake.
"You'd better go home, old man," he said. "We'll leave an officer in charge here."
Mr. Reeder rose with a groan, splashed some soda-water from a syphon into a glass and drank it.
"I must stay, I'm afraid, unless you have any very great objection."
"What's the idea of waiting?" asked Gaylor in surprise.
Mr. Reeder looked from side to side, as though he were seeking an answer.
"I have a theory—an absurd one, of course—but I believe the murderers will come back. And honestly I don't think your policeman would be of much use, unless you were inclined to give the poor fellow the lethal weapon necessary to defend himself."
Gaylor sat down squarely before him, his large gloved hands on his knees.
"Tell papa," he said.
Mr. Reeder looked at him pathetically.
"There is nothing to tell, my dear Mr. Gaylor: merely suspicion, bred, as I said, in my peculiarly morbid mind, having perhaps no foundation in fact. Those two cards, for example—that was a stupid piece of bravado. But it has happened before. You remember the Togmouth case, and the Lavender Hill case with the man with the alibi, and you think they must get their ideas out of books," he said, bending over to stir the embers of the fire. "The reason why that kind of literature must necessarily produce its reaction."
Gaylor took the cards from his pocket and examined them.
"A bit of tomfoolery," was his verdict.
Mr. Reeder sighed and shook his head at the fire.
"Murders as a rule have no sense of humour. They are excitable people, frightened people, but they are never comic people."
He walked to the door and pulled it open. Snow had ceased to fall. He came back.
"If you propose leaving on duty," he asked.
"I'll find one," said Gaylor. "There are half a dozen within call. A whistle will bring one along."
Mr. Reeder looked at him thoughtfully.
"I don't think I should. Let us wait until daylight—or perhaps you wish to wait? I don't think anybody would harm you if I rather fancy they would be glad to see the back of you."
"Harm me?" said Gaylor indignantly, but Reeder was no notice of the interruption.
"My own idea is that. I should brew a dish of tea, and possibly fry a few eggs. I am a little hungry."
Gaylor walked to the door and frowned into the darkness.
"Dr. and Mrs. Reeder before, and too wise a man to reject the advice summarily. Besides, if Reeder was entering, or had entered the Public Prosecutor's Department, he would occupy a rank equivalent to superintendent."
"I am all for eggs," said Gaylor, and bolted the outer door.
The older man disappeared into the kitchen and came back with a kettle, which he placed upon the fire, went out again, and returned with a frying-pan.
"Are you folks going to take your hat off?" asked Gaylor curiously.
Mr. Reeder did not turn his head, but shook the pan gently to ensure an even distribution of the boiling fat.
"Very rarely," he said. "On Christmas Day I allow myself it."
And then Gaylor asked a fatuous question; at least, it sounded fatuous to him, and yet subconsciously he felt that the other might supply an immediate and dramatic answer.
"Who do you take the blame for?"
"Two men, possibly three," said Mr. Reeder instantly; "but I rather think two. Neither was a professional burglar. One, at any rate, thought more of the killing than of any profit he might have got out of it. Suchler found anything worth taking, and even if they had opened the safe they would have discovered nothing of value. The young lady, Miss Margot Lynn, could, I think, have saved them a lot of trouble in their search for treasure. I may be mistaken here, but I rarely fall into error. Miss Margot is—"
He stopped, looked round quickly.
"What is it?" asked Gaylor, but Reeder put his finger to his lips.
He rose, moved across the room to the door which led to the tiny lobby through which he had made his entrance. He stood with one hand on the knob, and Gaylor saw that in the other was a Browning pistol. Slowly he turned the handle. The door was locked from the inside.
In two strides Reeder was at the front door, turned the key, and pulled it open. Then, to the inspector's amazement, he saw his companion take one step and fall sprawling on his face in the snow. He ran to his assistance. Something caught him by the ankle and flung him forward.
Reeder was on his feet and assisted the other to his.
"A little wire fastened between the doors—" he explained.
A bright beam shot out from his electric torch as he turned the corner of the house. There was nobody in sight, but the window of the house was open, and there were new footprints in the snow leading away into the darkness.
"Well, I'm damned!" said Gaylor.
"G. G. Reeder said nothing. He was smiling when he came back into the room, having stopped to break the wire with a kick.
"Do you think somebody was in the lobby?"
"I know somebody was in the lobby," he said. "Dear me! How foolish of us not to have had a policeman posted outside the door. You notice that a pane of glass has been cut? Our friend must have been listening there."
"Was there only one?"
"Oh no," said Mr. Reeder gravely. "And was he the one who came that way before—I don't think so."
He took the frying-pan from the hearth where he had put it, and resumed his frying of eggs, served them on two plates, and threw both into the fire. It was just as though death had not left in that lobby a few minutes before.
"No, they won't come back, there is no longer reason for our staying. There were two, but only one came into the house. Their bodies are very heavy, and they may have a long way to travel, and they would not risk being anywhere near daybreak."
At six o'clock the agricultural labourer of whom the post girl wrote so charmingly returned to his work, and they won't risk meeting him, either."
They had a solemn breakfast, Gaylor pitying the other with questions which in the main he did not answer.
"You think Margot Lynn is in this—"
"in the murder, I mean?"
Reeder shook his head.
"No, no," he said. "I'm afraid it isn't as easy as that."

Daylight had come greyly when, having checked the house, they plodded down the lane. Reeder's car had been retrieved in the night, and a more powerful machine fitted with chain-wheels was waiting to take them to Beaconsfield. They did not reach that town for two hours more on the way back, for the snow had come upon a little knot of policemen and farm labourers looking sombrely at the body of Constable Verly. He lay under some bushes a few yards from the road, and had frozen to death.
"Shot," said a police officer. "The divisional surgeon's just seen him."
Stiff and cold, with his botted legs stretched wide, his overcoat turned up and his cap worn backwards, was the officer who had ridden out from the station courtyard so unsuspectingly the night before. His horse had already been found, the bloodstains that had painted it in the snow accented for.
Gaylor and Reeder drove on into Beaconsfield. Gaylor was a depressed and silent man; Mr. Reeder was silent, but not depressed. As they came out into the main road he turned to his companion, and asked:
"I wonder why they didn't bring their own axes?"
THE VEILED WOMAN.

The most accurate account of the double tragedy appeared in a late edition of the "Evening Post-Courier."

At some hour between eight and ten, John Verity, a member of the mounted branch of the Buckinghamshire Constabulary, and Mr. Wentford, an eccentric and it is believed, a riel re-cluse, were done to death in or in the vicinity of a lonely cottage in the neighbourhood of Beaufield. At quarter past nine, Constable Verity was patrolling the road and came upon a body which was afterwards identified as that of the late Mr. Wentford, who lived in a small cottage some hundred yards from the spot where the body was found. Mr. Wentford had been brutally bludgeoned, and was dead when the discovery was made. Simultaneously with the discovery there appeared upon the scene Mr. Walter Enward, a well-known Beaufield solicitor, and his clerk, who, at Mr. Wentford's request, were on their way to visit him. It is believed that Mr. Wentford intended making a will, though no documents were found in the house to support this supposition.

"Leaving Mr. Enward to watch the body, Constable Verity rode towards Beaufield to summon assistance. He never saw alive after that moment."

"The dead man's niece, who also acted as his secretary, Miss Margot Lynn, had been summoned from London, and she arrived at the cottage a few minutes after the body had been taken away by the unknown murderer, discovered the place in disorder, though she did not at that time suspect a tragedy."

"The mystery was still further complicated in the earlier hours of the dawn, when a cow-boy, on his way to work, discovered the dead body of Constable Verity on the Beaufield side of the lane where Mr. Wentford's body was found. He had been shot through the heart at close range. No sound of the shot had been heard, but it may be explained that there were very few houses in the neighbourhood, and snow was falling heavily. A carter in the employ of a neighbouring farmer thought he had heard a shot fired much earlier in the evening, but this may be accounted for by the fact that snow was falling so thickly on the railway line, which is situated a mile away, that fog signals were being used."

"Chief Detective-Inspector Gaylor has been called in by the Buckinghamshire police, and he is being assisted by Mr. J. G. Reeder, of the Public Prosecutor's Department."

"The timetable, so far as can be ascertained, is as follows:

9.15. Constable Verity discovers the dead body of Mr. Wentford.
9.30. Mr. Enward and his clerk drive up by motor-car and are stopped by the constable, who rides into Beaufield for assistance.
6.45 a.m. The body of Constable Verity is found shot dead, 120 yards north of where the body of Mr. Wentford was found."

Mr. Kingfether, the sub-manager of the Beaufield branch of the Great Central Bank, read this account, and was rightly agitated. He got to the bank very early that morning, for he had a letter to write, and his managerial office gave him the privacy he required. He was a serious man with solemn-looking spectacles on a pale, plump face. He had a little, black moustache, and his cheeks and chin were invariably blue, for he had what barbers call a "strong beard."

The newspapers arrived as he was writing. They were pushed under the closed outer door of the bank, and, being at the moment stuck for the alternative to an often reiterated term of endearment, he rose and brought the newspapers into the office, put a new coal on the fire, and sat down to glance through them. There were two papers, one financial and one human.

He read the latter first, and there was the murder in detail, though it had only occurred the night before. The discovery of the constable's body was not so fully described, because it had not been discovered until just before dawn.

He read and re-read, his mind in a whirl, and then he took the telephone and called Mr. Enward. That gentleman was also in his office that snowy morning, though the hour was eight.

"Good-morning, Kingfether. Yes—yes, it's true—I was practically a witness. They've found the poor policeman—dead—yes, murdered—yes, shot. I was the last person to speak to him. Dreadful—dreadful—dreadful! That such horrors can be—I say that such horrors can be—I said that such..."

"What's the matter with your 'phone? He banks with you? Really? Really? I'll come over and talk with you!"

Mr. Kingfether hung up the telephone and wiped his face with his handkerchief. It was a face that became moist on the least provocation. Presently he folded the newspaper and looked at his unfinished letter. He was on the eighth page, and the last words he had written were:

"...can hardly live the day without seeing your darling face, my own."

It was obvious that he was not writing to his general manager, or to a client who had overdrawn his account.

He added "beloved" mechanically, though he had used the word a dozen times before. Then he unfolded the paper and read of the murder again.
Kemeth was supposed to arrive at nine.

"As a rule he was late. He was late that morning.

