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THE STORY OF A DEAD MAN

by Leslie Charteris

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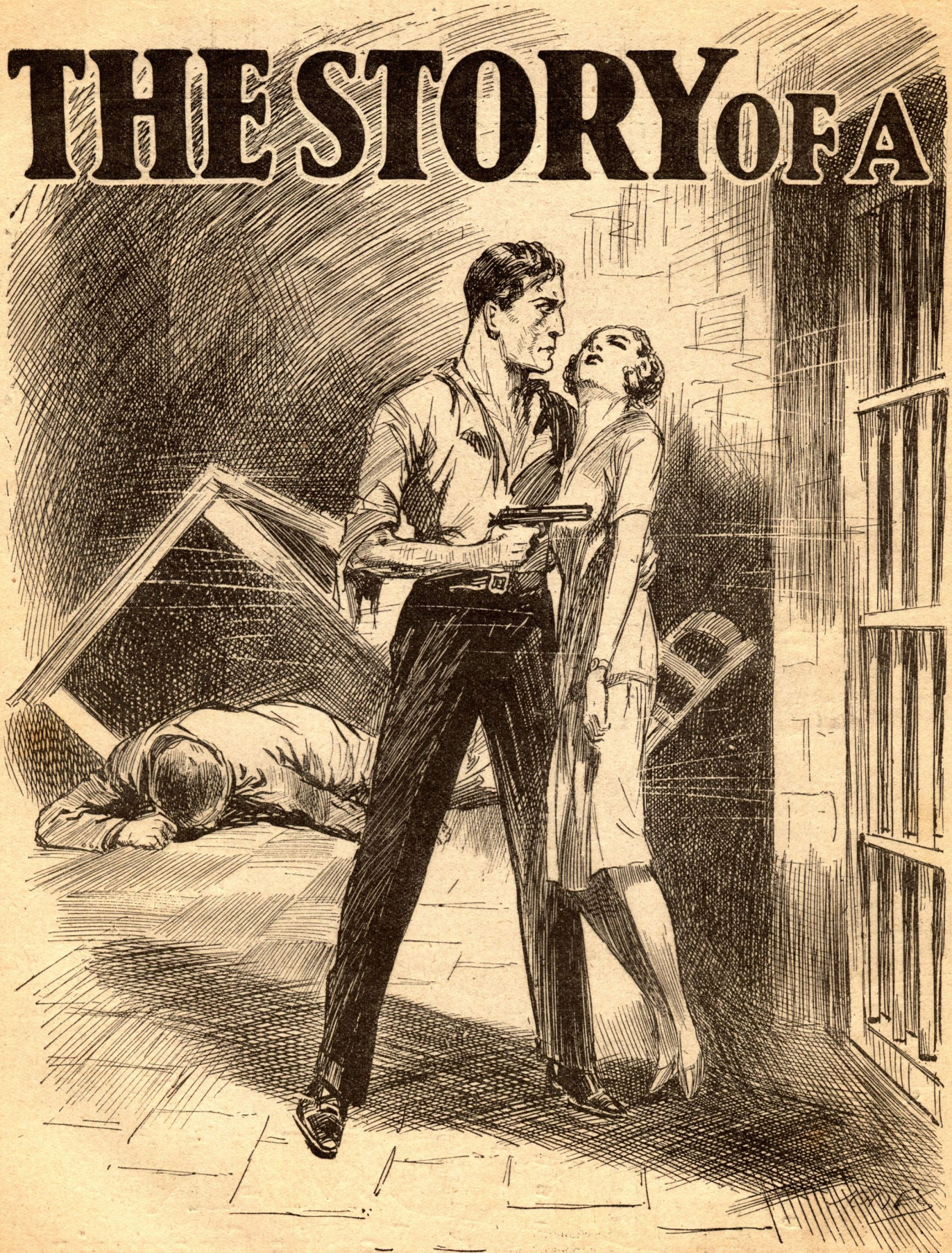
MAGNIFICENT BOOK-LENGTH COMPLETE STORY WITHIN!

THE STORY OF A



Behind the big iron gate, Jimmy and the girl were prisoners of a madman. They could expect no mercy. The room was rapidly filling with gas.

DEAD MAN

By

LESLIE CHARTERIS

Complete in This Issue

A BAFFLING MYSTERY NOVEL

Chapter 1.
TEAL OF THE "YARD."

When Long Harry came out of Pentonville Prison, he was not expecting to be welcomed by a cohort of friends. At the worst, he had reckoned an emissary of the Prisoners' Aid Society would be the most he would have to deal with, and consequently the sight of the plump and ponderous Inspector Teal lounging somnolently against a lamp-post a few yards from the prison gates was an unwelcome surprise.

Pulling his hat down over his eyes, Harry tactfully began to stroll in the opposite direction, but Inspector Teal was not so lightly to be deprived of the pleasure of renewing his acquaintance with an old customer.

He hitched himself off his lamp-post, and came up with Long Harry in a few slothful strides that nevertheless managed to convey him over the intervening ground in a surprisingly short space of time.

His hand fell on Harry's shoulder, and the yegg pulled up and faced about uneasily.

"I want you, Harry," said Mr. Teal, whose sense of humour was sometimes lacking in good taste.

Harry shuffled his feet.

"You've got nothing on me, Mr. Teal," he said defensively.

"I want you, Harry," repeated Mr. Teal sleepily, "to come along to the Corner House and have some breakfast with me, and then we'll have a little talk."

Harry said that he had had breakfast, but Mr. Teal was not so easily to be put off.

"If you won't eat yourself," he said, "you can watch me—and listen," he added, with unconscious humour.

As he spoke, he was gently shepherding Harry back past the prison gates to a diminutive car that was drawn up by the kerb.

They passed down Caledonian Road in silence. Mr. Teal had the gift of investing his silences with a peculiarly disturbing quality, and Long Harry became more and more unhappy as the miles ticked over on the speedometer in front of him.

"I suppose," said Harry, breaking a period of almost intolerable suspense as they turned round Park Crescent into Portland Place, "I suppose you aren't thinking I had anything to do with that Regent Street job?"

"I've stopped thinking about that," said Mr. Teal, "since I became certain."

"That's like you flatties," complained Harry bitterly. "Let a man do his time and not say a word, and then wait for him outside the prison to shop him for another stretch."

Mr. Teal said nothing. They whizzed down Regent Street in another spell of silence.

"It isn't even a fair charge," said Harry presently with an injured air. "I've got a beautiful alibi for you."

"You always have," said Mr. Teal, without resentment. "I've never known you disappoint me yet!"

They sat over bacon and eggs in Coventry Street, and Inspector Teal then condescended to relieve some of Harry's apprehensions by explaining the reason for his hospitality.

"I want you," said Mr. Teal, in his sleepy way, "to tell me a little story about a man

named Connell. I've got an idea he's a particular friend of yours."

The other's face twisted up in a vicious grin.

"Connell," snarled Long Harry, "is a——"

"Yes?" prompted Mr. Teal drowsily.

Harry's clenched fist opened slowly. His vicious grin became cunning, then mask-like.

"Connell," said Harry softly, "is a man I've met occasionally. I can't tell you more about him than that, Mr. Teal."

The detective sighed.

"Sure you can't?"

Harry shook his head.

"You know I'm always ready to help you when I can, Mr. Teal," he said speciously, "but I don't know anything about Connell."

Mr. Teal looked sceptical.

"Except," said Harry slowly, "that I've a good idea he was the squealer who shot me for the Bayswater joke."

"You let me down over Bayswater," said Mr. Teal reproachfully. "I never thought you carried a cosh around with you."

"Nor do I," said Harry. "Listen!"

He leant forward across the table.

"You and me, Mr. Teal," he said, "have met pretty often—on business, as you might say. Now, you know I'm a respectable burglar. You've never caught me with a cosh, let alone a gun, yet. You've put me away six times, and I don't mind admitting now that I asked for the whole half dozen, but I swear to you I never went near Bayswater that night."

"You ought to have told that to the Court," said Mr. Teal.

"Look here," persisted Harry with charming simplicity. "You remember pulling me in, don't you? Well, had I got an alibi? Did I say anything about an alibi? You know I didn't. Now, I ask you, Mr. Teal, have you ever known me to be pulled in for a job of work that I really did and me not have an alibi ready?"

Mr. Teal's eyes were half closed, and he appeared to be taking no notice. That pose of lazy boredom was his one affectation.

"The whole thing was a frame-up from start to finish," repeated Harry, "and you ought to know it, Mr. Teal. I never used a cosh in my life, and I never did a porch job, anyway. And the man might have died, from what the papers said. Then I'd have been hanged. Maybe I was meant to be hanged. But Connell——"

Mr. Teal's eyes suddenly opened very wide.

"What are you going to do to Connell?" he asked.

Harry relaxed.

"Well, when I see him," he said, "maybe I'll stand him a drink, and maybe I won't. Who knows?"

"And when I take you again," said Mr. Teal, "maybe you'll get a lifer, and maybe you'll hang. Who knows about that, either?"

It was an unsatisfactory interview from all points of view, and Mr. Teal, who had dragged himself out of bed at half-past five that morning in order to bring it about, was pardonably annoyed.

He got back to his room at Scotland Yard about half-past nine, and his assistant found him in an unpleasant mood.

"I've been thinking," began the recently-promoted Sergeant Barrow, and Mr. Teal cut him short with a ferocious glare.

"Why?" demanded Mr. Teal unkindly. "I'm sure it hurts you, and you know I've always told you to take care of yourself."

"I've been thinking about the Camberwell Post Office hold-up," insisted the younger man aggrievedly. "Now, couldn't that man Horring have been in it?"

"He could," agreed Mr. Teal carefully, "if they hadn't hanged him at Wandsworth the week before. Go away and rest. You'll be getting brain fever if you go on thinking like this."

After that, Mr. Teal felt better.

"And on your way down," he called after the retreating sergeant as the door closed, "tell Sergeant Jones I want him!"

There is a special department at Scotland Yard whose sole function is to indulge its curiosity, and the facts which it brings to light are strange and various. Some of them are gleaned from the reports of patrolling constables, who are instructed to note down any unusual happenings which they observe on their beats. Others are gleaned by painstaking subterranean investigation.

No plain van draws up outside a house at night and proceeds to discharge its cargo without the fact being reported; no man moves suddenly from a bed-sitting-room in Bermondsey to a service flat in Jermyn Street without arousing the interest of this inquisitive department; no man becomes a regular frequenter of the hotels and restaurants in the West End, which are shared as a meeting-ground by London society, foreign millionaires, crooks, both home-bred and imported, and that curious fraternity which, without coming into conflict with the law, contrives to live in luxury by its wits and the generosity of its relatives, without this prying department interesting itself in him.

Of this department, Sergeant Jones was an esteemed ornament. He spent his life in a maze of card indexes, turning over the disjointed and apparently insignificant reports which came in to him from time to time, sorting the wheat from the chaff, filing away accredited information, and requesting the further investigation of those facts which seemed to him to require it.

Sometimes the threads he followed led nowhere. Sometimes, by devious means, they were linked up with other threads, which in their turn tangled up again with yet more threads. And then, perhaps, a house would be surrounded, a couple of detectives would enter, and in a few moments some very surprised men would be hustled unostentatiously into a waiting taxi and removed to a place where they would have leisure to wonder how the seemingly undetectable had been detected.

"Sit down, Jones," said Mr. Teal, settling himself comfortably in the big swivel chair behind his desk and closing his eyes, "and sing me a little song about Vanney's."

Sergeant Jones sat down. He was a long, lanky man, with sandy hair and a large nose.

"Directors," said Sergeant Jones, "as follows: President and managing director, James Arthur Vanney, 48, of 52, Half Moon Street; secretary, James Traill, Esquire, 26, of 113, Cheyne Walk; director, Malcolm Standish, 34, Solicitor, of Lincoln's Inn."

"Do we know anything about these men?"

"Not much. Standish we know. He's behind half the criminal cases that are defended at the Old Bailey—a lot more than his name appears in. If any big crook gets landed he sends for Standish at once. We've never had anything on him, but I shouldn't be surprised if he'd made a tidy pile out of some of the cases he's worked on. Vanney built that new house at the bottom of Half Moon Street about nine months ago. Two cars—a Rolls and a Daimler. Four servants. Does himself pretty well on the whole."

"Where was he before he moved into Half Moon Street?"

"He stayed at the Savoy while the house was being built. His address was registered there as Melbourne, Victoria. Traill commissioned the architect and got the building job in hand a couple of months before Vanney arrived. Traill is a man we'd like to know a lot more about. Stenning took him on as his private secretary about six months before he was killed in that motor smash. Traill was one of the witnesses at the inquest, if you remember. Before that he divided his time between the West End of London, Paris, and the Riviera. He always had plenty of money, but nobody knew where it came from, and he certainly used to go around with a bunch of pretty doubtful characters. The French police wanted him for a big jewel robbery at Nice three years ago. Before that his name was mentioned in connection with a big bank fraud in Paris. A few months before Stenning took him on you were after him yourself for the Gregory case."

"I know all that," said Mr. Teal. "The French police wanted him, and I wanted him, and we're all still wanting him. He's a clever lad, is Jimmy."