Mr. Reeder saw the young man through a window in the manager's office, and thought that he did not look well. His eyes were tired; he had shaved himself carelessly, for his chin bore a strip of shaving paste. Perhaps that accounted for the spots on the soiled cuff of his shirt, thought Mr. Reeder, when he confronted the young man.

"No, I will see him alone," said Reeder.

"He is rather an insolent pup," warned Mr. Kingfether.

"I have tamed lions," said Mr. Reeder.

When Kemeth came in:

"Close the door, please, and sit down. You know me, my boy?"

"Yes, sir," said Kemeth.

"That is blood on your shirt, isn't it? Cut your chin, did you? You haven't been home all night?"

Kemeth did not answer at once.

"No, sir. I haven't changed my shirt, if that is what you mean."

Mr. Reeder smiled.

"Exactly."

He fixed the young man with a long, searching glance.

"Why did you go to the house of the late Mr. Wentford last night between the hours of eight-thirty and nine-thirty?"

He saw the boy go deathly white.

"I didn't know he was dead—I didn't even know his name until this morning. I was there because—well, I was blackmailing enough to spy on somebody—follow them from London and sneak into the house—"

"The young lady, Margot Lynn. You're in love with her? Engaged to her, perhaps?

I'm in love with her—I'm not engaged to her. We are no longer—friends," said Kemeth in a low voice. "She told me I had been there, I suppose."

And then, as a light broke on him: "Or did you find my cap? It had my name in it."

Reeder nodded.

"You came down on the same train as Miss Lynn? Good. Then you will be able to prove that you left Bourne End Station."

"No, I shan't," said Kemeth. "I clipped out of the train on the line. Naturally I didn't want her to see me. I got out through the level crossing. There was nobody about—it was snowing heavily."

"Very awkward," Mr. Reeder pursed his lips. "You thought there was some sort of friendship between Mr. Wentford and the young lady?"

Kemeth made a gesture of despair.

"I don't know what I thought—I was just a jealous fool."

A very long silence, broken by a coal falling from the fire on to the iron bottom of the fender.

"You paid out six hundred pounds the other day to a lady on Mr. Wentford's cheque?"

"I didn't know that Wentford was—a dead man, but Mr. Reeder hinted at that aspect of the situation. 'Yes—a Wdel lady. She came by car. It was a large sum of money, but the day before Mr. Kingfether had told me to honour any cheque of Mr. Wentford, no matter to whom the money was paid."

"Will you tell me something about your quarrel with the young lady?" Mr. Reeder asked. "It is, I realise, a delicate subject."

Kemeth hesitated, then told his story as he had told it to Mr. Machfield.

"Miss Lynn called on you that night—did she ask you to destroy the photograph you had taken?"

The young man was surprised at this query.

"No. I had forgotten all about the photograph till the other day. I must have sent the pack to be developed or put them aside to send them. I've no idea what's happened to them. Would the picture of Mr. Wentford be any good to you?"

J. G. Reeder shook his head. He asked very little more. He was, it seemed, the easiest man in the world to satisfy. Before he left he saw the sub-manager alone.

"Did you tell Mr. McKay that he was to honour any cheque of Mr. Wentford's no matter to whom the money was paid?"

The answer came instantly.

"Of course not! Naturally I should expect him to be sure that the person..."
who presented the cheque had authority. And another curious thing which I have not mentioned is that the inn opposite, and I usually have a seat in the window, where I can see these premises. And I have no recollection of any car drawing up to the bank.

"Heaven alone knew that Mr. Reeder said.

He made a few inquiries in Beaconsfield and the neighbourhood, and went on to Wentford's house, where Gaylord had arranged to meet him. The inspector was picked up and down the snowy terrace before the house, and he was in very good spirits.

"I think I've got the man," he said.

"Do you know anybody named McKay?" Mr. Reeder asked him quickly.

"I know a dozen," he said.

"Come inside and I'll show you something.

Reeder followed him into the room. The carpet had been taken up, the furniture removed. Evidently a thorough search had been in progress. Gaylord swung back the bookcase; the safe door was ajar.

"We got two keys from the maker—quick work! They were down here by eighty

He stopped down and pulled out three bundles. The first was made up of bills, the second out of gold, the third was a thick bundle of French banknotes each to the value of 1,000 francs.

"That is surprise No. 1," began the detective, flourishing the money. "French banknotes as well.

"I am afraid it doesn't surprise me," said Mr. Reeder apologetically. "You see, I've been examining the gentleman's bank book. By the way, here are the numbers of the notes. Mr. Wentford's account.

He handed over a slip of paper.

"Six hundred pounds is a lot of money," said Gaylord. "I'll phone these through. Well, what else did you find in the bankbook?"

"I observed," said Mr. Reeder, "though I did not emphasise the fact, that all the money he paid in was in French banknotes.

The inspector extracted a sheet of headed paper from one heap. Written in pencil was what was evidently a memorandum from somebody who signed himself "D. H. Hartford."

"I have found that the man who is employing a private detective to find ye is George McKay, of Sunset House, Marlow. I don't know what his intentions are, but they're not pleasant. There is nothing to worry about; he is employing one of the most incompetent private detectives in the business.

"Extraordinary," said Mr. Reeder, and coughed.

The first thing to do is to find Hartford," began Gaylord.

"He is in Australia," Mr. Reeder interrupted. "At the time that letter was written his address was 237, Lamb's Buildings. He became bankrupt, and left the country during the War." "How do you know?" asked Gaylord.

"Because I am—the incompetent private detective, engaged to find Mr. Lynam by a gentleman named Mr. Wentford. And I did not find him," said Mr. Reeder.

"Why did McKay wish to find this man?"

"He owed him money. I know no other thing. The search fell off because—um—Mr. George McKay owed me money. One has to live."

"Then you knew about Wentford?"

"Mr. Reeder took counsel with himself."

"Um—yes. I recognised him last night—by one of those things I thought it was very odd. I also—er—drove over to Marlow and made inquiries. Mr. McKay—Mr. George McKay did not leave his house last night, and at the moment the murder was committed was entertaining the—um—vice to dinner."

Gaylord stroked at him."

"You're a killjoy," he said, and Mr. Reeder laughed heavily.

"I'm going to have these developed."

He held up a little film pack. "I found them in the old man's bedroom. I don't suppose they'll tell us anything."

"I fancy they will be very instructive," said Mr. Reeder, "especially if you are interested in natural history. There will also be a picture of Mr. Wentford, or Lynam, with his arm around the shoulder of his niece.

Gaylord sat down.

"Are you pulling my leg?" he demanded.

"Revenen forbid!" answered Mr. Reeder piously.

Gaylord got up and stood squarely before him.

"What do you know about these murders, Mr. Reeder?"

"I'll challenge you to a public debate in London, that's interesting. Poor Henry is suffering from a severe chill, and is in bed, but his mother, an admirable and hardworking woman, permitted me to see him. And the two sisters joined the door, all very very interesting indeed! Mr. Gaylord, if you will permit me to interview old George McKay I will undertake to tell you who committed these murders."

"The girl told you something—the girl Lynam."

"The girl has told me nothing. She also may be very informative. I purpose spending a night or two in her flat—um—not, I hope, without the chaperon."

Gaylord looked at him, amazed. Mr. Reeder was blushing.

The bank closed he handed over the key of the safe to Kenneth McKay. He led the people of the bank closed and the name of the safe. He was back by six, I'd like to you to keep for me."

Kenneth McKay did not receive the suggestion at all favourably. He also wished to get away. 

"Well, you can't," said the other sharply. The bank inspector will be in tomorrow to complete the bank record account. It will probably be evidence."

Mr. Kingfather got out his little car and drove to London. He parked his machine in a Bloomsbury square and made his way on foot to the Grosvenor House. The inspector who took him up grunted a welcome.

"The young lady's in, sir," he said.

"The young lady" herself opened the door to his ring.

"Look who's here!" she said in surprise, and threw herself at him to let him in.

She was dressed in an old kimono, and did not look at all attractive as usual."

"In another half-hour I'd have been out," she said. "I didn't get up till after lunch. These late nights are surely hell!"

She led the way to a sitting-room that was large and sparsely furnished. There was a large room, its floor covered with a soft carpet that had once cost a lot of money and was now marked with stains. Before the fire was a big divan, and on this she had left the shawl. The fire and the no Ok, you are aware, with a peculiarly English air of superiority. I am also interested in natural history; I have always been I am curious about criminals and chickens—I have perhaps the finest Wyandottes in London, but that is in the private garden. I should be grateful to give you my theories. The blood on the police's horse; that is interesting. And Henry Green—Mr. Edward's clerk—the blood on his coat, though he did not go near Mr. McKay, he has been fairly rough. Poor Henry is suffering from a severe chill, and is in bed, but his mother, an admirable and hardworking woman, permitted me to see him. And the two sisters joined the door, all very very interesting indeed! Mr. Gaylord, if you will permit me to interview old George McKay I will undertake to tell you who committed these murders."

"The girl told you something—the girl Lynam."

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Gaylord looked at him, amazed. Mr. Reeder was blushing.

Who killed Wentford?

The last page of the letter which Mr. Reeder produced had begun with such ease in the early part of the morning was extremely difficult to read. He had the two notes joined to the door, all very very interesting indeed! Mr. Gaylord, if you will permit me to interview old George McKay I will undertake to tell you who committed these murders."

"The girl told you something—the girl Lynam."

"The girl has told me nothing. She also may be very informative. I purpose spending a night or two in her flat—um—not, I hope, without the chaperon."

Gaylord looked at him, amazed. Mr. Reeder was blushing.

"Now, off you pop, and don't worry. The governor will be seeing you tonight—talk it over with him. I think you'd better, in case you do anything turns up—you know what I mean."

He took a letter out of his pocket and gave it to her with an air of embarrassment.

"I wrote it, or rather started it, this morning—I couldn't finish it. I mean every word I say."

She kissed him loudly.

"You're a darling," she said.

Mr. Reeder hastened back to his office to find only a junior in charge. Kenneth McKay, despite instructions to the contrary, had gone, and the sub-manager sat down to a rough examination of important letters. He could not do justice to his task. He possessed one of those slow-starting tempers that gathers momentum from its own weight. A little grievance and a long brooding brought him to a condition of sensuous and unreasoning fury.

He was in his state when Kenneth McKay returned.
"I asked you to stay in, didn't I?" he gloved at his subordinate.

"Did you? Well, I stayed in until I finished my work. Then the bank inspector came.

Mr. Kingfather's face went white.

"What—what did he want? Redman didn't tell me he called.

"Well, he did" Kenneth passed into the outer office.

Kingfather sat scissing oddly on his blotting-pad for a minute, and then for the first time saw the letter that had been placed on the mantelpiece. It was marked "Urgent. Confidential. Deliver by hand," and was from the head office.

He took it up with a shaking hand, and, after a long hesitation, tore the seal. There was a little mirror on the wall above the fireplace, and he caught sight of his face, and could hardly believe that that ghost of a man was he.

There was no need to read the letter twice through. Already he knew every word, every comma. He stood blinking at his reflection, and then went into the outer office. He found Kenneth collecting some personal belongings from his desk.

"I suppose the inspector came about the Wentford cheque," he said.

The young man looked round at him.

"Wentford, eh? I don't know what you're talking about. You don't mean the cheque I cashed for the woman?"

It required an effort on the manager's part to affirm this.

"What was wrong with it?"

"It was forged, that is all."

"Forged?" Kenneth frowned at him.

"Yes. Didn't the inspector say anything? He left a letter for me, didn't he?"

Kenneth shook his head.

"No. He was surprised to find that you weren't here. I told him you had gone up to the head office. I'm getting a bit sick of lying about you. What is the yarn about this cheque?"

Again it required a painful effort on the manager's part to speak.

"It was forged. You've to report to head office to-morrow morning—some of the bank-notes have been traced to you—the cheque was out of your office book."

It was out, yet he felt no relief.

McKay was looking at him open-mouthed.

"You mean the cheque that was changed by this woman?"

The word "woman" irritated Mr. Kingfather.

"A lady was supposed to have called—a veiled lady."

"What do you mean by 'supposed'—" demanded Kenneth. "You say that the notes were traced to me—I insisted—is that what you mean?"

"You have them—some of them—in your private possession, that's all."

Incredulity crept over Kenneth's face.

"I? You mean I stole them?"

Kingfather had reached the limit of endurance.

"How the hell do I know what you did?" he almost shouted. "Head office have written to say that some of the notes you paid over the counter have been traced through a moneylender named Stuart to you."

The young man's face changed suddenly.

"Stuart—oh!" was all that he said. A minute later he went blundering out of the side door, leaving Mr. Kingfather to continue his aimless scribblings on his blotting-pad.

Kenneth reached Marlow just before the dinner-hour, and he came into the study where old George McKay was usually to be found, working out his eternal combinations.

of cards and figures. To Kenneth's amazement, his father greeted him with a smile. Instead of the cards, his table was covered with packages of documents and the paraphernalia of correspondence.

"Hallo, son—we've had a stroke of luck. The arbitrators have decided in my favour. I know jolly well I hadn't parted with my rights in the dyeing process when I sold out, and the company has to pay close on a hundred thousand back royalties."

Kenneth knew of this wrangle between his father and his late company that had gone on through the years, but had never paid very much attention to it.

"That means a steady income for years, and this time I'm going to look after things here!"

He pointed to the grate. The fireplaces were not now for playing cards.

"They've asked me to rejoin the board as chairman. What is the matter, Kenny?"

Kenneth was sitting on the opposite side of the table, and his father had seen his face.

Briefly he told his story, and George McKay listened without comment until he had finished.

"Wentford, eh? He is going to be a curse to me to the end of my days!"

Kenneth gasped his amazement.

"Did you know him?"

Old George nodded.

"I knew him all right. We were—good friends. Reeder was here this morning."

"About me?" asked the other quickly.

"About me," said his father. "I rather gathered that he suspected me of the murder."

Kenneth came to his feet, horrified.

"You! But he's mad! Why should you—"

Mr. McKay smiled calmly.

"There was quite a good reason why I should murder him," he said calmly, "such a good reason that I have been expecting the police all the afternoon."

And then, abruptly, he changed the subject.

"Tell me about these bank-notes. Of course, I know that you had borrowed the money from Stuart, old boy. I was a selfish old fellow to let you do it. How did the money come to you?"

Kenneth's story was a surprising one.

"I had it a couple of days ago," he said. "I came down to breakfast and found a letter. It was not registered and the address was hand-printed. I opened it, never dreaming what it contained. Just then I was terribly rattled over Stuart. I thought head office might get to know..."
Lordy! I once carried a quarter of a million bank at baccarat. Nobody would believe that, but it's true. Come and eat and then go along and see your Margot.

"Father, who killed that man Wentford?"

There was a twinkle in McKay's eyes when he answered:

"J. G. Reeder, I should think. He knows more about it than any honest man should know!"

**REEDER—THE DEVIL**

When her visitor was gone, Ena opened the letter he had left with her, read a few lines of it, and threw letter and envelope into the fire. Funny, the sameness of men! They all wrote the same sort of stuff—raw stuff dressed up being different from all other men. She did not resent these stereotypes of passion, nor did she feel sorry for those who used them. They were just normal experiences. She sat clasping her knees, her eyes alternately on the fire and the sleeping dog. Then she got up, dressed quickly, and, going into Gower Street, found a cab.

She was set down at a house in a fashionable Mayfair street, and a liveried footman admitted her and told her there was company. There usually was in the early evening. She found twenty men and women sitting round a green table, watching a croupier with a large green shade over his eyes. He was turning up cards in two rows, and big money, stacked in compartments marked on the green table, went into the croupier's well or was pushed, with additions, to the fortunate winner.

There was a croupier's box, the usual crowd, she noted. One pretty girl looked up and smiled, then turned her eyes quickly and significantly to the young man by her side.

"He's found the governor in his room. He was smoking alone and reading the evening newspaper when she came in. "Shut the door," he ordered. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing much. Only 'Feathers' is a bit worried," she told him why.

"Mr. Machfield smiled.

"Don't you worry, my pet," he said kindly. "There has been a murder down his way. Did he tell you anything about that? I've just been reading about it. I should be surprised if old Reeder didn't get to the bottom of it. Clever fellow, Reeder."

He picked up his newspaper from the floor and his cigar from the ashtray where he had laid it.

"Rather a coincidence, wasn't it, Ena? Feathers pickin' on that account—Wentford's?"

"Don't move—I beg of you!"

There was a gun in Reeder's right hand, its muzzle directed at the croupier. In his left he held the red aces.
“Who are you expecting?” she asked.

“All right; don’t be rude! No, thousands never make me faint. Especially when they’re talking about.”

“Now listen,” said Mr. Machfield. “Mr. Machfield was too good a talker to be brief. He led from a preamble to sections, into sub-sections.

“One minute!”

He interrupted his explanation to lift the hatchet. She saw him bringing it down; then unexpectedly he raised it again. Was it the effect of odd lighting, or had his face changed colour? He dropped the hatchet softly and gazed round at her.

“Who let him in? That doorman has cropped me!”

“Who is it?” she asked.

He beckoned her to his side, lifted the panel an inch. Stoop!” he hissed. “Look—that fellow with the side-whiskers.”

“Oh—is he anybody?” She did not recognize the visitor. Possibly he was a bully; he looked hopelessly suburban, like the people who serve Wilds. They always wear ready-to-wear ties and coloured handkerchiefs that stick out of their breast pockets. “I know who he is,” said Mr. Machfield. She wanted to raise the hatch and look, but he would not allow her.

“Go out and see what you can do. Wait a bit.”

He lifted a house telephone and pressed a knob.

“Who was that fellow—the old fellow with side-whiskers? Got a card; what name Reeder—Reeder—1-V. Where is he?”

He put down the ‘phone—unsteadily. Mr. Machfield gave little membership cards to the right people. They were issued with the greatest care, and after elaborate inquiries had been made as to the antecedents of the member, therefore so carefully.

“Go and get acquainted—he doesn’t know you. Go round through the buffet-room and pretend you’ve just come in.

When she reached the gaming-room she found Mr. Reeder was sitting opposite the cropper. How he got that favour ed chair was a mystery. His umbrella was between his knees. In front of him was a pile of Tootsie notes. He was saying something gravely, seemingly absorbed in the game.

“Vois vos jeux, messieurs de mesdames,” said the cropper mechanically.

“What does he mean by that?” asked Mr. Reeder of his nearest neighbour. He was a thin, high, bald man, and the girl, who had drawn up a chair by his side.

Mr. Reeder made ten coins and won six pounds. With this he got up from the table and recovered his hat from beneath his chair.

“I always think the time to—unstop playing cards is when you’re winning.”

He imparted this truth to the young lady, who had withdrawn from the table at the earlier statement.

“What a marvellous mind you have!” she said enthusiastically.

Mr. Reeder winked.

“I’m afraid I have,” he said.

She swept back into the buffet-room; he seemed quite willing to be refreshed at the expense of the house.

“A cup of tea, thank you, and a little seed cake.”

Eva was puzzled. Had the whole breed of butresses undergone this shaking deterioration?

“I prefer seed to fruit cake,” he was saying.

“Curiously enough, chickens are the same. I had a hen once—we called her Curly. She could eat fruit, and preferred it.”

She listened—she was a good listener. He offered to see her home.

“Of course; if you could drop me at the corner of Bruton Street and Berkeley Square—I don’t live far from here,” she said modestly.

“Dear me!” said Mr. Reeder, as he signalled to a cab. “Do you live in a new house, too? So many people do.”

This was disconcerting.

“I am going to see you once a day—I am Mrs. Coleforth-Eding, and my phone number—do write this down.

“My memory is very excellent,” murmured Mr. Reeder.

The cab drove up at that moment, and he opened the door.

Eva Burslem—I will remember that—907, Greenford, now!”

He waved his hand in farewell as he got into the cab.

“I’ll be seeing you again, my dear—toddle.”

Mr. Reeder could on occasions be outrageously frivolous. “Toodle-oo!” was the high-water mark of his frivolity. It was not remarkable that Eva was both alarmed and puzzled. Brighter intellects than hers had been shaken in vain effort to reconcile Mr. Reeder’s appearance and manner with Mr. Reeder’s reputation.

She went back into the house and told Mr. Machfield what had happened.

“Tha was my man!” said Machfield admiringly. “I’ll go and hunt for him who had killed Wentford, or whatever his name is. I’d be shaking in my shoes. I’ll walk round to the Leffingham and see if I can pick up a young game-fish. And you’d better dine, and get away from the dole on that business I was discussing.

The Leffingham Club was quite useful to Mr. Machfield. It was a kind of potting shed where likely young shoots could be trained and brought up to the garden of chancery. Even Kenneth McKay had had his uses.

When Mr. Reeder reached Scotland Yard, where they had arranged to meet, he found Inspector Gaylor charged with the garden of chancery.