Mr. Teal fingered his chin thoughtfully.

"Staff?" he queried.

"Very small. Girl secretary, name of Pamela Marlowe, and two clerks. Pamela Marlowe was Stenning's ward."

Mr. Teal nodded faintly to signify that the interview was at an end, and Sergeant Jones rose.

He was leaving the room when a man brought in a small parcel.

"One moment," murmured Mr. Teal, and the sergeant stopped by the door.

Inspector Teal examined the packet carefully and then held it to his ear. Then he blinked, and the ghost of a smile crossed his face.

"How surprisingly unoriginal," remarked Mr. Teal mildly.

Sergeant Jones came back to the desk, and Mr. Teal held out the packet to him. Jones took it doubtfully.

"Walk that round to the Explosives Department," said Teal, "and mind you don't drop it. You can also spend your spare time praying that it doesn't go off before you get there!"

THE MYSTERIOUS OFFICES.

VANNEY'S, LTD., who were vaguely described on the glass panel of their door as "Agents," occupied a suite of offices in a new block of buildings opposite Charing Cross Station.

There were four rooms looking out on to the Strand. A private corridor ran the length of the suite, and each room opened separately on to it, while a system of communicating doors permitted access to any room from any of the other rooms without entering the passage. The first room was a waiting room, in the second room worked two clerks, and in the third were Traill and Miss Marlowe. The fourth was the sanctum of James Arthur Vanney himself.

Vanney was a thick-set man of medium height, though he actually looked short by reason of exceptional breadth of shoulder. He was dark and bearded, sparing of speech, and gruff in manner.

Inspector Teal knocked on the door marked "Inquiries" one afternoon, and was told by the clerk who opened it that Mr. Vanney was busy.

"I'll wait," said Mr. Teal philosophically, and the clerk appeared to be nonplussed.

The door communicating the clerks' room with the secretary's office was open.

Through it Mr. Teal perceived a familiar back. He flowed irresistibly past the clerk, passed through the communicating door, and tapped Mr. Traill's shoulder.

"Good-morning, Jimmy," said Mr. Teal drowsily.

"Good-afternoon to me," said Mr. Traill easily, and rose. "I'm sorry you've had this journey for nothing. Didn't the clerk tell you that Mr. Vanney was engaged?"

Mr. Teal nodded.

"He did," admitted Mr. Teal, "and I said I'd wait."

"Mr. Vanney," persisted Traill, "will be engaged all the afternoon."

"I've got a lot of time to spare," said Teal calmly, "and, when I get bored with waiting, you can come and talk to me."

"Mr. Vanney," continued Traill pointedly, "will not be able to see you until to-morrow morning."

Teal extracted from his pocket a small packet done up in pink paper. From it he took a smaller packet, from which he took a thin wafer of chewing gum. With his jaws moving rhythmically, he cast a sleepily speculative eye round the room.

"I can doss down in a corner," he said. "Or have you a camp bed?"

Traill inspected a row of buttons on his desk, selected one, and pressed it.

Mr. Teal masticated in silence until a knock on the door answered the bell.

"In," said Traill briskly.

The door opened, and a man in a plain blue serge suit and a bowler hat stood framed in the aperture.

"George," said Traill, in the same brisk tone, "show this gentleman the way out."

Mr. Teal shifted his gum round so as to give the other side of his face its full share of exercise.

"Suppose," he suggested languidly, "that I just had a word with you in private first?"

Traill shrugged.

"I can give you two minutes exactly," he said. "You can wait outside the door, George. Miss Marlowe, would you mind?"

Mr. Teal lounged into a chair.

"Nice girl that," he remarked.

"Very," agreed Traill. "I'm sure you're not a friend of hers!"

Teal stretched his arms lazily.

"Ever heard of the Duc de Mondemont, Jimmy?" asked Mr. Teal.

"An old friend of mine," said Jimmy. "We met in Nice some years ago."

"His wife has never found her necklace since you said good-bye," said Teal to the ceiling.

"Anyway," said Jimmy Traill composedly, "she was a mean old camel, and as for the duke—well, he was never a very nice man. Possibly they deserved it."

"Possibly," agreed Teal. "But what I really came to tell you was that they got hold of a floor waiter who left the hotel the next day before the theft was discovered, and he says that he saw someone extraordinarily like you coming out of the duke's room the night before the necklace was taken."

Traill permitted himself to smile.

"That's interesting," he said, "and so I suppose the Sûrèté are clamouring for my extradition?"

Teal nodded.

"That's about the idea."

Traill shook his head.

"It won't wash, Teal," he said sadly. "You know I can't be extradited from England. You ought to know better than to try to put a bluff like that over on me."

"You could be tried here," said Teal.

"Even that won't wash," said Traill regretfully, "because I'm sure that if I just said a little word to the duke he'd be only too pleased to tell me that I had his full permission to keep the necklace, if I happened to have it in my possession. I know a lot of things about His Grace which would make him awfully sorry to get me into trouble."

"Have it your own way," said Teal languidly. "Now can I see your boss?"

"I'm afraid not," said Jimmy. "I've told you he's engaged."

Teal looked across at the opposite communication door. The upper panel was of frosted glass, and across this was painted the word "Private."

"Does he always see his visitors in the dark?" asked Teal gently.

"Always," said the bland Mr. Traill. "It's one of his many peculiarities."

Mr. Teal's eyes were half-closed.

"And does he," pursued Mr. Teal, in the same tired voice, "always hang his hat and coat up in the clerks' room? I can see your hat and coat hanging up in the corner there, and there were three hats and coats in the room I came through."

"That," said Jimmy fluently, "is another of his eccentricities. He says he hates to have his hat and coat hanging up in his own room."

Mr. Teal nodded, and then he moved.

It has already been mentioned that, for such a large and slothful man, he could, when he so desired, cover ground with a surprising turn of speed.

He had flung open the communicating door marked "Private" before Jimmy could stop him, and the lights clicked up under his thumb as Jimmy reached his side.

The room was empty.

It was sparsely, but comfortably furnished, with a big knee-hole desk set crosswise in the corner by the window, a safe in the opposite corner, and a filing cabinet against one wall. There were two armchairs upholstered in leather, and a plain wooden armchair behind the desk. Facing the communicating door was a fireplace, and on either side of this was a tall cupboard built into the wall. There was no sign of Vanney.

Teal leaned back against the jamb of the door, looking at Jimmy's blank face and chewing unemotionally.

"And," said Mr. Teal, without changing the bored tone of his voice, "does Mr. Vanney automatically vanish, together with his visitor, when this door is opened?"

Traill put his hands in his pockets and settled himself comfortably in the doorway. He looked quizzically at the detective.

"I've never known him do it before," he replied calmly. "But great men are always slightly erratic in their habits. It will be an interesting little problem for you to take home with you."

Mr. Teal removed a speck of dust from his bowler hat.

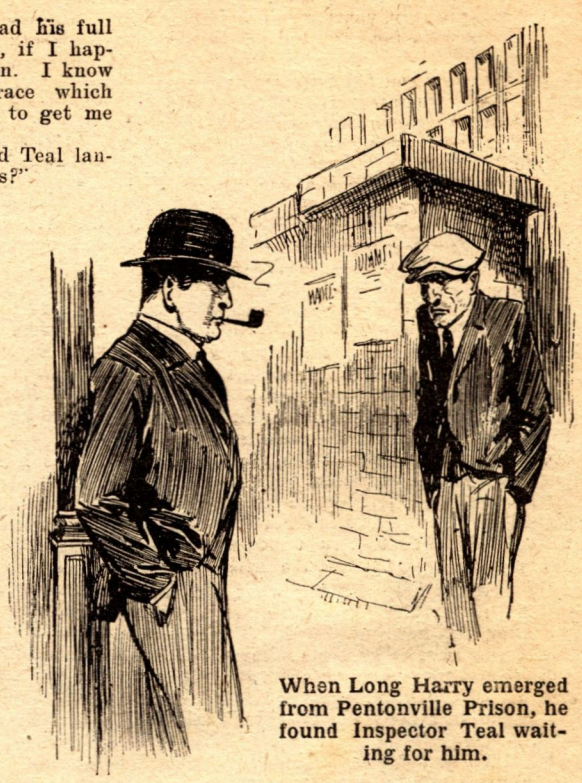
"On second thoughts," he said, "I don't think I'll spend the night here. Bye-bye, Jimmy. See you later, I expect."

"I'm afraid so," said Jimmy affably.

Mr. Teal opened the door to find the porter standing patiently outside.

"You may go, George," said Teal. "I'll find my own way out."

He was sauntering down the corridor when a thought struck him, and he returned. He opened the door a few inches without the formality of knocking, and poked his head in.



When Long Harry emerged from Pentonville Prison, he found Inspector Teal waiting for him.

Mr. Traill was writing at the desk, and the girl was tapping the typewriter in the corner.

"Good-bye, Teal," said Jimmy pleasantly, without looking up.

"When Mr. Vanney comes back," drawled the imperturbable Inspector Teal, "you might tell him, with my compliments, that if he makes any more childish attempts to kill me, I shall be seriously annoyed."

He closed the door again and resumed his leisurely progress towards the stairs, humming gently to himself.

Mr. Teal had never been able to overcome a weakness for playing the magazine detective.

CRIMINAL NONSENSE.

Jimmy Traill put the finishing touches to the letter he was drafting. Then, settling himself back in his chair, he reached out a long arm to the neat row of bell-pushes which occupied one corner of his desk. Selecting one with a thoughtful air, he pressed it. The small brass plate beside the knob was engraved with the word "Secretary," and the bell rang in the opposite corner of the same room, over Pamela Marlowe's head. The outsider would have failed to see the point of this arrangement, but Traill had not been in business long enough to get tired of playing with the mechanical gadgets provided in all up-to-date offices for the amusement of the staff.

Mr. Traill lighted his cigarette and gazed reflectively at the ceiling.

"Take a letter," he said. "This is to Stanforth and Watson: Dear Sirs,—With reference to our telephone conversation this morning. Stop. Something seems to be eating you."

Pamela Marlowe looked up from her pad in surprise.

"Do you want me to put that down?" she asked.

"No," replied Jimmy, taking his eyes off the ceiling. "The remark was addressed to you."

He was regarding her keenly, and after a few seconds silence she looked away.

"You may tell me all," remarked Jimmy gently. "I am a Grand Master of the Order of Father Confessors."

She met his eyes, again, and the question with which she took advantage of his invitation did not come as a surprise to him.

"Who was that man who came in just now?"

"That," said Mr. Trail, "was the worthy Inspector Claude Eustace Teal, of the Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard. He has a prying disposition, and he isn't anything like the fool he looks. I grant you that would be difficult."

The girl hesitated, fidgeting with her pencil. But Mr. Traill, unruffled himself, made no attempt to fluster her.

"Mr. Traill," she said at length, "I wasn't trying to hear the conversation that went on after you sent me out of the room, but the partition wall is very thin."

"It's these jerry-building methods," sighed Mr. Traill. "I'll dictate a letter to the 'Times' about it in a moment."

The girl's lips tightened a little.

"I couldn't help hearing what Mr. Teal said."

Jimmy said nothing.

He, who should by rights have been the one to show embarrassment, registered nothing of the kind.

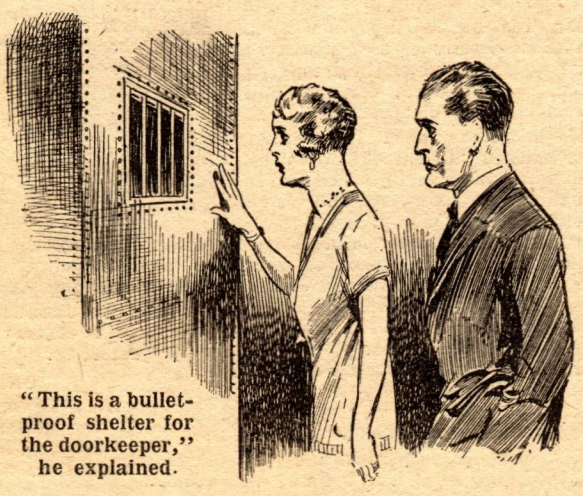
"You didn't deny his charges," said the girl.

"Naturally not," said Jimmy. "George Washington was an ancestor of mine, and I cannot tell a lie."

"Well," said the girl bluntly, "I shall hate doing it, but doesn't it occur to you that it is my duty to say something to Mr. Vanney about it? That is, if you can't give me some sort of explanation."

Jimmy smiled without mockery.

"Of course it is," he agreed cheerfully; "and I should like to say that I appreciate the nobility of your impulse. I shall draw Mr. Vanney's attention to it. But as for the other matter, I'm afraid you won't be able to tell him anything that he doesn't know. Try it to-morrow morning, if you don't believe me."



"This is a bullet-proof shelter for the doorkeeper," he explained.

He dictated a number of letters, waited while she typed them, and took them into Mr. Vanney's private office. He was back in a few moments with the sheaf duly signed.

"You can go as soon as you have addressed them," he said. "George will take them down to the post."

She ventured to be inquisitive.

"Why do we need a special porter for this office?" she asked.