“We’ve had a bit of luck!” he said. “Do you remember those banknotes? You took their numbers—you remember? They were paid out on Wentford’s account.”

“To the veiled lily!”

“Veiled grandmothers!” said Gaylor.

“We have traced two hundred pounds’ worth to a money-lender. They were paid by Kenneth McKay, the bank clerk who cashed the cheque.”

He took it from a folder on his desk.

“The signature is a bad forgery; the cheque itself was not torn from Wentford’s cheque-book, but from a book kept at the bank under McKay’s charge.”

“Astonishing!” said Mr. Reeder.

“Isn’t it?” Mr. Gaylor was smiling. “So simple! I had the whole theory of the murders given me to-night. McKay forged and uttered the note, and to cover up his crime—killed Wentford.”

“And you instantly arrested him?”

“Am I a child in arms?” asked Gaylor reproachfully. “No, I questioned the boy. He denies that he paid the money-lender, but says that the money came to him from some anonymous source. It arrived at his house by registered post. Poor young devil, he’s rattled to blazes! What are we waiting for? A gentleman who wants to open a box!”

Mr. Reeder mysteriously.

(“Remesler releases his mysteries as a miser pays his dentist,” said Gaylor to the superintendant. “But he leaves me all the enterprising business—I admit he is very good and passes on most of the information he gets, but the old devil will keep back the connecting links!”)

“Humour him,” said the superintendent.

TRAPPED!
The THRILLER

A story by

The solution of the 'BAFFLER' PROBLEM

DO NOT READ THIS ANSWER until you have made your effort to solve the crime. To this end the facts are printed upside-down.
"Who said so?" asked Ena curiously. "A copper-policeman, I mean? Don't take any notice of that kind of trash. They'd lie to save a car fare! We know that Kenneth didn't forge the cheque."

Margot's eyes opened wide in amazement. "Forged a cheque—what do you mean? I don't understand what you are talking about."

For a moment Ena was nonplussed. If this girl did not know about the forgery, what was going on? She had noticed that this man had come in a taxi. It was the murderer! Kenneth was in it! She went cold at the thought.

"Oh, my God! I didn't think of that!" she gasped. "Tell me about this forgery," began Margot, and then her visitor remembered her cramp. "I want you to come along and see Kenneth. He's waiting for you at my flat—naturally, he can't come here. He'll tell you everything."

Margot was bewildered. "Of course, I'll come, but—"

"Don't butt my ear—just slip into my large gray chesterfield, Kenneth told me to ask you to bring all the keys you have. He said they can prove his innocence!"

"Dear, dear, dear!" said a gentle voice, and Ena flung round to face the man who had come into the room. Kenneth was there, and she knew it. That old devil! The key of the ladder, now, would that be of any use to you? asked Mr. Reeder in his jovial manner. "Or the key of Wormwood Scrubs?"

"Hallo, Reeder!" The girl was coquettish now. "I thought you were alone, young lady, I did not know you were entertaining Mr. and Mrs. Reeder."

Such a statement made Mr. Reeder blush, but it did not confuse him. Nor did Mrs. Gribble seem particularly distressed.

"This lady is Mrs. Gribble, of my department," he said gravely. "She may come in here," said Ena. She picked up her coat, which she had taken off. "I'll phone you later, Miss Lynn."

The cells at Bow Street police station are the most efficiently kept in the metropolis, but there are no telephones, said Mr. Reeder, and for the first time in the day she heard Kenneth laugh.

"What's the idea—cells?" she demanded loudly. "You've got nothing on me."

"We shall see. Will you step this way?"

He opened the door of the drawing-room. "I should like to have a few words with you."

He heard a knock at the door, and looked at Margot.

"I'll be on hand," he said.

She went to the door—and fell back at the sight of her visitor. It was Kenneth McKay. He looked at her gravely, and, without a word, took her into his arms and kissed her. He had never kissed her that way before.

"Can I see you?"

She nodded, and took him back to her room. The other three had disappeared. It is not known that you should know, darling, that I'm in terrible trouble. I've just come from home, and I suppose the police are after me. They may be after my father, too. He knew Wentworth—hated him. I didn't dream that."

"How about you? Why do the police want you?"

He looked at her steadily. "It is about a forged cheque. Some of the money has been traced to me. Darling, I've come to ask you something, and I want you to tell me the truth. Kingfisher said as good as told me I was a liar when I said I'd cashed it for a woman. I don't mind really what he says—he's a crook, that fellow! Money has been missing from the trough they sent old Reeder down weeks ago."

"How did they trace money to you?" she interrupted. "And what do you want me to tell them?"

"You knew that I owed money—I told you," she nodded. "And how worried I was about it. I can't remember whether I told you how much I owed."

She shook her head.

"You didn't," she said, and he drew a long breath.

"Then it wasn't you," he said. He described the arrival of the letter containing the banknotes.

"Two hundred pounds, and, of course, I wanted the money badly."

"Who else knew that you were short of money?" she asked. "Oh, everybody. He was in despair. I bluffed about it. Kingfisher said that he never ordered me to cash any cheque that came, and that the story of the stolen woman who traveled by car to London when he was at lunch was all moonshine."

He saw the door of the drawing-room opening, and gasped at the sight of Mr. Reeder.

"It wasn't moonshine, my young friend," said Mr. Reeder. "In fact, I—er—have interviewed a garage keeper who filled up the tank of the lady's car, and, incidentally, saw the lady."

He turned to the room and beckoned Ena Kenneth. "Well?" she said defiantly. "Do you think you'll know me again?"

"I know you now!" he said huskily. "You're the woman who cashed the cheque!"

"That's a damned lie!" she almost screamed.

"Shh!" said Mr. Reeder, shocked. "I've never seen him before!" she said, and Margot gasped. "But you told me—"

"I've never seen him before," insisted the woman."

"You'll see him again," said Mr. Reeder gently. "You on one side—the wrong side—of the witness-box, and he on the other!"

And then she lost her head.

"If there was a swindle, he was in it!" she said. "You don't suppose any clerk would pay out six hundred pounds to somebody he had never seen before unless he had his instructions and got his money!"

"The cheque was forged?" it seemed all right to me."

"May it continue to seem all right," said Mr. Reeder piously. "May you be convinced through the long period of your incarceration with the—the—comfort of a good conscience. I think you will get three years—but if your previous convictions influence the judge I fancy you will get five!"

Ena collapsed.

"You can't charge me, she whimpered."

"I don't know what I'm going to do."

"There is a crime called uttering," said Mr. Reeder. "'Uttering—knowing to be forged. Will you take the young lady's arm, Mrs. Gribble? I will take the other—perhaps we will meet a policeman on the way. And did you say anything about 'conspiracy'? That is also an offence. Mind the mat, Mrs. Gribble."

The manager's jaw dropped.

"Is he here now?" she asked, and Mr. MacNeil smiled at the foolishness of the question.

And he was not coming to-night unless he arrives with a flying squad. We'll keep that bird out at any rate."

"Where is Ena?" asked Kingfisher."

"Sod cards un intern," said MacNeil. "She had a bit of a headache and I advised her not to come."

The bank manager helped himself to a whisky from a decanter on the sideboard. "I'm very fond of that girl," said Kingfisher.

"Who isn't?" asked the other.

"To me!—there was a tremor in the younger man's voice—she is something special. Do you think she's fond of me, MacNeil?"

"I am sure she is," said the other heartily; "but she's a woman of the world, you know, my boy, and women of the world don't—don't—don't—"

He might have added, that, in the case of Ena she carried the business equivalent of that organ up her sleeve ready for exhibition to any susceptible man, young or old.

"Do you think she'd marry me, MacNeil?"

Mr. MacNeil did not laugh. He had played the great deal, and had learned to school his countenance. Ena had two husbands, and had not gone through the formalities of freeing herself from either.
Both were officially abroad, the foreign country being that stretch of desolate moorlands in which Mr. Machfield and Tavistock, in the quaint convict establishment of Princetown, they laboured for the good of their souls, but with little profit to the tax-payers who supported them and a smoke from somewhere. Five hundred and a year doesn't go far with a girl who buys her dresses in Paris.

Kingfether strode up and down the apartment, his hands in his pockets, his head on his chest, a look of gloom on a face never touched with brightness.

"I realise that," he said, "but if she loved me she'd help to make both ends meet. I've got to cut out this business of the bank; I've had a fright, and I can't take the risk again. In fact, I thought of leaving the bank and setting up a general agency in London."

Mr. Machfield knew what a general agency in London meant, and he did not think much of it. An office in which nobody came except bill collectors. He didn't, however, wish to discourage his client; for the way he supplied them with gold gave him little opportunity for comment.

"There is going to be hell's own trouble about that cheque," he said. "I had a letter from head office. I have to report to the general manager in the morning and take McKaye with me. That is the usual course.

"Such details are distasteful to Mr. Machfield. He needed all the spare room in the hotel, and he matters much more in the size of the Great Central Bank, but he was more interested in the fate of McKay."

Kingfether came back to Ena, because Ena fluffed his horizons.

"The first time I ever met her," he said. "I knew she was the one woman in the world for me. I know she's had a rough time and that she's had a battle to live. We must have been kind, I suppose?"

"Who indeed," murmured Mr. Machfield, with considerable truth. And then, pursing his lips: "What will happen to Mr. McKay if he is taken?"

"Only for a second did the manager look uncomfortable."

"He is not my concern," he said loudly. "There is no doubt at all that the signature on the cheque was his own."

"Oh, yes, yes," said the other impatiently. "Don't want to discuss that, do we? I mean, not between friends. You paid me the money you owed me and there was an end to it so far as I was concerned. I took a bit of a risk myself, sending Ena down—"

"I mean, letting Ena go," he corrected when he saw the look on the other's face. "What about young McKay?"

The manager shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, and I really don't care. When I got back to the bank this afternoon he'd gone, though I'd left instructions that he was to stay until I returned. Of course, I can't report it because I did wrong to go away myself, and it was rather awkward that one of our bank inspectors called when I was out. I shall have to work all night to make up arrears that might have helped me. In fact, I told him—"

"Oh, he came back all right?"

"He just looked in and went out again. That is how I knew the inspector had called."

"I had to tell this pimple about the cheque and the banknotes. By the way, that is a mystery to me how the notes came into his hands at all. I suppose there is no mistake about them? If he was in the habit of coming here he might have got them from the bank."

"Not often," Mr. Machfield might have added that nobody came to that place unless they had a certain amount of surplus wealth or the means by which easy money could be acquired.

"There were quite a number of his clients who were in exactly the same position as Mr. Kingfether—people in positions of trust, men who had the handling of other people's money. It was no business of Machfield's how that money was obtained, so long as it was judiciously spent. It was his boast that his game was straight, as indeed it was up to a point. He had allowed himself throughout life a certain margin of dishonesty, which covered both bad luck and bad investments. Twice in his life he had gone out for big cops. Once he had failed, the other time he had succeeded, but had made no money.

"He was not a person in a great part of the countries of the world. If he had arrived at Monte Carlo he would have left by very nearly the next train, or else the obliging police would have placed a motor-car at his disposal to take him across to Nice, a route which isn't so particular as to the character of his temporary visitors."

"I'm sorry for McKay in a way, although he is such an impossible swine, but it's a case of his life or mine, Machfield. Either he goes down or I go down—and I'm not going down."

"Nothing worried Mr. Machfield worse than heroes. And yet he should have been hardened to them, for he had lived in an atmosphere of hectic drama, and once he'd seen a victim of his lying dead by his own hand across the green board of his gaming table. But it was years ago."

"You'd better slide back to the room," he said. "I'll come in a little later. Don't play high. I've still got some of your papers, dear boy."

When he returned to the room, the manager had found a seat at the table and was piercing modestly and with some success. The croupier asked a question with a flick of his eyelids, and almost imperceptibly Machfield shook his head, which meant that that night, at any rate, Kingfether must pay his losses in cash, that neither his IOUs nor cheques would be accepted.

From time to time the players got up from the tables, strolled into the buffet, had a drink, and departed. But there was always a steady stream of newcomers to take their places. Mr. Machfield went back to his for he was expecting a telephone message. It came at a quarter past ten. A woman's voice said: "Ena says everything is O.K."

"He hung up the telephone with a smile."

"Ena was a safe bet. You could always trust that girl, and he did not question her ability to keep her visitor occupied for at least two hours. After that he would do a little questioning himself. But it must be he, and not that other fool."

There was no sign of raiders. He had special scouts posted at every street corner approaching the house, and a man on the roof (he secured this on a night of rain and sleet) to take and transmit their signals in case of danger. If there was a raid he was prepared for it. More likely the police.
The THRILLER

following their inevitable custom, would postpone the visitation until later in the week. And by that time, if all went well, the house would be closed and the keys in the hands of the agents.

Kingfisher was winning; there was a big pile of money in the room when the man next to him. He looked animated, and for once in his life pleased. The bank was winning, too; there was a big box on the table, and this was full of foreign money, and every few minutes it increased.

A dull evening! Mr. Machfield would be glad when the time came for his loud-speaking gramophone to play the National Anthem. He always closed down on this patriotic note. He left the most unlucky of players with the players, and at least they had their country left to them.

He was looking at the long folding door of the room as it opened slowly. It was second nature in him to open the door and open doors, and if this was his home, he was not shocked or startled by what he revealed. Now, however, he stood dumbfounded, for there was Mr. Reeder, without his hat, and even without his umbrella.

Machfield, the proprietor, was frozen to the spot. With an apologetic smile, Mr. Reeder came up to him across the room.

"Do you very much mind?" he asked in an urgent voice, "I am twenty minutes late. Time hanging rather heavily upon my hands."

Machfield flicked his dry lips.

"Come here, will you?"

He went back to his study, Reeder behind him.

"Now, Mr. Reeder, what's the idea of your coming here? How did you get in? I gave strict instructions to the man on the door—"

"I told him 'liaç'" said Mr. Reeder in a loud voice, as though the enormity of his offence had temporarily overcome him. "I said that you had particularly asked me to come tonight. That was very wrong. I am sorry. The truth is, Mr. Machfield, even the most illustrious of men have their little weaknesses—very little, even the cleverest and most laudable crimes, the company's little instincts, and, although I am neither a prude nor a weasel, I have the frailties of my—humanity."

Machfield, of course, was unable to play cards for money—far from it. As you probably know, or may have heard, have a curiously distorted mind. I find my secret pleasures in such places as these."

"Machfield was relieved, immensely relieved. He knew detectives who gambled, but somehow he had never associated J. G. Reeder with this peculiar weakness.

"Why, certainly, we're glad to see you, Mr. Reeder."

He was so glad, indeed, that he would have been happy to have given this oil-looking man the money wherewith to play.

"You'll have a drink on the house—not," he added quickly, "that I am in any position to offer. I have been taken, but I will use my best endeavours to avoid police court proceedings, because we are after something much more important than naughtly people who play cards for money."

Machfield was somewhat moved by the strange men standing in the doorway. They came from all directions—from Mr. Machfield's study, from the hall below, from the roof above. They handed Lamontaine and took away the letters in the private box. Machfield was unwarmed.

"What will the charge be?"

"Mr. Gaylor will tell you at the police station. But I think the question is unnecessary. Honestly, don't you, Mr. Machfield?"

Machfield said nothing.

DEED

Mr. Bannerman kept what he called a e-n-s-k-r, in which he inscribed a pianistic account of every transaction which he was engaged. Some of these cases had no value except to the man who wrote them, and not interest anyone except perhaps the psycho-pathologist. Under the heading "Red Aces" appeared this account, written one evening.

In the year 1919 (wrote Mr. Reeder), there arrived at the Hotel Majestic in Nice a man who described himself in the hotel register as Rufus Machfield. He had a number of other names, but it is only necessary now to identify this particular character. The man had a reputation as a cardsharp, and, in the pursuit of his nefarious calling, had "worked" the ships flying between England and New York. He had also been convicted on two occasions as a professional gambler in Germany.

He was of Danish origin, but at the time was a naturalised Englishman with a permanent address in Calcutta Gardens, Bayswater, London. He had lunch with Benny Lynn, an adventurer who had also "operated" the ships on the North Atlantic. On one of these trips Lynn had become acquainted with Mr. George McKay, a Rasputin type, from Bayswater and Oxford. There is no evidence that they ever played cards together, and Mr. McKay does not recall that they did. But the residence of Mr. McKay was in the habit of coming to Nice every year, and was in residence at the time Lyn and Machfield met. McKay was known as a resolute and successful gambler, and he, too, now had figured in sensational play.

The two men, Lynn and Machfield, conferred together, and decided upon a scheme to rob McKay at the tables. Gambling in Nice is not confined to the recognised establishments. There are also a number of Cercles Privés where play was even higher than at the public rooms, and the most reputable of these was "Le Signe," which, if not recognised, was winked at by the French authorities.

In order to swindle McKay, a patron of this club, it was necessary to secure the aid of an official. Lynn's choice fell upon a young croupier named Lamontaine, and he, in turn, was to suborn two other croupiers, both of whom it was intended should receive a very generous share of the money.

Lamontaine proved to be a singularly pliable tool. He had married a young wife and had got into debt, and was fearful that this should come to the club authorities. An interview was arranged in Lyons; the scheme was put before the croupier by Lynn, and he agreed to come in, taking a half share for himself and his wife, and the other half being equally divided between Lynn and Machfield. Lynn apparently dummied at the division, but Machfield was satisfied with it. From that time he knew Mr. McKay had been wining and dining heavily, and providing he had the right kind of betting there would be a big killing.

The game to be played was baccarat, for McKay could never resist the temptation of taking a bank, especially a big bank. It was very necessary that arrangements should be hurried on before the merchant left the South of France, and a
and checked by the admissions of Machfield, Lynne never left his house except on the days when Machfield and Lamontaine were there, they frequently went to that city over the week-end.

It was Lamontaine who formed the disabolical plan which was eventually to lead to Wentford’s death. He knew that the only man to whom access to the house was the mounted policeman who patrolled that part of the country, and he studied police methods, even got information as to the turn the night watch was patrolled.

Lamontaine at some time or other had been on the French stage— he spoke perfect English—and I have no doubt was in a position to make himself up sufficiently to get into Wentford’s head and then get him out. At seven o’clock Constable Vautry left the station and proceeded on his patrol. At seven-thirty he was ruthlessly murdered by a man who stopped him and shot him point-blank through the heart.

The body was taken into a field and laid out, the two murderers hoping that the snow would cover it. Lamontaine was already wearing the uniform of a police constable, and mounted his horse and rode on to Wentford’s house. The old man saw him through the window, and, suspecting nothing, got down and opened the door.

He may not have realized that anything was wrong until he was back in his parlor, for it was there that the murder took place. The two men had left him in the cottage, but a complication arose; whilst they were searching the place, or endeavouring to open the safe behind the bookcase. The telegraph boy heard Margaret Lynn say that she was coming on, but was delayed. One of them answered in a disguised voice.

The thing to do now was to remove the body. Lifting it out, they laid it over the horse’s saddle, and, guiding the nervous animal down to the road, made their way towards Beaconfield. Here a second complication arose; the lights of Mr. B Award’s car were seen coming toward them. The body was dropped by the side of the road under the constable took his place on the horse’s back. The animal was smothered with the blood of the murdered man, and the clerk of Mr. B Award, the lawyer, taking the bridle quietly from the constable, tied his sleeve along the shoulder, for it was afterwards discovered that his coat was stained. It gave me my first clue, and I was able, owing to my peculiar mind, to reconstruct the crime. The body was submitted. The attachment of the red nose to the door of Wentford’s cottage—a mere act of bravado—was also a very valuable clue.

The two men joined another again in the vicinity of the cottage. They were able to make no further headway. One of them, however, heard that the girl knew where the money was cashed. I am
afraid I was responsible for this, and it was intended that she should be taken away with the key of the safe deposit.

Machfield was already acquainted with Kenneth McKay, the son of the victim of the card-sharping episode at Nice. He also knew—on Kenneth's own confession—of his straitened circumstances. Probably to hit at the father, George McKay, whom he must have known was still hunting for him, Machfield used an opportunity which was offered by chance, to ruin him, as he believed.

Two hundred pounds, representing a portion of the money obtained from the bank by a fraudulent manager (3 years penal servitude; Central Criminal Court), through the instrumentality of his woman friend (5 years P.S., C.C.C.), was sent anonymously to the younger McKay by Machfield, and was traced to the young man.

After this was a note also in Mr. Reeder's hand:

"Rufus John Machfield and Antonio Lamontaine (sentence: death, C.C.C.), executed at Wandsworth Prison, April 17th. Executioner, Ellis." Mr. Reeder was a stickler for facts.

THE END.

(Another gripping adventure of the famous J. G. Reeder, Edgar Wallace's greatest detective character, the week after next. See page 23.)