"One should always," said Jimmy impressively, "surround oneself with all the evidences of prosperity that one can afford. It creates a good impression. George will have his nice new uniform with brass buttons to-morrow, and I shall expect to see an immediate jump in our turnover."

It was an invariable rule at Vanney's that Mr. Traill was the last to leave the office. On that particular evening, however, Pamela Marlowe, with her hat and coat on, appeared to be uncertain whether she should take Mr. Traill at his word.

"I've told you you can go," said Jimmy, without looking up from the letter he was perusing.

She made a demur.

"Are you sure Mr. Vanney won't want me again?"

"Mr. Vanney," said Traill carefully, "never wants you. You know that perfectly well."

It was true. All instructions to the office staff were given by Mr. Traill, and he dictated all the letters that were sent out, and opened all that came in. The rest of the staff were never allowed to pass through the door marked "Private."

"I've told you that I shall not want you any more this evening," said Jimmy, "and you may take that as official. Mr. Vanney has already left."

She stared.

"He hasn't come through for his hat and coat," she objected.

"He left by his private entrance," said Jimmy shortly, "without a hat and coat. He has just joined the Ancient Order of Kangaroos, and one of their rules is that no member is allowed to take his hat and coat home with him on Friday."

There was nothing for her but to leave without further argument, but the incident found its place in her memory beside a number of other extraordinary things which she had noticed during the few months that she had worked under Traill.

Mr. Traill was in every way an ideal employer His manner, without being brusque, was at all times irreproachably impersonal, but she had never been able to understand his mentality. Whenever she ventured to comment on any unusual happening, he was never at a loss for an explanation, but the reasons he gave so glibly would have been an insult to the intelligence of an imbecile.

There had been a time when she had wondered if he fancied himself as a wag and was expecting her to laugh, but he made the most outrageous statements without smiling, and if he showed any emotion at all it was one of concealed delight at her annoyed perplexity.

She found another enigma to interpret when she arrived at the office the following Monday, for Mr. Traill, with his coat off, was supervising the finishing touches which were being put by two workmen to a curious erection which had appeared at the far end of the private corridor.

Jimmy greeted her in his usual affable manner, and invited her to admire it.

"This is George's new home," he said.

It was, in fact, no more than a partition which turned into a sort of cubicle the blind end of the passage beyond the door that opened into Vanney's private room. It would have been nothing but an ordinary janitor's box but for an unusual feature in its design. The partition reached all the way to the ceiling, and there were only two small windows—one in the partition itself, and one in the door which the workmen were at that moment engaged in putting in position. Furthermore, each window was obscured by a row of steel bars set close together.

Coming closer she made another surprising discovery.

"But why is it lined with steel?" she asked in amazement.

"Because," said Jimmy, "a half-inch deal board is not much protection against a bullet. We should hate to lose our one and only George."

The girl was silent, but Jimmy was perfectly at his ease.

"Observe, too, the strategic position," he prattled on, with the enthusiasm of an artist. "No one can reach George without having to cover the whole length of the suite, either through the offices or down the corridor. Consequently, it'll be his own fault if he doesn't hear them coming. Besides, we've got another little safety device. I'll show you if you wait here a moment."

He went down the corridor, and as he got near the door a low, burring noise came to her ears. Staring blankly about her, she eventually located its source in a small metal box screwed to the wall inside the cubicle.

Jimmy passed on to the door, and the buzzing stopped. He turned, and it recommenced; then he came back down the corridor, and it stopped again.

"What is it?" she asked, "a burglar alarm?"

"The very latest," said Jimmy. "Come and have a look."

He led her down the passage, and when they were within a yard of the door the low buzzing made itself heard again. She stopped and gazed round puzzledly, but she could see nothing.

"I saw it demonstrated in a shop the other day," explained Jimmy, "and I promptly ordered one. It's worked by a ray that shines across the corridor on to a selenium cell. It's invisible, but if you get in its path the buzzer gives tongue. It's impossible to put it out of action until it's too late, because only James Traill and the electrician who fitted it know exactly where it is."

He was amused at her bewilderment.

"Don't you think it's rather neat?" he asked.

"It seems a lot of trouble to take over a porter."

Jimmy smiled.

"George," he said virtuously, "is a member of Vanney's just as much as you or I. Isn't it the duty of the firm to see that he is thoroughly protected against the dangers of his position?"

In her astonishment she forgot the lesson which experience should have taught her.

"But why should George be in any danger?" she said, and Jimmy's face instantly assumed its gravest expression.

"Haven't you read about all these armed robberies?" he demanded severely. "Haven't you ever heard of the Black Hand; and do you mean to say that I never told you that the Union of Porters, Commissionaires, Caretakers, Undertakers, and Glue Refiners have threatened to do George in for allowing us to put two more than the regulation number of buttons on his uniform?"

She turned away in despair, and went into the office.

Jimmy followed her, and resumed his coat. Then he leaned back in his chair, put his feet on the desk, and pressed the bell marked "Secretary."

"Take a letter to the 'Times,'" he said. "To the Editor of the 'Times.' Dear Sir,—The scamping of work at present practised by the building trade is a disgrace. Stop. In the house which I have recently taken, the walls are so thin that a nail which I drove into the wall last night, in order to hang a picture, was distinctly felt by the occupant of the next room. Stop. Consequently, my wife has been compelled to take her meals off the mantelpiece ever since, with the result that our domestic arrangements have been seriously disorganised. Stop. I am, etcetera, Lieut.-Colonel, Retired. And just remember, Miss Marlowe, that George is one of the most important people in this office, and if anybody happened to shoot at him successfully the firm would probably go into liquidation, and you and I would be looking for new jobs."

UNDER POLICE OBSERVATION.

THE memory of Inspector Teal's visit had occupied a prominent part in Pamela Marlowe's thoughts ever since the afternoon when Jimmy Traill had so shamelessly acknowledged the truth of that lethargic detective's accusations. But when Mr. Traill arrived one morning and told her that he had arranged for her to carry the tale to Vanney, she felt a paradoxical reluctance to go to her employer with a charge against his manager's honesty, even while she welcomed the opportunity of testing the truth of Jimmy's statement that Vanney knew the whole story of his misdeeds.

Mr. Traill, however, appeared to have no doubts as to what the outcome of the interview would be.

"Tell him everything you heard," he encouraged, when the bell rang from Mr. Vanney's office to summon her. "He will be interested."

She took Jimmy at his word, but it was a profitless conversation.

Vanney listened attentively to her story, but when she had finished she could have sworn that he was smiling behind his beard. His voice, however, was quite serious.

"I appreciate your high sense of duty, Miss Marlowe," he said, "but what Mr. Traill told you is quite correct. I know everything about him, and in spite of that he has my complete confidence."

He had a stiff manner of speaking, and appeared to think each sentence out carefully before he uttered it. He did not once look directly at her, but kept his eyes fixed on a point in space a foot or so away from her left shoulder.

"I didn't wish to do Mr. Traill any harm," she felt compelled to explain. "But I had to remember that you were the one who was employing me."

"I quite understand," said Vanney.

He continued to gaze past her in silence for some seconds, stroking his beard. Then he said:

"Did you know that your late guardian's last request to me was that, if anything happened to him, I should look after you?"

"But you were in Australia."

"I know," said Vanney, rather testily. "He wrote to me."

The girl nodded.

"I see. But I never knew much about him, and I never heard him speak of any of his friends. My father knew him a long time ago—they were boys together, but they hadn't met for over twenty years. Just before father died, he happened to meet Mr. Stenning again, quite by accident; and since I had no other relatives living, and father and Mr. Stenning had been such close friends before they lost touch with each other, it was fairly natural that he should appoint Mr. Stenning my guardian. But I only saw Mr. Stenning three times, and that was when I was quite young. He discharged all his duties through his solicitors."

Evidently Traill feared arrest. He was packing his trunk when Inspector Teal arrived.

"He often mentioned your name to me when he wrote," said Vanney. "I believe that, behind the scenes, he took a great interest in you."

He began to fidget with a pencil on his desk, and she could not help noticing his hands. They were rough and ill-kept, and not at all the hands that one would have associated with a millionaire—for Vanney was reputed to be no less.

He appeared suddenly to become aware of their defects, for he dropped the pencil and hid his hands in his pockets.

"I had a very rough life in Australia before I made my fortune," he volunteered. "And I fear that, as guardian, I should be of very little use to you. Now, of course, you are old enough not to need looking after. But if you would honour me with your company at dinner one evening, Miss Marlowe, I should appreciate the compliment."

She hesitated.

"If you want me to——"

"You don't seem very keen," he said.

She had to pause to think of a reply.

"I hardly go out at all," she said at length, and was conscious of the flimsiness of the excuse as soon as she had uttered it.

But Vanney did not appear to be at all put out. He pulled a book towards him and began to turn the pages.

"Very well, Miss Marlowe," he said, with a return to the gruffness of tone which had softened for a moment. "That will be all, then. You may go back to your work."

She returned to Mr. Traill's room feeling vaguely uncomfortable. She knew that her refusal of Vanney's invitation had not been an example of perfect tact, and that realisation was not a congenial one. There was no logical reason that she could see why she should have been so perverse, and she was annoyed with herself for having given way so readily to an unaccountable feeling of revulsion.

Mr. Traill was scribbling away industriously, as usual. She had never discovered what it was he wrote when he was not closeted with Vanney or dictating letters to herself. The sheets were stowed away in a drawer of his desk, which he locked whenever he left the room.

"You are subdued," remarked Jimmy, without taking his eyes off his work. "Therefore I deduce that you have been unwillingly forced to admit that I am more truthful by nature than you had believed."

She smiled, but he was not looking at her.

"I owe you an apology," she said. "You warned me that I was making a fool of myself, but I refused to be convinced."

"Your apology is accepted," said Jimmy amiably.

He covered half a page of manuscript while she transcribed a letter.

"But," said Jimmy, "if you're thinking that one day I shall be revealed as the brilliant and noble detective who masquerades as a criminal, caring nothing for his own reputation and matrimonial prospects, in order to nab the crook of crooks, it is my duty to warn you that nothing so romantic will happen. I'm all that Teal could call me, and more, and the fact that I love you will never alter that."

He said this without the least change of tone, so that it was fully a minute before she realised the meaning of the declaration contained in his last sentence. When the astounding point dawned upon her she stopped tapping the typewriter and stared at him.

Mr. Traill seemed blissfully ignorant of the fact that he had in any way departed from his usual style of conversation. While she watched him in amazement, he wrote three more lines, and then laid down his pen and gazed at the ceiling with an air of furious concentration.

She did not know what to say, and so said nothing. This was not difficult, for he did not appear to be expecting her to make any comment. After a short period of scowling rumination, he picked up his pen again and continued writing.

Pamela gazed hopelessly at a blank sheet of paper. The situation was impossible, but Jimmy gave no sign that he perceived any incongruity in it.

"You are still subdued, Miss Marlowe," he murmured, laying a closely-written page aside and drawing a fresh sheet towards him. "I hardly imagine that the discovery that I am in love with you would affect you so deeply, so I am left to conclude that Vanney has asked you to meet him in a social sort of way."

"I don't think it's any business of yours, Mr. Traill," she began, and then he looked up at her.

"Did he or did he not?"

She flushed resentfully at his insistence.

"What if he did?" countered a stubborn Pamela

Jimmy fingered his chin.

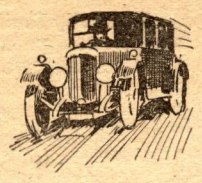
"I was afraid he would," he said. "The morals of the modern employer are appalling. You might remind me to dictate a letter to the 'Times' about it. But I'll just ask Mr. Vanney not to annoy you any more."

To her astonishment, he rose at once from his desk and went into the next office. This time she had no compunction about eavesdropping. But, strain her ears as she might, she could make nothing of the faint, almost inaudible murmur of voices.

In a few minutes Jimmy returned, and his normally unwrinkled brow wore a frown that was not one of concentration.

"Mr. Vanney is inclined to be obstinate," he said. "I hope I've convinced him of the error of his ways, but if it occurs again you will let me know."

GEORGE IN EVENING DRESS.



THE lot of a policeman has become a happier one since some restless brain discovered that crimes can be classified according to the method of their commission.

There are men who are accustomed to enter houses other than their own by way of the first floor window, having scaled the pillars of the portico, while others are wont to clamber up a drain-pipe and admit themselves on the same level at the back. Confronted with a closed and fastened window, one man will force back the catch with a thin-bladed knife, while another will cut out a pane of glass and insert his hand for the same purpose. For opening locked drawers and cupboards an instrument, known to the lay public as a jemmy, and to the trade as a "stick," is used, and this may be of many patterns, according to the ingenuity of the owner, ranging from a simple chisel to a beautifully-finished collapsible claw-ended lever of tension steel.

A glorified and super-efficient "stick," designed on the principle of the tin-opener, has been successfully employed to open the flimsier kind of safe. Other safe experts favour the wedge system; others, in suitable circumstances, will blow out the lock with a small charge of nitro-glycerine; a number of skilled and painstaking individuals are able to solve the riddle of a combination lock with the aid of a stethoscope; and the potentialities of the oxy-acetylene blow-lamp have not been overlooked by the élite of the profession.