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THE TRAPPER!

A DRAMA OF THE NIGHT-HAUNTS OF LONDON

By GEORGE DILNOT

Author of "Scotland Yard," etc.

Chapter I.

VERY NEAR TRAGEDY.

This girl pushed back her chair so that she might the more comfortably adjust one leg over the other. She smoothed her skirts demurely, tilted her chin a little, and laughed.

"Why, ain't it? Me a crook and you mummy's model boy! Gimme a cigarette!"

With slow deliberation he passed his case. Her imagination was made her own choice, and then with lazy insolence she cast her eyes about the crowded restaurant. A hidden hand pressed a note, nay, vines true, and her foot tapped the floor in rhythm. She blew out a cloud of smoke, and her gaze returned to her companion. "I've trimmed you," she said reflectively. "Trimmmed you good and proper. Say, if you fitted your little finger they'd fetch a John ponte. No fun, no worry. Everything quiet and decent. That'd mean a year or two in stir for me. Ugh! Do you know what she is? If you had the blood of a white rabbit you'd do it, instead of buying me grub at a pound a mouthful!"

The young man lunched his shoulders.

"I don't know that kind of slang. I guess you mean prison. I had thought of it. "Would that get me back my twenty thousand?"

Her lips parted in a complaisant smile.

"Not by a fiftieth wouldn't." Her voice had a quality of soft melody that gave a sinister harshness to her words. "All the same it would be some satisfaction to you. It would show me that you weren't the soft man that you are."

"I had considered it," he admitted. "That was one of the things I had in mind. I have thought of three alternatives. I might send you to jail. I might shoot you. I might marry you. I find it difficult to arrive at a conclusion."

He spoke softly, as one measuring a business problem in his mind.

"That is why I asked you to dine with me tonight."

She regarded him with a whimsical twinkle at the corners of her mouth.

"Affrayo! A gun in one pocket, a marriage license in the other, and a tic at the door."

He leaned his folded arms on the table between them, and stared her in the face. "You've played me for a sucker, Stella, and I've lost. I'm not whining about it. Watch my right hand," he added, while a glimmer of a nickel barrel under the sleeve of his coat, and her colour weakened. "I might shoot you now," he continued. "It'd be better for you, better for me, if I did."

Her arms tightened, and her hands gripped nervously at the back of her chair. She had nerve, but this unexpected menace had shaken her.

"Don't be a blasted fool, Dick!" she said, with an attempt to retain her smile. "You're trying to frighten me. Put that away."

"That'll be the finish of us both," he commented gravely. "I'm not in the mood for explanations this evening. "They'll notice if you sit tight and listen. Smile, girl, smile! God! You've got enough of the actress in you as it is, and now I suppose that all this while you've thought I'm a rich mug with more money than sense."

"I don't blame you, I acted like that. It perhaps doesn't matter to you, but I've pawned my watch to pay for this dinner to-night. You and your gang have cleaned me out. It's ticked you to own up that you're a crook, now that you think you've bluffed me white. But the game isn't over, Stella. I've got to have that twenty thousand back. You're going to help me."

Her composure had returned to her. She puffed automatically at her cigarette.

"I'm sorry, boy," she declared. "If you shoot me to-day I won't help you. I couldn't do anything. I'd sooner go and take a bonanza from a hungry tiger than try to get you."

"Don't harp on that line," Old Simeon Harcoke doesn't know me from Adam. I'm no millionaire's son. I'm just a plain fool of a stockbroker's eldest, and every penny that you and your gang have had come from dealings in shares that don't belong to me. That money has got to go back. I'm a desperate man."

Stella Cliffe was not easily startled. Young though she was in years, those insidious blue eyes, for all their many depths, had far into many phases of life. She had confronted many crises with poise and philosophy. Yet, somehow, this revolution threw her out of her stride.

"Do you mean to tell me that you're just a black slob who's been hitting the high spots with the boss's money?" she exclaimed. "Now I see why you won't hand me over to the police."

"They don't want me."

"You just naturally don't want me."

"I don't want you," he sneered.

"I know," she agreed. "You just naturally don't want me. You can't frighten me any longer, and it might get us both into trouble."

Her voice was smooth, but, as though under some domination that he could not resist, he reluctantly dropped the weapon back into his pocket.

"That's sensible. Now we can talk. You won't put me in gaol. You can't shoot me, as you told me. That saves the nickel and your proposition. There you've got me guessing. Why marry me—no? I'm cleverer, but you're cocked. Where's the idea? How would that help you?"

His fingers ratted a nervous tattoo on the table.

"You may laugh, but you've been nearer death in the last ten minutes than ever you have in your life before. Make no mistake. On deep sea I married you, it would have been because you would never allow me to become a disgraced and ruined man. You'd get the money somehow or other."

She gave a little chuckle, which she suppressed as his sable brow drew down upon her.

"You're just as much a crook at heart as I am, Dick. But you worship the great god of reputation. You've got a salvation seal. You didn't mind pinching twenty thousand pounds, but you hate to be found out. We'd make a fine couple, you and I. You'd be enough for me and I'd poison you within a week."

"You're not already married," he demanded.

"No. I'm still in the market. But I don't know that I'm going on you, Dick. This isn't the kind of place for the woman or your life doesn't get me going. I want to hear something about my bright eyes and the rest of the goo-goop patter."

"You'd be married for myself alone. You didn't think I'd hear something about my bright eyes and the rest of the goo-goop patter."

"No, little Stella carries on, on her own, for a bit longer. I'll tell you what I will do, though—because, as I've said, I'm sorry for you. I'll give you a thousand. You can get a start with that in the States, and nobody will know you for a sucker wanted by Scotland Yard, unless you give yourself away."

His face was pale. Up to a few months ago, he had been the unsparing path heasten by hundreds of commonplace young men. His day began with blasters or battle bacals, pulsed down hurriedly with weak and toped ten at his cheap Brixton lodgings. A cigarette—ten for sixpence—a glance at the general news, a prolonged study of the sporting pages of a newspaper, with particular attention to the racing items. A fight for a fag or the Brixton boil. A lark morning at the office. A frugal lunch at a marble-topped table in the crowded smoking-room of a lash-up-fork in one hand and a domino played reflectively in the other. Opposite, a pasty-faced colleague who most often won the apostrophe. "Thud!"

An afternoon of insufferable toil with interminable figures, awaiting the hour of release. She had for the brightest lights, a seat in the pit of a theatre a satin roll-out at a local saloon, where Dick was received with
Taking assent for granted, he thrust his arm through that of Estrehan, and led the way to the door. Estrehan followed-though he had not noticed the chauffeur's hand. An alert chauffeur smart enough to hold the door wide. Dick took his seat as one mesmerized. His companion followed, and the chauffeur asked no question.

"Get along," said the stranger curtly.

THE TRAPPER.

THE unexpected is part of the past at Scotland Yard. Nevertheless, as in all great cities, extraordinary emergencies are not welcomed. They tend to put a strain upon the machine, and they also throw up a limelight which is not too welcome in a government institution. However pleasing it may be when a triumphant conclusion has been reached.

The trouble began a few weeks ago. The winter, the veteran Chief Constable of the Criminal Investigation Department, received among mail a type written envelope which contained nothing but a thin piece of wire, twisted in the form of a rose. Winter, who was a practical man with thirty years experience of the underworld and its ways, twisted it impatiently into a wastepaper basket. Suddenly a day passed, but he received some such melodramatic communica
tion among his elders, and he had little time to waste on enigmas.

"Some tomfool who's been reading detective stories, I eat my hat," he declared, in the privacy of his study.

A couple of days later came the jewel robbery at Dalston. Old Dutchy Oglo had been bereft of ten thousand pounds worth of jewelry. It was a big case. So Winter, having the necessary qualifications, was put on the case. Now, Old Dutchy might be found lurking in the doorways of the East End, as a wholesaler dealer in precious stones, but Winter knew better. He was sent to Hatton Garden. He was also known to the Yard men. He was a consummate receiver-a one-through scoundrel, who had passed the process of many a big haul of stolen jewels. More than once had he been touched and go free so long as he took his place in the dock, but always there had been that vital gap in the evidence.

Precious stones apart from their settings are hard to dispose of. If a man wants them, it is certain, could have discovered this piece of roguesy more bitterly; no one could have urged the Criminal Investigation Department more strongly to energetic measures to bring the thieves to justice than did Old Dutchy Oglo in those days. But there was one thing that was not in his mind, but for a line wire nose lying at the bottom of one of the rifled drawers.

While regretted that he had thrown away the money, the man is not usually cast to his knowledge. He regretted it still more when he learned that a wire nose had cropped up still ringing.

From the Old Jewry the City of London detectives reported that a well-known firm of stockbrokers, Messrs. Hint, Hint, Sons & Barrer, were concerned about the strange disappearance of a clerk, one Richard Estrehan, and the return to them by registered post of some to the value of twenty thousand pounds, belonging to their clients. On the top of the package was a note of thin wire.

So many things. While talking with genial earnestness and fluency than Winter, as many newspaper men know. By doing this, he avoided setting up any matters issues until he had thoroughly weighed them. At the moment, apart from the unimportant point that he was the only person who had knowledge that in some way these cases were linked. Not even Curst, the divisional detective-inspector of the yard, was trusted into certain avenues of the underworld, with a very clear idea that Old Dutchy had been a simple coloratura, and not accustomed to accusations that he was aware of facts which might modify that theory.

As far as he knew they had merely passed on the singular facts of Estrehan's disappearance as a matter of interest. So far as his regular employers did not accuse him of any crime.

Still, the thing could not now be ignored. Winter twisted his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, and then over his

mand the available men who might be able to get to the bottom of the matter. All detectives have their weaknesses: some have diverse temperaments and qualifications which cannot be ignored by a wise superior. He may say, with a dogged intensity of purpose; another may have some knowledge of certain classes of criminals; a third may have specialist acquaintance with some particular mode of mechanical, scientific side of crime detection.

There is the ruthless, dominating type, and another who simply can win the friendship even of those whom duty compels him to send to jail. One man may win out by the simplest means, another, because he is utterly dissuaded of that quality.

Thus it was on careful consideration that Winter decided to take on the job. He was known to all, and he had no respect of persons. He was not the man to tap at the door he strode into Winter's room and tugged at his coat, then, after the leather divan chair flanking his desk, ran to the theatre. He knew his own value, and he was no respecter of persons.

"See you're closing up this coming business," observed Winter. "When do you think it will be finished?"