Having skilfully entered certain premises, there are men who work cautiously in the hope that they will not make enough noise to disturb the rightful inhabitant, while others prefer to knock him on the head, tie him up, and gag him. There are many who always include an expedition to the pantry in their raid, and they are known by their taste in food and drink; more than once a marked fancy for marmalade or cheese has been the clue that has sent a man away for a compulsory sojourn in the country.

Accordingly, when a grocer in South London was found lying, shot through the heart, behind his counter, when the assistant came to open up the shop in the morning, with the till broken open and the previous three days' takings missing, the man in charge of the case, before he allowed anything to be moved, sent for the police photographers. The pictures they took were developed and printed in a few hours; and these, together with the inspector's own copious notes, were sent immediately to that department of Scotland Yard known as the Records Office, where are catalogued in one gigantic card index all the known forms, variations, and trimmings of crime, with cross-references to the men who are known to practise them.

There then began a scientific process of elimination. The extra heavy sentence which is always received by a criminal who uses firearms in his work means that comparatively few burglars go armed. From the list of these men were eliminated those whose known methods of entering a house did not correspond with the method used in that case. The list was reduced again by removing the names of those who, without a serious divergence from their old habits—a rare phenomenon among habitual criminals—would have solved the problem of the locked till in a way other than that in which it had been solved. The list diminished steadily as the names it contained were in turn tested by other characteristics of the crime in question.

Even with these precise methods, it is usual for several names to be left over for further scrutiny, but in this instance the accumulated evidence pointed with the most convincing certainty to one man.

"You mentioned his name to me only the other day," said the man from the Records Office. "So I thought you would be interested."

"I am," said Mr. Teal. "But I'd be still more interested if you could tell me where he is."

It was in a pessimistic spirit that he telephoned an inquiry through to the inspector in charge of F Division, and therefore he was not disappointed when it proved fruitless.

"The last time anything was seen or heard of Connell," F Division informed him concisely, "was in July, two years ago."

Mr. Teal, remembering his breakfast of a fortnight ago, took his hat and coat and went for a walk.

He ran his victim to earth in a public-house near Victoria Station, and took the next place at the bar.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Harry," said Mr. Teal untruthfully, for he had drawn blank at several coverts before he found his fox. "What'll you have?"

"A bottle of champagne with you, Mr. Teal," said Long Harry.

"Two bitters, please, miss," said Mr. Teal.

He picked up his tankard and nodded towards a vacant table in a corner.

"Suppose we get out of the crowd, and have a little talk," he suggested, and Long Harry knew of old that when Mr. Teal made such a request it was useless to refuse.

He followed the portly detective to the secluded spot he had indicated, and they sat down.

"Now tell me about Connell," said Mr. Teal.

Long Harry scowled.

"I told you once I don't know anything about him."

"But he did a job in Battersea last night," said Mr. Teal. "I thought you'd have heard—it's in the lunch editions."

Long Harry shook his head.

"I don't know anything about it, Mr. Teal," he said.

"Now, I thought you would," said Teal dreamily. "The lunch editions didn't say Connell did it, but I was expecting you to come along and tell me that. Either Connell did it, or someone who knew his methods inside out arranged it so that everything would point to Connell."

EDGAR WALLACE has written another—

Thereafter he ignored her existence until lunch time, but when she had put on her hat she found him holding her coat for her—a courtesy which he had never offered before.

"Miss Marlowe," he said, "will you put me in the same category as Vanney if I ask you to lunch with me?"

She looked at him.

"I'd rather you explained yourself now," she answered. "Am I intended to take that remark of yours as a proposal or not?"

She had not meant to speak so curtly, and the hurt that showed for an instant in his eyes was an unforgettable reproach. Then he smiled wryly.

"You are not," he said shortly. "I decline to give you the pleasure of refusing me. And, on second thoughts, I'll withdraw my invitation—for the same reason."

He went back to his desk and took up his pen. She opened her mouth to speak, but Jimmy's head was bent over his writing, and he had ceased to take any notice of her.

She left the room without another word.

Sergeant Jones, who was loitering inconspicuously on the corner of the block, saw her come out. An hour later he saw her return, but he wasted another sixty minutes

—gripping book-length novel for "The THRILLER"

waiting for Mr. Traill to make a similar excursion.

Inspector Teal, to whom the most trivial details were always a matter of the most tremendously absorbing interest, had posted him there to report on the habits of the clients and staff of Vanney's, Ltd.; and Sergeant Jones was beginning to feel that he had a personal grievance against Jimmy Traill, for it was the fourth day in succession that Mr. Jones had sacrificed his own mid-day meal in the hope of getting a chance to observe Mr. Traill at lunch.

"He's either dieting to keep his figure, or he's on hunger strike," Mr. Teal was told that night. "Anyhow, he's never been out for a bite during the day since I started tailing him."

Inspector Teal blinked once; but inwardly he was chalking up Jimmy's mysterious fast among the many other peculiar facts which were catalogued in his mind against the firm of Vanney's.

Harry grinned.

"If you're thinking I pulled that job to frame Connell, you're right up the spout. I've got an alibi."

The torpescent Mr. Teal felt in his waistcoat pocket for a fresh bar of chewing gum.

"Then," he remarked pensively, "it seems as if you *must* have done it."

"But this," said Harry, 'is a copper-bottomed alibi. I spent last night in Marlborough Street Police Station. I'd been entertaining some friends, and we'd had what you might call a sticky evening. It took three policemen to get me there."

Mr. Teal raised a reproving eyebrow.

"Drunk, I suppose," he murmured.

"All three of them," said Harry.

Inspector Teal ruminated in silence for some moments, and then he said:

"Do you get drunk easily, Harry?"

"I can knock back a tank full and not show it," Harry bragged.

"Entertaining friends, were you?" said Teal slumbrously. "Then you must have come into some easy money. I know how fond you are of work, and you haven't been out of stir long enough to earn that much honestly."

"I got a remittance," said Harry glibly. "An uncle of mine, who went out to Australia years ago, suddenly remembered his poor, persecuted nephew in the old country, and sent me a tenner."

Mr. Teal went back to Scotland Yard very little wiser than he had been when he left it.

Jimmy Traill advanced threateningly on the driver of the other car. "Clear off!" he ordered, "and don't come here again."

That afternoon an idea struck him. He walked up the Embankment to Charing Cross, and he was standing by a tobacco kiosk when Pamela Marlowe left the offices of Vanney's, Ltd., and crossed the road to the Strand Tube Station.

"Excuse me, miss," said Teal, catching her up at the entrance to the subway.

It was not the first time she had been spoken to by a stranger, and she would have hurried on, but something in the business-like tone of his address stopped her, and she looked round.

She saw a big, red-faced, sleepy-eyed man, of considerable girth, wearing a rather noisy tweed suit, with a soft felt hat tilted to the back of his head.

"I am Inspector Teal, of Scotland Yard," said that same, "and you might be able to help me a lot, Miss Marlowe, if you'd just step into that tea den with me and have a chat."

Over a cup of tea, at his request, she repeated the history of her association with Stenning and Vanney, in much the same way as she had told it to Vanney himself. Mr. Teal appeared to doze during the recital, but as soon as she had finished he was ready with a question.

"How did you get your job at Vanney's?"

"Mr. Vanney wrote to me off his own bat. He knew Mr. Stenning, and he says that Mr. Stenning had often spoken of me."

"What were you doing before that?"

"Nothing. Father was always pretty well off, and he left me everything he had."

"And something went wrong?"

She nodded.

"Most of the money was in Claravox Gramophones. Father put all his eggs in that basket just before he died. The shares were at about 450, but the promised dividends were colossal." She smiled ruefully.

"If you remember, the fraud was shown up two years ago, when Stenning died, and the company went smash."

"I remember," said Teal. "Claravox Gramophones was one of Stenning's companies. I guess that man must have held the dud company record for this country."

He drank some tea, and cogitated, with his eyes closed; and his next query was a surprising one.

"Does Jimmy ever make love to you?"

"No," she replied at once, and wondered how she came to lie so spontaneously.

Teal, however, seemed to have been anticipating that answer.

"He wouldn't," he said. "Jimmy's a clean crook. But what about Vanney?"

"I've only seen him once, and then he asked me to have dinner with him."

"Is that so?" Teal opened one eye. "Did you go?"

She shook her head.

"It was only the other day. I put him off, and he hasn't mentioned it since."

With that he seemed to have come to the end of his intended interrogation, and she took advantage of his silence to make an inquiry of her own.

"What did you mean when you said that Jimmy is a clean crook?" she asked.

"Well," said Mr. Teal judicially, "he's a crook all right. He doesn't make any bones about it. The reason he's at large is because on the few occasions when he's left any evidence behind him that could be used in court, the injured parties have refused to kick. Jimmy always makes pretty sure of his man before he robs him. To give him his due, none of them have been particularly desirable citizens, as far as one can make out, but that doesn't make him an honest man."

"Why do you think he does it?"

"For fun, I suppose. There are men with a kink that way. Certainly not for money—he's got a very good income of his own."

She was astonished at this revelation.

"Then why does he work at Vanney's?"

The girl put her ear to the door. In the circumstances she had no compunction about eavesdropping.

"And why, for that matter, did he work for Stenning?" said Teal. "If you could answer those questions, Miss Marlowe, you'd save my mind a lot of hard wear. All I know is that I smell trouble wherever Jimmy's hanging around."

The implication did not make itself plain to her at once, but when she had grasped it, she stopped with her cup half-way to her lips, and stared.

"Do you mean Vanney's isn't straight?" she said.

"I've a good idea," said Teal, "that Vanney's is one of the crookedest shows in the history of commerce. If Vanney's is straight, I'm going to ask the Commissioner to call in all the rulers in Scotland Yard, and supply the clerical department with corkscrews."

He gazed at her in his drowsily placid way while she digested this startling piece of information, and his air of heavy-lidded weariness did not prevent him taking in every detail of her appearance. She was pretty—Mr Teal, who by no stretch of imagination could have been called a connoisseur of feminine beauty, would have been blind if he had not recognised that fact. Nice eyes and mouth. A trim figure, and well-chosen clothes that suited her to perfection. Mr. Teal thought that there would have been some excuse for Jimmy, anyway.

He thought of Jimmy. Jimmy was dark and good-looking, an entertaining companion and a personality. Jimmy knew how to wear clothes, and he had a most engaging smile. Maybe there would have been some excuse for Pamela Marlowe.

"You seem to be rather interested in Jimmy," murmured Mr. Teal. "Are you in love with him, by any chance?"

"No," she replied promptly. "Whatever made you ask that?"

"It just occurred to me," said Inspector Teal vaguely.

After a few minutes more desultory conversation he left her.

Those were turbulent days for her under their superficial calm, and she was beginning to feel the strain. Consequently, it was a most welcome relief for her when, after dinner, the girl who occupied the next room in the house where she lived came in, and suggested a visit to the pictures.

They went by bus to Piccadilly and walked up Regent Street.

As they passed the back entrance of the Piccadilly Hotel, two men in evening dress came out, and one of them hailed a passing taxi. They stepped in and were driven away.

One of the men she had recognised at once, for it was none other than Jimmy Traill. His companion had been a big, heavy-featured man, with a small military moustache, whose face seemed curiously familiar.

It required some minutes of concentration before she could place him, but when she had done so her involuntary gasp of amazement startled her companion.

It was not surprising that she had not been able to identify him at once, for the last time she had seen him he had been wearing a purple uniform decorated with buttons and braid of gold, and he answered to the name of George.

A TRAP—A THREAT.

PAMELA walked on with her brain in a ferment. She felt strangely disinclined to embark on a lengthy explanation of what had startled her, and the other girl, after some futile attempts to draw her, relapsed into an offended silence.

It seemed that she was destined to become more and more lost each day in the network of mystery of which Vanney's was the centre, and no added complication seemed to lead nearer to a solution.

What was the closely guarded secret of Vanney's, and what part was Jimmy Traill playing in it? Everything she had seen or heard pointed to the secret being a sinister one, and yet, however suspicious a character Jimmy Traill might be, he had one of the least sinister personalities that she had ever met. But why did so many irregular things mark the conduct of the office which was under his supervision, and why, to cap it all, had he been dining at the Piccadilly with the porter—George?

Pamela's brain seethed with unanswerable questions for the rest of the evening, and the entertainment, which should have been a means of forgetting the perplexities which had worried her for days, was spoilt for her; but her adventures were not yet finished for that night.

She got home to find a note on the hall table informing her that a man had rung her up twice while she had been out. While she was reading it, the telephone bell rang again.

She went to the instrument with an instinctive certainty that the call was for her, and she was right.

"I am speaking for Mr. Traill," said a masculine voice. "An important deal has been concluded this evening, and, since the other party is leaving for the Continent early to-morrow morning, Mr. Traill wishes you to come round at once and make out the necessary papers."

"But——"

"Mr. Traill asks me to say that he is very sorry to trouble you at this hour, but he must ask you to come immediately. A closed car is waiting for you at the corner of the street. Please come at once!"