Wilde contemplated the fingers of his left hand. "It will be a matter of days," he replied. "Say a week. We're only waiting to get the three of them at work red-handed."

"Munt could finish that up, couldn't he?"

"Well, he's got the money observation, and are ready to pounce."

"Shove Munt on to it, then. I've got something else I want to do."

Winter said, "Sounds like a bit out of a book. You may be wasting your time."

He briefly recounted the coincidence of the wire noses.

Wilde listened with impassive face, his chin resting on his hand. He exhaled in a deep breath.

"Funny business, gas'nor," he commented. "What do you think of it?"

The other nodded. "It seems well thought out, and there's nothing wrong."

"I'm too old a bird to think," he declared. "I don't make anything out of it. That's your game. The rest of us, of course, can work out the whole thing in our heads-not in a day. Keep your mouth shut and go to it."

Still in his mind, he shook his head slowly when he repeated them.

Can't see how this can be a jocie," he said. "Yet, as you say, ordinary crooks don't do this sort of thing..."

"Yes, but the trouble is one of the biggest cases I've ever thrown out a challenge—kinda trap. The Trapper—by gosh, perhaps that's the answer! You know about him again. I'm out of my depth. Have you got the one that was found in the park?"

The Chief Constable passed over the loop of wire.

"I'm afraid not," he explained. "We asked Great to let me have it," he said.

"Yes, but you, g'nor. I'll just drop round and have a word with these Hint people."

"HINT people," he repeated. "Thither has summoned Detective-Sergeant Munt, a stout fellow who received (Continued on page 26)."
READ THIS FIRST!

Rafflers! The New Detective Story Game

Who Murdered Ellington Breeze?

Manchester was shocked one morning in June of last year by the news that a distinguished citizen, Ellington Breeze, chairman of the Breeze Chemical Works of that city, had been murdered by poison gas, generated in his bedroom during the night.

The police investigations revealed the following pertinent facts: Breeze had been found dead in his bed at about 8 o'clock in the morning by his man-servant, who for years had waited on him at that hour. On the mantelpiece—there was no fireplace—the police found a glass flask of about one quart capacity. Its stopper was missing. It was the kind of glass vessel familiar to any chemical laboratory. Experts said that one chemical poured upon another would have generated the poison gas immediately, and that diffusion in the room must have followed quickly. Neither on the glass flask or other objects were fingerprints found.

Although both windows, which were curtained, had been open eight inches at the bottom, the practically instantaneous effects of the gas had killed every living thing in the bed-room. Breeze's pet bull-finish lay dead in its cage. Half a dozen flies lay dead on the window-sills. The dark green blinds were found drawn down nearly to the bottom of the lower window sash, dimming the murder chamber, though the sun shone brightly outside.

The wavering finger of suspicion began to point with equal emphasis at two young men, each of whom was connected with Ellington Breeze's business, and had had enough laboratory experience to have manufactured the deadly gas.

E. Breeze Walters, nephew and only surviving relative of the murdered man, was one suspect. Adam Boardman, Breeze's confidential secretary, was the other. Each protested his innocence, each to a degree had an alibi.

According to the police investigation, as far as could be determined, both had good records, no debts or entanglements. Both seemed deeply affected by the tragedy. Neither seemed capable of committing such a cowardly crime. Yet the police reflected upon the terms of Breeze's will, which divided half his estate—about £200,000—between the favorite nephew and the devoted employee, Boardman. The other half of the estate Breeze had bequeathed to charity.

The terms of the will, drawn five years before, had never been a secret.

Walters and Boardman had maintained cordial but not close relations while in the employ of Breeze. Each expressed confidence in the innocence of the other.

A doctor examined the body at 9.30 a.m. and declared that Breeze had been dead at least four hours, possibly for as long as ten hours. The position of the body in the bed indicated to a certainty that death had overtaken Breeze while in his bed, in which he had been confined by a slight illness.

The police, cherishing a uniform suspicion of Walters and Boardman, decided that they would know the murderer when they knew approximately the hour in which the poison gas was generated in Breeze's bedroom.

Boardman, the secretary, had been with Breeze until about 11.30 a.m. He admitted it, and his leaving the house about quarter to twelve was confirmed by the testimony of old Mrs. Grew, Breeze's boyhood nurse and housekeeper, whose room was next Breeze's on the second floor. Boardman was discussing business matters with his employer, who was laid up in bed convalescing from gripe. He admitted returning to Breeze's bedroom for a moment after first leaving it, in order, he said, to secure some written instructions which he had forgotten. At that time, he said, he put out the bed-room light at Breeze's request, and closed the door upon leaving. And after leaving Breeze's home Boardman went straight to his own.

Through the rest of the night and until the body was found his alibi was perfect.

Walters had returned unexpectedly early from Liverpool, at one o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Grew heard him enter, came out and spoke to him on the second-floor landing, and asked if there was anything she might do. Walters said he was not hungry and would go to bed. He asked about his uncle's health, heard that Boardman was still up until nearly midnight attending to details of the business, and observed that his uncle must be recovering nicely from his gripe if he could remain at work. He went upstairs to his room on the third floor.

Mrs. Grew, who was suffering from rheumatism, returned to her room on the second floor, read for a while, and then went to sleep—until 2.30 a.m., she believed. From that time until the discovery of the murder, Walters's claim of innocence, like Boardman's, had no support from other testimony than his own.

In short, the police suspected, and their suspicions proved well-founded, that if Breeze died before midnight it was Boardman who liberated the gas that killed him, and that if Breeze died after midnight, then Walters was the slayer of his uncle.

This is all the evidence from which the police shrewdly fixed the approximate time of the crime, and thereby the identity of the murderer.

Can you solve this problem by answering these questions:
1. Was it Walters or Boardman who liberated the gas? (Mark 5.)
2. How did the police deduce it? (Mark 5.)
THE TRAPPER.

(Continued from page 24.)

instructions to clear up the coming case with a celerity that made Wilde, who stated that Wilde did not wish to say why he had so suddenly abandoned the case, he would do so, if his evidence were pressed upon him. He was none of Munt's affair to be curious.

So the chief inspector took a "bus to the City, and, dropping off at the corner of Fleet Street, where he found the slightly old-fashioned offices of Hint, Sons & Dart, the clerk to whom he spoke, Yule, seemed to have something of the same look to himself as if he were a bit afraid. "Mr. Hint did you wish to see me, sir?" He was by no means sure of the degree of deference with which he was to be addressed by a chief inspector from Scotland Yard.

"Are you the partners, I don't care whom.

"Is it in regard to Estrahan?"

"In a way—you might say so," Wilde said, in a confidential tone, and added, "There's no construction put on his visit. Besides, he might find the clerk even more useful than the partners.

"Yes, sir."

The clerk was a little flattered by the air of respect with which he was addressed. He was careful, too, not to catch the eye of the inspector, which, after all, was not a very amusing thing to do. Every one in the office was unaccountably fastened on him.

"We had many interests in common, Queer. He would have been the one to put the point."

"No, young fellow, I think that scarcely likely. I suppose he had a number of lady friends, one of the lads, eh?"

"Oh, yes, we've got one or two."

"Well, of course, you know, sir—that is, we had a habit of getting in a bit late in the evenings. Nothing out of the way. He liked a bit of fun. It was about a month ago he dropped me off. He got in with some swagger people, and I suppose an erstwhile high-tension enough. Besides, I haven't a dinner-jacket. I met him one evening, coming out of the Gnomes Club with a friend of his, and he absolutely cut me off. Not that I minded then. I hope I've got that, and there are three other people who were with him in evening dress in Shaftesbury Avenue, and, believe me, although I went up to the police and told them, and they had the case, and as though I was some strange kind of insect, I had it out with him here next day, but he was gone. A man and a business man. We've had him and he's gone."

"Yes—yes. You've come about this fellow Estrahan. A nice boy, Mr. Wilde, though perhaps not perfectly thorough in the police department. He's been sobered down in life, and become a valuable man. We thought it best to report the facts to the police, and it's now in their hands."

"I'm going to the police, so we just reported it, you see. Nothing to do with us really, but awkward—very awkward, gentlemen. We've been shamed as it is."

"There was a question about some bonds, sir."

"Ah, yes!" Hint shifted a paperweight quite needlessly from one end of his desk to the other. "That's quite all right. They're all in order.

"Wilde leaned back in his chair, and, thrusting his hands deep into his trousers-pockets, regarded the fire from under his slagg'y eyebrows. "You might be quite candid with me, Mr. Hint, he said. "These bonds? Were they ever found?"

"There was a note found, however, the identity of which is in the hands of the police."

"And the find was a substantial one?"

"Oh, I'm afraid we have no doubt on that score. We've quite got that."

"And if you initiated proceedings against this man, there would have to be disclosure of this—ah—laxity, which would hurt the credit of—?"

"Exactly, Mr. Wilde. There's really no harm done.

"Wilde withdrew his hands from his pockets. "You may care your mind, Mr. Hint. I have no intention of foreing you to prosecute even if you desire it."

"But it is to discover where Estrahan now is, I fancy he can give me information on another matter. He's been on the track of the bonds reached you."

"The stockbroker gave a satisfied breath—"it was almost a sigh—of relief as his visitor made his point clear.

"I am afraid, they were thrown away. The address was typewritten, and the postmark was, as far as I could see, in Scotland."

"And that's all?"

"Yes, I think we have been protected by the package by accident. I have it here."

"He pulled out of one of the desk drawers, and produced a bed furniture, hand."

"The detective gave it a cursory glance, and dropped it between the pages of a small notebook which he took from an inside pocket. He had verified a suspicion, had made the first step. It was explicable that a clerk who had tampered with securities should be diligent about returning to an office from which, at the very least, he was certain to be dismissed. But I have resolved itself into one of those commonplace, everyday tragedies with which a lifetime at Scotland Yard is replete with all its stimulating variety."

"By the time he had left Hint's offices he was satisfied that he had learned all that was likely to be gleaned in that quarter. He had quitted the office where the missing clerk, and, in a quiet congregator of shorthand and abbreviated language, that he had found upon Estrahan had favored, and the people with whom he was known to have acquaintance. He decided to draw Brixton."

"A garrulous landlady carried the information he had acquired a point or two further. She had come to him, and he had learned, that she had found on Estrahan's late night habits, and had even vouched a maternal interest in his appearance. He had been a respectable house, and I'm a respectable woman."

"Well, sir, from this having effect, she explained, almost tearfully, the young man had been far from being worse hours than ours, especially since that evening."