Before she could reply, a click from the receiver told her that the man at the other end of the line had rung off.

Pamela put the telephone down slowly, biting her lip. In one sense there was nothing very extraordinary about the request. The circumstances were plausible, and it was not unusual for important business negotiations to be concluded over dinner, although such a thing had never happened before while she had been at Vanney's. And Inspector Teal had said that Traill was a clean crook. She might easily have left without further deliberation, but she did not.

There were one or two things which she could not understand, and they made her pause. First, the message which awaited her when she got in told her that she had been called at 9.30 and 10.30. If it was so important that papers should be made out without delay, would they have waited so long for her? Another stenographer should have been obtainable; and, besides, Traill was perfectly capable of working the typewriter efficiently himself—she had seen him do so more than once. Secondly, when she had last seen him, he had been with George; and whatever the reason for that intimacy, it was not likely that the janitor would be present when business was being discussed. And then, what was the reason for the car? Apparently it had been sent much earlier in the evening, so that its arrival would coincide with the first attempt to get her on the telephone, and yet there was no reason for Traill to have suspected a sudden dearth of taxis in Kensington. Finally, why had he not spoken to her himself?

Making up her mind, she picked up the telephone book and found Traill's number. She called it, and his voice answered her almost immediately.

"Yes?"

"It's Miss Marlowe speaking, Mr. Traill. Did you ring up just now?"

"Certainly not," said Jimmy.

She told him about the message she had received, and he whistled.

"You can take it from me, it was a fake," he said. "I don't know who sent it, but I'll try to find out. You say a car is supposed to be waiting for you at the corner?"

"Yes."

"Is it still there?"

"I'll go and see."

Her room was in the front, on the first floor, and she ran quickly up the stairs. Crossing to the window, she looked down, disturbing the curtains as little as possible. There was a car drawn up by the kerb two doors away—a racy-looking saloon.

"It's still there," she said, returning to the telephone.

"Good," said Jimmy briskly. "Now, you run along off to bed, Miss Marlowe, and forget it. And if you get any more messages like that, give yourself the benefit of the doubt and don't make a move until you've confirmed them. Incidentally, I don't know how you go to the office in the mornings, but I should stick to the tube or bus if I were you. Funny things have happened to taxis before now. Good-night."

She went upstairs, but she did not undress at once. Instead, she put on a heavy coat, opened the window a little at the bottom, and sat down beside it with a book. She read inattentively, with one eye on the car in the street below.

Ten minutes later, a sports coupé droned round into the street, passed the waiting car, and pulled in to the pavement directly under her window. A man stepped out, and stood for a moment lighting a cigarette, and she recognised Jimmy Traill.

He sauntered up to the other car and opened the door.

"Marmaduke," said Jimmy clearly, "you're a bad boy. Go right home and don't do it again."

The driver's reply was inaudible, but she

heard Jimmy speak again, and there was a hard, metallic note in his voice.

"You lie," said Jimmy. "You are afraid of me, because you know that if I get annoyed there isn't a graft in the world that'll stop me showing it—unpleasantly. Do what you're told."

There was a muttered colloquy which she couldn't hear, and then Jimmy closed the door and stepped back.

He watched the saloon out of sight, and then walked back to his own car.

He stood beside it, scanning the windows above him, and Pamela leaned out.

"It's all right, Miss Marlowe," called Jimmy cheerfully. "You won't be disturbed again. Good-night, for the second time."

He climbed into his car and drove off, and she closed the window.

The next morning he seemed to have forgotten the incident, and when she thanked him for disposing of the mysterious driver, he appeared to have to concentrate intensely before he could place the reference.

"Oh, that!" he said at length. "Do you know you've broken a record?"

She showed her bewilderment, and he smiled.

"If I put you in a book," he said, "you'd be the first heroine in the history of thick-ear fiction who has not cantered blithely into the first trap that was set for her. Tell me how you did it."

She told him, ending up with the information that she had seen him leaving the Piccadilly with George, but he did not seem at all upset by this discovery.

"George and I are great friends," said Jimmy airily. "But perhaps you didn't know that I was a practical Socialist?"

"But he was in evening dress!"

Jimmy raised his eyebrows.

"Why not?" he demanded. "The only difference was that mine was paid for, whereas so far George has only been able to cough up the first instalment on his. The hire-purchase system is really a fine gift to democracy. George will own that suit in three years, and the dicky and cuffs will be his very own in a couple of months. Who are we to discourage George's efforts to better himself?"

Presently he asked:

"Have you seen Teal lately?"

"He spoke to me in the street the other day, when I was going home."

"What did you talk about?"

"Nothing in particular," she said. "He told me one or two things about you."

"I call myself something in particular," said Jimmy brightening, "even if you don't. What did he say?"

"Oh, things."

Jimmy looked at her.

"And do you wish to give notice?" he asked.

"I don't think so."

"Good," said Jimmy. "For those kind words I'll be more gentle with Teal when I see him again."

That afternoon there was a caller, and Jimmy frowned thoughtfully over the cheaply printed card which the clerk brought in. "Mr. Harold Garrot," it said.

He went through to the waiting-room, and a sallow, lantern-jawed man, with shaggy eyebrows and a blue chin, slowly uncoiled his six feet six inches of lanky length from a chair.

"Sit down, Harry," said Jimmy affably, "and shoot us the dope in your own time. Also, you might whisper the important passages, because the walls in this office are very thin."

Long Harry sat down, and put his hands on his knees.

"Mr. Traill," he said, "you know who I'm looking for"

"I don't," said Jimmy.

"Connell," explained Harry tersely.

Jimmy frowned.

"Is there a catch in this?" he demanded.

"Am I supposed to say: 'Who is Connell?' —whereupon you say: 'Connellady eat asparagus without dripping the melted butter down her neck?'—or something soft like that. Because, if so, I'll buy it—but let's get it over quick."

Long Harry leaned forward.

"Traill," he said, "you know me, and I know you, and we both know Connell. But, did you know that I'd just come out of stir?"

"I read in the papers a couple of years ago that you'd just gone in," said Jimmy. "How's the old place looking?"

But Harry was not feeling conversational.

"Connell put me there," he said. "I never did that Bayswater job. Connell shopped me, and I'm looking for Connell."

Jimmy rose.

"Well," he said briefly, "I'm afraid I can't help you. Nobody's seen Connell for two years. Good-afternoon."

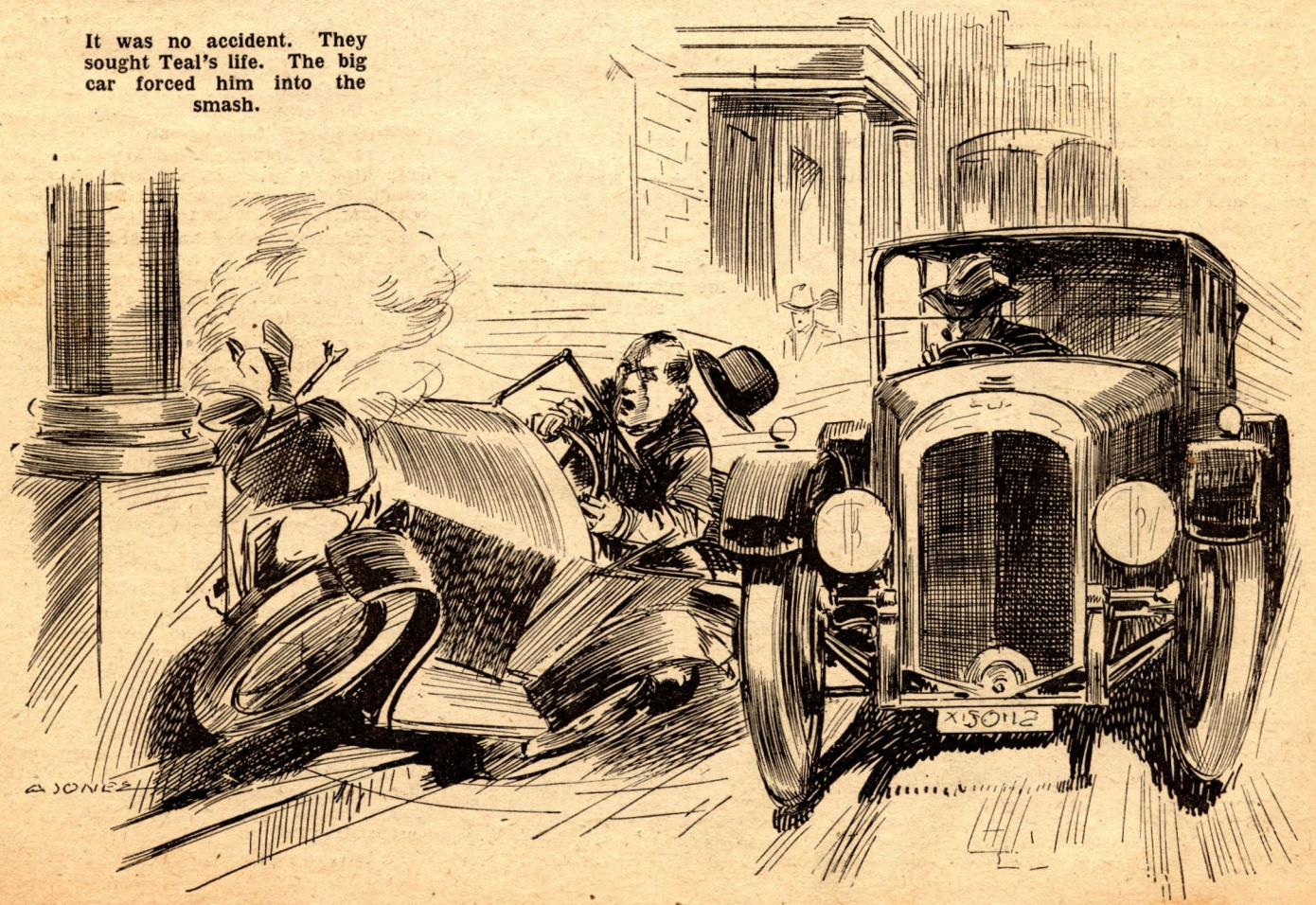
He held out his hand, but Long Harry ignored it.

"Next time you see Connell," said Mr. Garrot, rising, "you can tell him I'm laying for him."

"Good-afternoon," said Jimmy again, and opened the door. "Call in any time you're passing, but don't stay long."

He returned to his desk with a worried

It was no accident. They sought Teal's life. The big car forced him into the smash.



air, for the return of Long Harry seemed to him to presage the beginning of troublous times for the firm of Vanney's, Ltd.

A LIAR—AND DEATH!

"TALKING of disappearances, Mr Teal," said Sergeant Barrow—"I've been thinking."

Inspector Teal fixed his subordinate with a basilisk eye.

"Not again?" he drawled with heavy sarcasm.

"What's more," said Barrow, "I've been talking to Jones and Records Office, and I've got on to something that might interest you."

Teal waited.

"About the time that Connell disappeared," said Barrow earnestly, "Red Mulligan also vanished. The last thing we heard of Red, he was supposed to be dying of pleurisy. Red was the man who worked the Finchley bank job. He and Long Harry used to run together, and they shared a room in Deptford. Connell made a trio when it suited him. Well, Connell disappears, and a few days after that we stop hearing anything about Red I went down to Deptford and made a few inquiries, but all they could tell me was that Harry gave out a story that Red had got better and gone out to Australia. Since when, nobody's seen or heard of him. Now, does a man who's been given up for dead get better as quickly as that, and would he jump right off his bed into a steamer, and shoot off without saying a word to anyone? It's not as if there was anything against him at that time—he had a clean sheet."

Teal nodded.

"That's worth thinking about," he conceded.

But it was not Inspector Teal's practice to make his thought processes public, and he switched off almost immediately on to a new line.

"Go out into the wide world, Barrow," he said, "and find me an Australian."

After some search an Australian was found, and Teal took him out, bought him beer, and invited a geography lesson. Then he bought the Australian more beer, and left him.

He went to Vanney's, and Jimmy saw him at once.

"Mr. Vanney is engaged," said Jimmy, "but all my time is yours. What can I do for you to-day?"

"I'm looking for a man named Connell," said Teal.

"Everybody seems to be doing it," sighed Jimmy. "Only yesterday, we had a man in looking for him."

"Long Harry?" asked Teal, and Jimmy nodded.

"It's surprising how popular a man can become, all of a sudden."

"Connell's wanted for the Battersea murder," said Teal.

Clearly Jimmy was surprised at this item of news, but his surprise did not make him any more helpful.

"Connell is the mystery man of the twentieth century," said Jimmy. "Sorry, Teal, but you've come to the wrong shop. We broke off our partnership with Maskelyne's years ago."

"There's another thing," said Teal. "We've got a man in for a bit of work in Curzon Street, and he's made a confession that might put us on to a man we've been looking for for years. I won't go into details, but I will tell you that I'm temporarily stuck, and you might be able to help me."

"Anything within reason, Claude Eustace," said Jimmy.

Teal winced.

"The point is," said Teal, "that this case links up with one in Australia. The trouble is, we haven't got the name of the man who was robbed, and I'm wondering if Mr. Vanney could save me the trouble of cabling out to Australia for it. I believe he spent some years in Melbourne."

"That is so," said Jimmy.

"Then he might know the name. He's one of the richest men in Melbourne, and I'm told he's got the swellest house in the place. The man I've got couldn't remember the name, but he thinks it began with an 'S.' He remembers that it's a big, white stone building at the top of Collins Street, about five minutes from Brighton Beach. The family used to dash down to the sea for a dip every morning before breakfast, and it was while they were out on one of those early swimming parties that the jewels were taken."

Jimmy looked doubtful.

"It's some time since Mr. Vanney was in Melbourne," he said.

"He couldn't help knowing the place," said Teal persuasively. "Collins Street is one of the big thoroughfares, and everybody knows Brighton Beach, and this man's home was a show feature of the city."

Jimmy shrugged.

"I'll ask him," he said, "but I doubt if he can help you. Shall I write and let you know what he says?"

"I can get a reply telegraphed from Melbourne quicker than that," said Teal. "Couldn't you ask him now?"

"I'll see," said Jimmy, and went.

He was back in two minutes.

"Mr. Vanney is very sorry, but he can't remember the name of the man. He knows the house, of course, but he thinks that the man's name began with an 'M.'"

"Thanks," said Teal, and heaved his vast bulk out of the chair. "Sorry to have troubled you."

"Sorry to have been troubled," said Jimmy genially

Teal stopped by the door.

"By the way," he said, "why have you gone off your feed lately? Are you in love?"

Jimmy smiled appreciatively.

"That was clever of you, Teal," he admitted. "I didn't find out till a couple of days ago that you were watching the place. No, I don't have luncheon these days."

"Why?" asked Teal.

"Because," said Jimmy fluently, "it is Lent. In Lent, I give up luncheon, lumbago, lion-hunting, and liquorice."

"I," said Teal, "give up lorgnettes, leeks, leprosy, lynching, lamentation, lavender, and life preservers."

It was the first time that Mr. Teal had held his own with Mr. Traill in a verbal encounter, and that, in the auspicious circumstances, put him in a very good humour.

He returned to Scotland Yard, and sent again for Sergeant Barrow.

"Did you look out all the papers connected with the Stenning case, as I told you?" he asked.

Barrow pointed to a bundle recently placed on Teal's desk, but Teal preferred to cut his work down to a minimum. If he had told Jimmy that he gave up labour through the year, irrespective of Lent, wherever possible, he would have been very near the truth.

He leaned back, clasped his hands in an attitude of prayer, closed his eyes, and said:

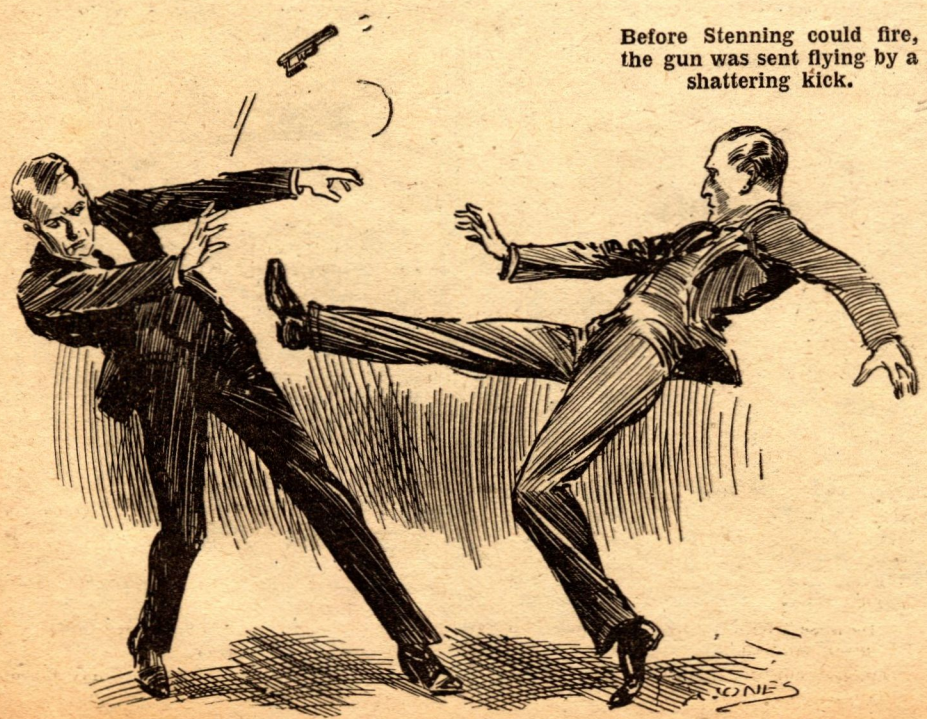
"Have you studied the case?"

Sergeant Barrow intimated that he had done so.

"Tell me about it," said Teal.

Stenning's death had caused a considerable sensation at the time. His name was well known in the City, and the derogatory rumours which circulated persistently among the cognoscenti were not printed in the newspapers, which were restrained by the law of libel, and therefore did not reach the majority of the public. It was not until after Stenning's death that all the facts of his nefarious career were made public, and then there was a panic among the small investors.

Stenning was clever. For years he had sailed perilously near the wind, and had found it a profitable procedure. But, with



Before Stenning could fire, the gun was sent flying by a shattering kick.

the passing of time, the encouraging recollection of past successes and the temptation to increase his income still further by risking sailing manœuvres closer and closer to the wind, had led him to form companies of increasing instability. He had ended up by organising and directing a project which, for the first time in his career, was flagrantly fraudulent. The result had been to raise his conjectured profits to the seven-figure mark, although at his death his estate was valued at no more than £10,000.

"No man," said Sergeant Barrow, "ever died at a more convenient time."

Stenning had passed over with all his sins when his last, and more ambitious, scheme was tottering on the dizzy pinnacle of success. Ultimate discovery was inevitable—though whether Stenning realised that, and was banking on being able to leave the country before a warrant was issued for his arrest, or whether he was too swollen with vanity to see his danger, would never be known. Certainly, drunk with confidence, he had ended up by over-reaching himself; but then he had died. As Sergeant Barrow remarked, he couldn't have timed his death for a more suitable moment.

One night he had set out from London in an open car, accompanied only by his secretary and his chauffeur, to keep a business appointment at Bristol. According to the evidence at the inquest, the chauffeur, Arthur Wylie, had attempted to take a corner too fast on a lonely stretch of road between Basingstoke and Andover. The car had skidded and overturned. The secretary and chauffeur were flung clear, but Stenning had been pinned underneath the wreckage, and before either of the other two could go to his assistance, the car had burst into flames, so that it was impossible to approach it. The car was reduced to a heap of twisted scrap-iron, and of Stenning there remained nothing but a corpse charred beyond recognition, and identified only by a ring, a watch, and a bunch of keys. The chauffeur pleaded inexperience, and it was found that he had only held a driving licence for six months.

On the evidence of James Traill and the chauffeur a verdict of "Accidental death" was returned, and Stenning was buried in dishonour, for upon his death the full story of all his shady transactions was made public. But, of the millions he was reputed to have amassed in the course of his career as a swindler, no trace could be discovered.

"That's the story," said Sergeant Barrow. "But what's it got to do with Connell?"

"Nothing, and at the same time everything," answered Mr. Teal enigmatically. "And now, if you will listen carefully, I'll tell you a little joke."

Sergeant Barrow produced a smile.

"The joke," said Mr. Teal, "is about a man who says that he lived several years in Australia, and who gives Melbourne as his last address. I asked him if he could identify a house at the top of Collins Street, five minutes from Brighton Beach, and I told him how the people who owned the house used to run down to the sea for a bathe before breakfast."

Sergeant Barrow's forehead puckered.

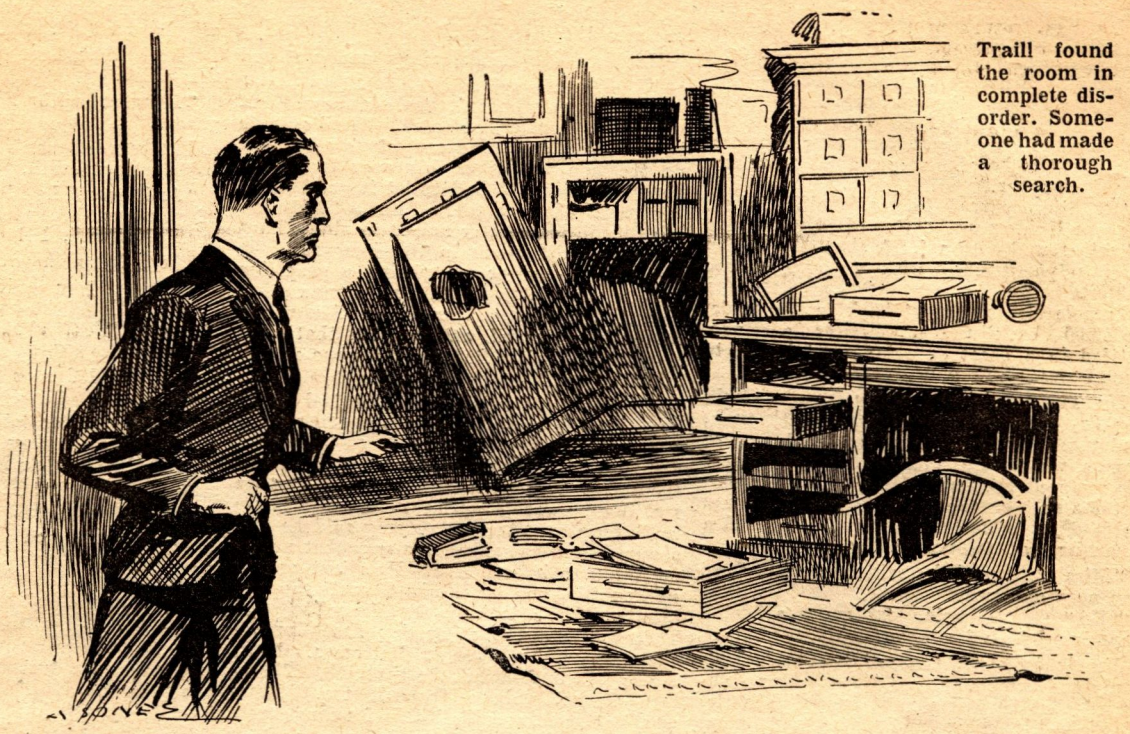
"I'm very sorry, Mr. Teal," he said, "but I don't see it."

"Suppose," said Teal dreamily, "that I told you that I'd got a beautiful house in Kensington Gardens overlooking the Embankment. What would you say then?"

"I should say you were a liar, Mr. Teal," said Sergeant Barrow diffidently.

Inspector Teal seemed to smile in his sleep.

"I said nothing so insulting," he murmured. "In fact, I said nothing at all. But since the Australian you found me gave me his word that Brighton Beach was at least ten miles away from the top of Collins Street, Melbourne, I think I was justified in thinking a lot."



Traill found the room in complete disorder. Someone had made a thorough search.

DANGER LOOMING.

"Take a letter," said Jimmy. "To the Editor of the 'Times.' Sir. The impudent presumption of the modern employer is a menace to the morals of the community. Stop. The other day, I was applying for the post of secretary to an American business man who was opening a branch in London. Stop. Finding my qualifications and references satisfactory, he then asked me how much I wanted. Stop. 'Four pounds a week,' I said. Stop. 'With pleasure,' he replied. Stop. 'Certainly not,' I retorted. Stop. Can nothing be done about this? Stop. I am, etcetera, Harassed Stenographer. I wonder why they never print my letters," added Jimmy.

"Because," said Pamela Marlowe calmly, "I never send them."

Jimmy regarded her seriously.

"Why not?"

"Because, although they are amusing, I don't feel justified in wasting Mr. Vanney's stamps sending out letters which the Editor would certainly put in his waste-paper basket."

"Are you the manager?" inquired Jimmy frostily.

"No."

"Well, don't talk like a fool."

Pamela said nothing, and he wondered why. Five minutes later he caught her smiling a smile of secret delight, and discovered the reason.

But towards lunch-time there was a slack period, and during that she risked losing the advantage she had gained.

"What did Mr. Teal mean by talking about Mr. Vanney making childish attempts to kill him?" she asked, and Jimmy put down his pen and leaned back comfortably.

"Owing to the recent boom in detective fiction," he explained elaborately, "the public have come to regard it as essential that their detectives should lead dangerous lives, in imminent peril of crafty assassination. To meet the popular demand, the proprietors of the leading newspapers have been compelled to organise private squads of thugs, who at intervals attempt the life of a well-known detective, and thereby provide headlines for the front page. The detectives, of course, being public servants, take this all in good part, but they do insist on a certain standard of efficiency about the murders, and when the attempt is below par they feel annoyed. Naturally, any self-respecting detective would object to being killed in any of the crude, old-fashioned ways."

"Very amusing," said Pamela tartly, "but I am not a child, Mr. Traill."

"You deprive yourself of an excuse," said Jimmy. "Inquisitiveness is pardoned in children."

Pamela flushed.