"But you say "just as if it was a proper fortune". She made it clear that slender foreboding had haunted her, for that friend had first thrown herself in a dimmery algebra. And goodness knew what had happened."

"The last thing she had seen him he had come home, and no one could tell why he was last seen, but his best and his second best suit still in his wardrobe, and his suit-case under the bed."

"Having a lady's love, I suppose?" Wilde asked, and smiled. "Wilde obtained permission to take a glance at Estrahan's apartment. A rigorously neat bed-

sitting-room, cheaply furnished, and with the walls made indistinguishable by contrasts of hygroscopic stains, the landlady's relatives, framed in plain, and erups specimens of their occurrence in the old-fashioned pictures hung in the framework apparently inspired by delirium tremens.

"I found no puppet, in searching the place—not such an intense prolonged search as he might in other circumstances have made—but a rough scrutiny of things at hand. There were a case of old newspapers, a few books, a tailor's shop; a tailor's bag; a few receipts, among which Wilde noted one for a gold watch; a money-order, a booklet, an explanatory of an elderly woman, and a note of seven words addressed to "R. Haregrce, Bex, the musicologist,"—"Will see you to-night. All love, Stella."

"Tipt," commented the inspector, and stored the wallet in his pocket left the house.

"Stella," whoever she was, presented herself to him as the most obvious path to follow. The man in the Gnomes Club, which had been a chance acquaintance, had been in one of the streets running between Piccadilly and Oxford Street. Then the manager received a visitors' book that day. Then the manager received a visitors' book that day.

"It was a running night club, a possible fraction to windward of the way it is well to be polite to the people who come in, and sometimes to have instant access to the members' register and to the visitors' book, and his diplomatically-trained manners made a dream of him.

"He emerged whistling, and with the companionliness of a man who feels that all is well with the world, boarded a bus and made his journey to Brixton. Stella Cliffe had met his eye as an habitu? of the club, he felt that he had in his hands an end of the call he was seeking to unravel.

"It was eleven at night ere he returned. There was the clang of cymbals and the white of the saxophone in the big main room of the club. The detective stood for a while in the shelter of a curtained recess watching the dancers. Half an hour passed, and he glanced summary of the door to his left. At last he saw Stella, bayouly and vivacious, laughing into the face of her tall escort. The girl was very striking, and yet nothing in her manner suggested the "black" light of an archway opposite the spot where she stood.

"The lights flinched and went out. Martin Wilde heard the low-voiced reasurances of the man, and the subdued thittering of the announce. There was a sharp cracking in some fashion continued to play. He waited till the light should be restored.

"Someone switched on a hand-torch, and its beam rested on the man with Stella Cliffe. The two were still beneath the archway, the tips of her fingers resting on his shoulder. Then her voice the way went out, and the darkness was split by a vicious needle of flame. A heavy thudding report mingled with the wild shrill screams of the woman. The hairs stopped abruptly.

"Wilde flung his way forward, striking a match as he moved. As though at a signal the room was illuminated. The first thing to catch the eye was Cliffe's companion sprawled on the floor, a crimson blight slowly spreading on his white shirt. He was a man of the people, of business, of the people who keep a marmalade with pale set face, and lips moving mechanically. "Can you believe it?" she was saying as the detective reached her. "Why, it's you, Mr. Wilde. Would you believe it?"

THE MURDERER OF VELVET.

Stella Cliffe stood over the dead body of Velvet Greymarsh-dry-eyed, incredulous. Yet there were no shadows on her face. She knew it. Recently, however, remodelly, has come into association with murder always feels as if the solid ground had given way underfoot. Murders are things that one reads about in the newspapers and in books. They are unreal.
as a stage spectacle, calamities which cannot be taken into account as personal contingencies. That a man of one's should kill or be killed is incapable of conception. But when such a thing happens as concerned as the first shock as people suffering from a nightmare.

Stella, although her mature years had been spent in many illegitimate enterprises, had never come into contact with unexpected death in this form. Her reaction was entirely normal.

She had liked Velvet. He was a jolly companionable rogue. Superficially, at least, he looked like the kind of a fellow who would need his not inconsiderable wits to get it, and, since an all-wise providence had seen to it that there were a number of such fellows about business, the little fellow had no difficulty in providing for his wants on a moderately magnanimous scale. He had assimilated much; that business was leaves, and all was fish that came to his net. He could handle a pack of cards as deftly as the most expert reaper. Had a knowledge of horse racing and a profound interest. Give him ten minutes start and he would sell a railway concession at the South Pole or a gold mine in New England to the highest bidder, and, clearest sight-wad of an Abraham Joy who ever existed. More than that, he could laugh easily when the joke was over and demand of his awakened victim a famous forebear had done, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Stella had found it well to join the little coterie that centered about this gentleman, and Velvet had managed to make her attract one of his calibre could not only lure fat pigeons to destruction, but assist in their plucking. True, Velvet somehow always had the lion's share of the take-off, but on the whole she did well, and he was pleasant to work with.

Do not be under any illusion—there was no question of love between them. Both had formed contempt for sentiment. Their intimacy was analogous to that which might exist between a producer and his leading lady.

This daughter of the underworld was, you like, a mercenary, merciless trickster, but she was yet still young enough to feel occasional bursts of compassion. She had found herself with the jockey's namers about Dick Estrehan, the while she despised him as a rich, unsophisticated young fool. She had seen him only with wideness in the best thrown down by Velvet, who posed as the "Hon. Derek Vaux," and his confederates.

The thing had been judiciously simple, and it had had patience all done in owing in a soft-seated, delicately lighted room in the "Hon. Derek's" flat. There Essteharn had been the man in the background, and her racing by a great trainer—a filly taken for the evening by one who was known in certain circles as Stott Thomas, a graduate of Velvet's own school.

He was told how "jobs"—great racing was—were carried out, and how easy it was to hide the fact that a horse by allowing it to lose a number of races until its handicap and the betting odds presented opportunity for a while. Essteharn had been the last to be taken, and she had faced the possibilities of callous reproaches by accepting her invitation to a last dinner with the other two, of the horse. So, she had gathered about her herself. The tragedy of that comedy are deeper into her soul than she would have cared to disclose.

Velvet's eyes were two inflections amused chuckle of his when she related the episode.

"The poor fool! So he was a tinkering perp ящчдн, after all. Well, he cleaned shaken me in. Anyway, we've got the bottle. Why worry."

He cut his laughter as abruptly and his eyes narrowed.

"Say, Stella, this is not so good. They'll get on to this bird. I wish he'd taken your shot and stopped it. They're bound to have him inside, and—I know the breed—he'll squeal."

She gave an expressive shrug of her shoulders.

"No, he won't," she said definitely.

The man eyed her shrewdly.

"Well, perhaps you know best. If you think you've him turned over. Anyway, there's nothing to it. He put his money on a horse and the horse lost. We can't be blamed for that. It might happen to anyone. How were we to tell that he'd been digging his fingers in the till. Let's forget it. Come on; I'll buy you some grip."

That had been all. She had tried to wipe the matter from her mind, to forget Essteharn. And now Velvet lay dead, and a detective was breathing over him. He had played a man for a sucker once too often.

"He's through," announced Martin Wilde, starting up. "Where's the manager? Stand back, you people. I'm a police officer. Here, you?" He seized a gaping waiter by the arm. "Slip to the door and say that no one's to be allowed to leave the building under any pretext. And then phone to Vine Street and tell them what's happened. Say that Mr. Wilde is here, and that I need half a dozen constables, the district surgeon, and two women witnesses."

A moment later he repeated these instructions to the manager, and then his gaze wandered stolidly over the kaleidoscopic throng of men and women who were now being shepherded back from the little group about the dead man. Almost merrily one hand had closed about Stella's wrist. The girl gave a little moan and he turned on her abruptly.

"What do you know about this?" he asked.

Her tone was low and menacing.

"I never thought—I never dreamed that he'd do it, she faltered. "If I had known—"

"Who do you mean? Who are you speaking of, girl?" His eyes, harsh and commanding, dwelt on her. "Tell me."

The girl's face twitched. She wrinkled in a frown at the sight of her arm. Dusting her half-paralyzed senses comprehended that she was being questioned by the natural enemy of her class, and without hesitation she summoned some of her old self-possessed resolution.

"Mr. Estrehan, Mr. Wilde. I don't know what I was saying."

He bent his lips to within an inch of her ear.

"I'll tell you," he said in a fierce whisper.

"You were saying that Dick Estrehan killed this man."

"I was not," she denied tremulously.

"I say."

Her voice trailed off, and Stella Glitter dropped in a dead faint beside the murdered man.

It was no moment for delay. Martin Wilde knew that he had his hands full for a while and he could not be bothered with attentions to a fainting woman. At his word some of the waiters carried the unconscious girl into the manager's room, and Wilde with inward relief saw three men advancing towards him. Vine Street followed promptly. They were a uniformed inspector, the divisional detective-inspector, and the district surgeon. While the medical man bent over the body the three held a short consultation. Then Wilde mounted a chair while the others hurried away.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "most of you have been witnesses of the crime that has just taken place. A man has been killed, and the murderer is still somewhere within this building. I have to ask you to assist my colleagues and myself. Both men and women will be searched before they can be permitted to leave. You will all be questioned and your names and addresses will be taken. I hope that you will follow the instructions that will be given you."

He dropped to the floor, and a man, wearing across his breast the red ribbon of some foreign order, detached himself from the crowd.

"I guess you ought to have this," he said, and by his accent Wilde discerned the educated and travelled American. "I have just picked it up. I suppose your friend the murderer was anxious to get rid of it."

He held out a small electric torch.

"Thank you," said the detective.

His eyes rested indifferently on the other, yet in that instant he took in a man somewhere about forty, of medium height, but with broad shoulders that gave indication of immense strength. The brown coat was steady and inscrutable. Somehow, Martin Wilde had a vague impression that he ought to know that clean-cut, square-chinned face with its firm determined mouth. There was a hint in his memory and it irritated him. This man might conceivably be the assassin he was looking for, and he was ready to get rid of a piece of damning evidence.

"I'll be glad," went on Wilde, "if you will, as nearly as you can, show me the spot where you found it. It might give valuable evidence."

"Mr.—" He raised his eyebrows in interrogation.

"That's my name—Quenton Thordil."

A flood of recollection swept over Wilde. Quenton Thordil was in a sense an international figure. The attention of Scotland Yard had first been attracted to him during the great war, when he had taken audacious personal risks and spent his millions freely in
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