"I suppose, then, you plead infancy as an excuse for yourself?"

"I am *no* ordinary man," said Jimmy.

She raised her eyebrows.

"Does it occur to you that *I* may be no ordinary girl?"

"It had occurred to me," said Jimmy coolly. "Extraordinary is the word."

He resumed his writing, and she regarded him coldly for some moments. Then—

"I don't know what you are, Mr. Traill," she returned, "but I do know you're the only one of it. If you lose your job here you ought to be able to get a job from any circus manager."

"It has occurred to me," said Jimmy, without looking up. "I've often wanted to travel around with a freak show. Will you go into partnership with me and be the exhibit?"

Pamela Marlowe went back to her table, slammed back the typewriter carriage, rattled in a sheet of paper, and began to pound away with unnecessary violence.

Mr. Traill finished the page he was working on, with a flourish, read it through, and placed it at the end of a thick wad of papers, which he disinterred from a drawer. He replaced the bundle, locked the drawer, put his feet on the desk, as was his usual habit when he had nothing to do, lighted a cigarette, and smoked meditatively.

"Miss Marlowe," he said presently, "are you very annoyed?"

"No," said Pamela. "I never expected anything better from you."

Jimmy took his feet off the table suddenly and smiled. It has already been mentioned that he had a most engaging smile. He left his chair and came and stood beside her.

"Pamela," he said, holding out his hand, "let's call it a day."

"Very well, Mr. Traill," said Pamela, and went on with her work.

Jimmy looked at the hand she had studiously ignored, sighed, and returned to his desk.

After that he did no more writing, and spent his idle moments with his feet on the table, smoking innumerable cigarettes, and staring at the ceiling with a frown indicative of furious cerebration.

He had lunch that day with two friends, and the conversation was not particularly inspiring. It was not until the end of the meal that he chose to liven things up.

Then he pushed away his plate, lighted a cigarette, and blew out a long stream of smoke.

"Boys," he said, "we have fortified ourselves with an excellent lunch. Our friend Connell has demonstrated a hidden talent for cheffery which has been a most delightful surprise; and the brandy is on the sideboard, in case any of you want bracing up another notch. Help yourselves, if you think you need it, because I've got a shock for you."

He paused, inhaling comfortably.

Connell accepted the suggestion, but the other man did not move.

"The first point," said Jimmy, settling himself, "is that now is the time for all bad men and true to realise that this party is liable to break up without notice. I knew we were on to a big thing, but I never saw that it was going to turn out as big as this. Frankly, I think we've bitten off a lot more than we can chew, and this is where the wise bird starts thinking about his getaway."

The other two said nothing. Clearly, Jimmy had only voiced their own thoughts.

"The second point," Jimmy went on, "is that, after all the trouble we've taken, we should go down to history as a set of prize-pikers if we beat it now. The boodle should all be in within a week now, and if we can only keep our nerve and hang on, we've got a sporting chance of scooping the kitty. The pool isn't as large as it might have been, but that's not our fault. We're being rushed on the last lap, and we've got to make the best of it."

He blew two smoke rings and watched them float upwards.

"Maybe you haven't realised how short our time's getting," he said. "Teal's on to us—that's a cert. He caught us all nicely on the hop the other day over that Melbourne inquiry. I had to let it go through because if I'd tried to stall him off it'd only have made him hotter and it wouldn't have made any difference in the long run. It was only a matter of turning a suspicion into a certainty. Teal knows now that Vanney's a fake as far as his Australian career is concerned, anyway, but that's not a crime in itself. But there are one or two other things."

Jimmy Traill stood up. He had taken over the chairmanship of the meeting quite naturally.

"There's been some funny stuff about Connell and Long Harry, and it's new on me. Harry was shopped for busting a house in Bayswater. Anyway, Harry said he was shopped, and he said it in a way that makes me want to believe him. He's just out of Pentonville, and he thinks Connell shopped him, and he's looking for Connell. And Teal told me the other day that Connell was wanted for a job in Battersea. Now, I know Connell didn't do that job. Therefore Connell's been framed, too. Now, what's the point of all this framing business?"

He looked straight at Connell, and Connell growled.

"Harry must have shopped me," he said.

"Get that idea right out of your head, Connell," advised Jimmy. "Teal knew Harry thought you shopped him in Bayswater, and the first thing he'd think of would be that Harry might have tried to return the compliment and shop you. Teal must have had something to make him quite certain that Harry didn't do the Battersea job, or else he'd have had Harry inside in a brace of shakes."

Jimmy canted up his cigarette between his lips, and set his hands deep in his trouser pockets.

"Even that," he remarked, "is no particular affair of mine. I just put it up to you to think over in your spare time. But the last two points are personal. First of all, this business of trying to bump off Teal has got to stop. I don't know how it was arranged, but Teal said it had been tried, and Teal doesn't bluff that way. I may be all sorts of crook, but I don't fancy swinging at dawn. Get that. If Teal makes any more complaints of that sort, James Traill goes out of this partnership at once."

The other two said nothing, but Jimmy had not been expecting a reply. He passed on.

"Finally," he said, "any monkeying about with Miss Marlowe will also stop. I've let you off once, James Arthur Vanney, but I don't know if I made it quite plain, then, that the next time it happens you will not be let off. That's all."

The bearded man came to his feet slowly.

"Are you running this show by yourself?" he asked.

"At the moment—and in this matter—yes," said Jimmy.

James Arthur Vanney turned to the third member of the party.

"And what have you got to say?" he demanded.

"I agree with Jimmy. It's too dangerous."

The bearded man's fist came down on the table with a crash.

"And I say," he blustered, "that if either of you interfere with my private dealings with that girl, I'll quit the show."

The third man got to his feet also.

"And if you quit the show," he said quietly, "I might have a little tale to tell Inspector Teal about the mysterious Mr. Vanney."

The bearded man looked round, savage-eyed.

"If it comes to telling tales," he said, "I guess I could tell as many as anyone. You wouldn't dare risk it."

Jimmy flicked his cigarette into the fireplace.

"Nor would you dare risk it, my man," he said smoothly. "Think it over, and while you're thinking just remember that it isn't only Inspector Teal you've got to be afraid of. I might get you first."

Jimmy's tone was perfectly quiet, but he never took his gaze off the other's face, and the bearded man saw murder in Jimmy Traill's eyes.

A CUNNING MOVE.

MR. TEAL had discovered long ago that he was the plaything of a peculiar destiny. Whenever he was engaged on a big case, when once the preliminary trifling and ferreting about was

He found Miss Marlowe struggling desperately in C
He gripped his pistol and plun

done, things had a habit with him of moving with well-oiled precision and alarming swiftness. Mr. Teal, in his leisure moments, attributed to this fact his ponderous and somnolent disposition—for, he pointed out, nobody less stolidly constituted could have stood the strain.

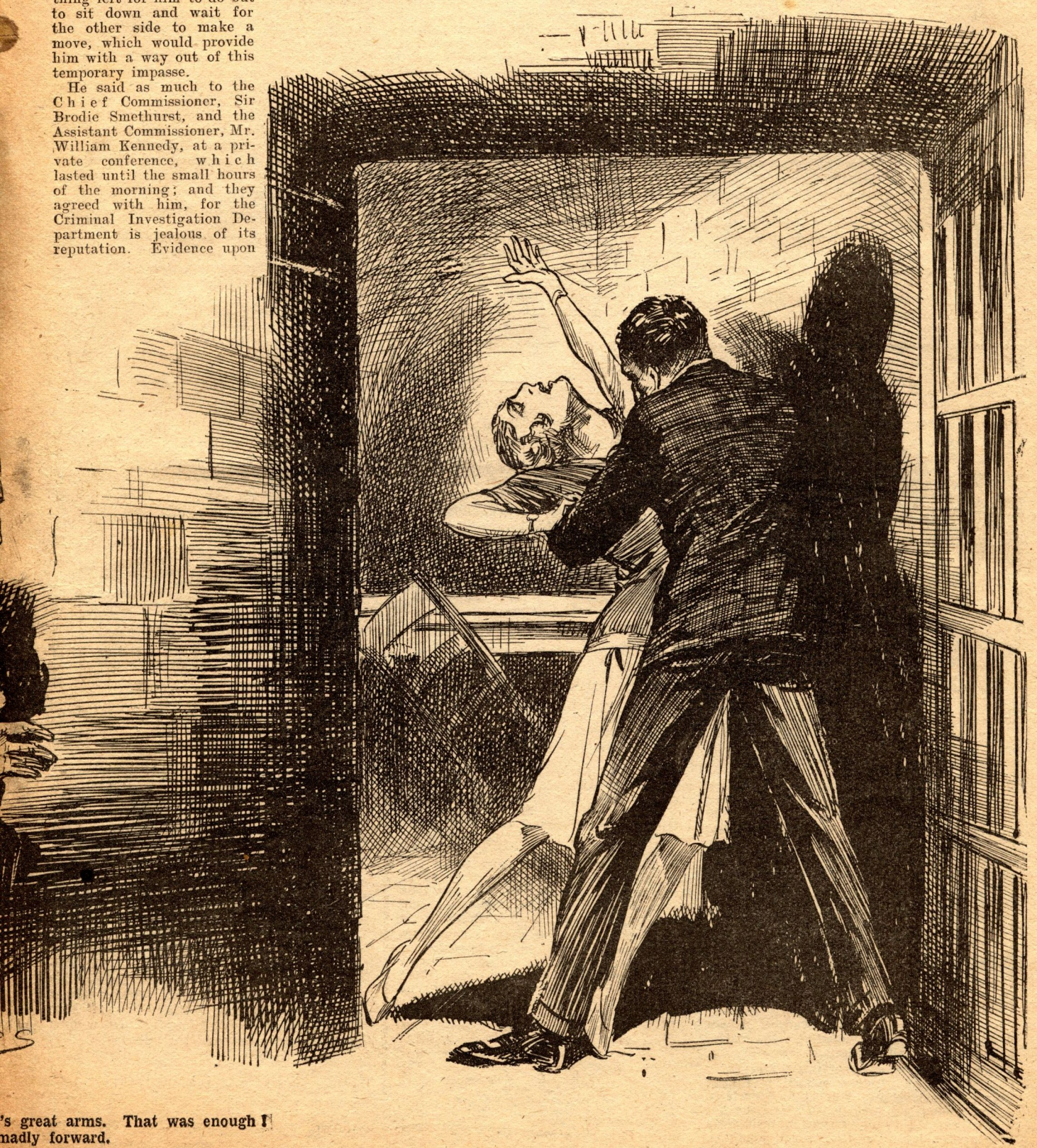
It was so with the Vanney case.

There came a day when Mr. Teal felt that he had disposed of every detail of the preliminary investigation, and there was nothing left for him to do but to sit down and wait for the other side to make a move, which would provide him with a way out of this temporary impasse.

He said as much to the Chief Commissioner, Sir Brodie Smethurst, and the Assistant Commissioner, Mr. William Kennedy, at a private conference, which lasted until the small hours of the morning; and they agreed with him, for the Criminal Investigation Department is jealous of its reputation. Evidence upon which a layman would act without hesitation, is sifted and contemplated with a suspicious and cautious eye, for Scotland Yard prefers to bide its time and take no action until the possibility of failure has been brought down to an irreducible minimum. The net is spread, and it is spread so effectively that only a genius could find a way out of it. There have been geniuses in the history of crime, but they are rare, and the police routine is not designed to cope with them.

"I think I've got Vanney's where I want them," said Teal. "If I have, they are safe, anyway. I'd rather not risk making a fool of myself and the Department by acting before I've got all the threads in my hands, and I can afford to lay a thousand to one on getting my conviction."

"What's their graft at the moment?" asked Kennedy, and Inspector Teal produced



's great arms. That was enough!
madly forward.

several typewritten sheets of paper which he handed over for perusal:

"That's a confidential report from Stanforth and Watson," he said. "Stanforth and Watson are handling a lot of Vanney's business. They'd had their doubts about it for some time, and when I started making inquiries they wanted to chuck it up altogether. I asked them to carry on to help us, and promised them we'd see that everything was all right for them when it came to the show-down. Eventually they agreed. You will find all the particulars here—it's the old bucket-shop game, but done more brilliantly than it's been done for years. Stenning was the last expert we had, and this is in the old tradition."

The Chief Commissioner looked up from the report.

"It's very reminiscent of Stenning," he agreed.

Teal nodded.

"It's Stenning to the life," he said.

"He died right on his cue, that man," put in Kennedy.

"He did," said Teal grimly. "It suited some people I could mention, down to the ground. I've got a feeling that if Stenning came to life again it'd mean a lot of trouble for the firm of Vanney."

He left the Commissioner's house at Regent's Park as the clocks were striking three, and drove away in his miniature car towards his own modest lodgings near Victoria.

The grotesqueness of the association of his mammoth bulk with that microscopic automobile had never struck him, but a more practical argument against it was forced upon his notice ten minutes later.

Piccadilly, at that hour, was almost deserted, and Inspector Teal, in defiance of speed limits, betrayed his satisfaction with the way the Vanney case was going, by allowing the lightness of his heart to manifest itself in the heaviness of his foot on the accelerator. He was doing nearly thirty-five miles an hour as he came level with the Ritz, but even so a big limousine purred up level and passed him effortlessly.

Inspector Teal had been guilty of allowing his thoughts to wander, and he was brought rudely back to earth by a sudden vision of the big car sheering in to the kerb directly across his front wings.

Faced with the alternative of crashing into the side of the car in front, Teal wrenched the steering round to the left, forgetting that he had no more than two feet of road on that side in which to manœuvre. He realised his mistake as he saw the columns, which carry the front of the hotel over the pavement to the edge of the road, leaping towards him. He tried to swing the car round again, but it was too late; and in an instant the near front wheel touched the kerb and the steering wheel was wrenched out of his hand. The car piled itself up against the stone with a crash.

Shakily, Teal picked himself up out of the road, where the force of the collision had hurled him. By some miracle he was unhurt, though the car was a wreck. The car which had caused the accident was vanishing in the direction of Hyde Park Corner, but the tail light was out and it was impossible to see the number.

He saw his car removed, with difficulty, to a nearby garage, and went home in a taxi. It was not the first time that an attempt had been made on his life, and he was inclined to take these things philosophically. But on this occasion he was annoyed, for the accident, and the consequent necessary arrangements for the disposal of the ruins, had deprived him of two hours' sleep.

The next morning, however, found him in a good humour, for his escape of the night before seemed to him, by all precedent, to mean that the case was entering on its last hectic stages; and he was almost cordial to the long-suffering Sergeant Barrow.

"I think most of the facts about Vanney's are taped out now," said Teal. "I've made a list of them in chronological order, and the list spells something to me."

He took a small notebook from his waistcoat pocket, marked a place with his thumb, and handed it over.

"Take a look at that."

Sergeant Barrow read the neatly tabulated entry:

1927	Traill wanted in Paris.
1927	Traill wanted at Nice.
1928 February.	Traill engaged by Stenning.
1928 July.	Connell and Mulligan disappeared.
1928 August.	Stenning killed.
1929 April.	Traill commissioned house for Vanney.
1929 June.	Vanney arrived from Melbourne, took possession of house, and opened the firm of Vanney.

"You seem to connect Vanney up with Stenning," remarked Barrow, when he had finished, and Inspector Teal closed his eyes, and smiled beatifically.

"I didn't do that," he replied. "Stenning did it himself."

The next development came some hours later.

Teal had returned to his office after dinner, and he was still working at ten o'clock, when a messenger entered.

"There's a question through from 'C' Division," said the man. "Connell's been seen in Soho to-night, and they want to know whether they're to pull him in or tail him, or what."

"Tail him till I arrive," said Teal briskly. "I've got an idea."

He spent twenty minutes in another room, and when he emerged the change in his appearance was amazing. The modern detective does not rely on such crude disguises as false beards. Instead he pins his faith to the creation of atmosphere. In a certain room at New Scotland Yard is kept a file of photographs of representative men of different trades, and the minutest details of their habits and characteristics are chronicled.

Teal, suiting his disguise to the framework on which he had to build, had adopted the character of a shady racecourse hanger-on. He changed his sober blue serge suit for a loud check, hung a massive watch chain across his middle, selected spats, and

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to "The Thriller" Office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

GOOD NEWS!

THE EDITOR GREETS YOU

GOOD NEWS! Good news! Another new novel-length story by EDGAR WALLACE is on its way to you! I am delighted to be able to make this announcement. Mr. Wallace's work is eagerly sought after by the world's keenest publishers, and even he—prolific writer that he is—has his limit. For one cause and another he has to refuse many commissions.

So it is good news for every reader of The THRILLER that the Master of Mystery is to be with us once more. As a matter of fact, Edgar Wallace has a soft spot for our new journal. He feels it fills a gap in the ranks of periodical publications, and puts him in contact with a new and wider public. Wider, without doubt! The gigantic circulation figure reached by our early issues prove that it finds favour with every section of the community.

Next week I hope to be able to give you more details—possibly the actual date—of the reappearance of Mr. Wallace. I will ask J. G. Reeder to investigate the matter and ascertain all the facts.

Meanwhile, how about this "Story of a Dead Man"? Isn't it splendid? I have just been lunching with Leslie Charteris, and telling him that when this issue has been perused by my readers he will have secured a legion of friends and admirers. I do not ask you if I am right. I know it! Nevertheless, I shall be glad to have your exact opinions if you care to write to me.

About next week. In our fifth issue I am going to introduce yet another author. His name may be unknown to most of you, but not to me. He has for years past written mystery stories of consistently high standard, but until now has hidden his identity under a nom-de-plume. In "The Man Who Quit" you will find and appreciate a book-length mystery story above the average in quality. At the same time the movement is swift and fascinating, and will supply you with thrill upon thrill.

Many complaints have come to hand from people who have not been able to secure our first three issues. This unfortunate state of affairs could have been avoided had they placed a definite order in advance for The THRILLER with their newsagent.

Be wise. Order now.

Yours sincerely,

The Editor

put them on over a pair of pointed, yellowish shoes. On each hand he put a ring, and fixed a diamond pin in the wrong part of a flashy tie. To his face he did little—a skilful darkening of the eyebrows, a broadening of the face by the insertion in the mouth of rubber pads designed for that purpose, and the attachment of a bristly moustache, was sufficient.

Regretfully he discarded his chewing gum, and put four cigars in a pocket of his waistcoat. He took a bowler hat of the wrong kind, a pair of lemon-coloured gloves and a silver-knobbed ebony walking-stick, and inspected the ensemble in a full-length mirror. Certainly, he was transformed.

At Marlborough Street Police Station he was told that the last report from the men who were keeping track of Connell had placed him in a public-house in Shaftesbury Avenue. Arriving there, Teal was met by a detective, who told him that their man had moved on to a night club.

The other detective was lounging against

"I want every man you've got, armed and at the double," rapped Teal.

the side of a taxicab outside, talking to the driver. The sign he gave Teal would have been unnoticed by a casual observer, but it was sufficient. Teal went in. He had no difficulty in this, for in his pocket was a collection of membership cards, which would have gained him admittance to any night club in London.

He saw his man as soon as he entered the room and established himself in a corner a few tables away.

Sipping the drink which was brought him, he watched Connell covertly.

Connell was there without any attempt at disguise. Gathered together at his table were three or four men whose appearances were decidedly against them. Two of them Teal recognised. There was the usual leavening of "dancing partners."

The party was a hilarious one, and Connell was leading every outburst of merriment. Every drink was on him—one round had hardly arrived before he was shouting for another—and he paid for them from a huge roll of Bank of England notes.

"Drink up!" he shouted at intervals. "I'm on a good thing, and this is my night out."

Teal watched for an hour, and when the party quietened down into a sodden stupor he judged that it was his turn to take a hand.

Taking a pencil and an envelope from his pocket, he scribbled a note: "If you want to make some more easy money, don't say anything to anybody, but follow me out of here."

"Slip that to the gentleman over there," said Teal to a passing waiter, and pointed out Connell

Connell read the note, and Teal caught his eye. Then the detective rose and walked towards the exit.

Connell caught him up in the street.

"What's this?" he demanded thickly, brandishing the envelope.

Teal took it from him.

"I want you to do a job for me," he said. "There's a place just up the road where we can talk without being disturbed. It's worth a hundred to you. Are you on?"

Connell swayed and steadied himself.

"Let's hear," he said, and Teal took his arm and walked him up the road.

In half an hour Connell was back at the club calling for more drinks, but Teal did not return. He went back to Scotland Yard, changed into his ordinary clothes and went home to bed.

He retailed the encounter to Sergeant Barrow the next morning.

"I asked him if he could drive a car, and he said he could. Then I asked him if he could do tricks with one, and he asked me what I meant. I told him I'd got a down on a man and I wanted him messed up in an accidental sort of way. 'This man's given his chauffeur notice,' I said, 'and I can get you the job, references and all, in any name you like. If you're a fool, you'll land yourself for dangerous driving; but if you're clever, maybe, you can get away with it and draw the hundred I'm offering.' He was in a boastful mood, and he said he could make a car eat out of his hand and turn somersaults, just when he wanted to. I arranged to meet him at the same place in two days' time, with the money, and that was that."

"And?" prompted Sergeant Barrow.

"And," said Mr. Teal, with languid satisfaction, "I think that tells me all I want to know about the past history of Mulligan; and how Stenning managed to die so successfully."

Altogether it was a successful twenty-four hours for Mr. Teal, for a few minutes later the man he had set to tail Connell home arrived with his report, and another mystery was well on its way to solution.

Mr. Teal now had a very good idea why Jimmy had stopped going out to lunch, and this further progress increased his conviction that things would shortly commence to hum.

THE BREAK.

At twelve o'clock on a certain morning, Jimmy Traill made a decision.

He came to this decision at the end of twenty-four hours' unbroken deliberation. The question itself had haunted him for eighteen of those hours. In the office he had been moody, going about his work with his usual efficiency, but the air of devoting to it no more attention than was absolutely necessary, while all the spare energy of his mind was simultaneously devoted to this far more important thing, of which he said nothing. When he was not working, he sat back in his chair, lighting cigarette after cigarette and scowling darkly about him. His manner had changed. Occasionally he essayed a jest after his old fashion, but most of the time he was too preoccupied with this other trouble to waste a moment in unnecessary conversation.

Pamela Marlowe diagnosed these symptoms as the proof of a misspent night before; but in this she was wrong, for the night before did not occur until the night after. Jimmy had gone back to his flat in Cheyne Walk, and covered miles of ground pacing up and down his room until the sky outside his window was palely luminous with the first light of dawn. Then he had bathed, shaved and changed, and gone out for a walk. He arrived at a restaurant in time for breakfast with the decision he had to make theoretically made, but it remained to decide whether it was possible to carry it out.

He spent more hours deliberating this point, drawing futurist designs on a piece of blotting-paper, and occasionally making a note, regarding it with a thoughtful and critical air, and carefully erasing it.

The decision was finally made at twelve o'clock, and with the removal of uncertainty and the arrival at a definite plan of campaign he brightened perceptibly. The pencil went flying across the room into a corner, the blotting-paper was screwed up into a ball and hurled into the waste-paper basket with the gesture of a challenger throwing down the gauntlet, and his feet returned to their usual position on top of the desk.

"I've got it," said Jimmy triumphantly.

"Badly, I should say," agreed Pamela, but he refused to be suppressed.

"Since lunch time yesterday," he explained solemnly, "I have been tormented by visions of helpless orphans struggling to make their way in the world, with no mother to spank them, and no father to borrow fivers from. It isn't only that, it's the neglect. I mean, think of the number of orphans whose parents never write to them, and—and—well, I think something ought to be done about it. Don't you?"

"Are you going to start an orphanage?" she asked.

Jimmy stroked his chin.

"Not exactly," he replied gravely. "I'm starting a fund for distressed orphans, and the fund will be used to help deserving cases to end their days in the luxury to which the hardships of their early years have entitled them. I am an orphan," he added absently.

Clearly he was bursting with some big scheme, but he was too intent upon it to waste time elaborating any more fantastic explanations.

"First," he said briskly, "I think I shall require a lawyer. How does one find a good lawyer?"

"There's Mr. Standish," she suggested.

"I said a *good* lawyer," replied Jimmy. "I've got to find a man who can tell me how to be legally dishonest, if I have to knock on every solicitor's door in London."

He chose his man by the simple expedient of opening the telephone directory at random, and scanning the columns for the name of a solicitor. He found one very quickly, and telephoned for an appointment.

"Sing me a song about this and that," said Jimmy cheerfully, and the solicitor was visibly shocked.

"Explain your business in terms that I can understand," suggested the solicitor stiffly, "and I might be able to help you."

Jimmy sobered down and put his hypothetical case briefly and clearly.

The lawyer expounded the law. Jimmy listened carefully, made some notes, asked one or two questions, and was satisfied. He paid the fee in cash.

"Thanks very much for your help," said Jimmy, rising to go.

"Not at all," said the legal authority. "But"—a slight frown crossed his forehead as he looked at Jimmy—"if you will forgive me saying so, your questions were rather extraordinary. You appear to be a most unusual young man, and I should be sorry to see you in trouble. I wonder if you will allow me to give you a word of advice, Mr. Thomas?"

"Carry on," said Mr. Thomas, whom Jimmy had found before to be a conveniently inconspicuous person.

"You appear to want to sail as near the wind as possible," said the solicitor. "In the question you have asked me, you have given me some indication of your motive for doing so. It is one that I can understand and sympathise with; but at the same time I feel that I ought to warn you that, even with the best of moral justification, the game is rarely worth the candle. It is so easy to make mistakes, and if you make a mistake you will be very much worse off than you can possibly be at present."

Jimmy nodded.

"Thanks again," he said frankly. "I know that I take a risk, and I think it worth taking. I came to consult you in order to cut down the chances of my making such a disastrous mistake as you have hinted at. If you've got any more practical advice on the subject to give, I shall be glad to take another quarter of an hour of your time."

"I've told you everything there is to be told," said the solicitor. "The fate of your enterprise now rests entirely with yourself."

Jimmy went back to the office feeling more light-hearted than he had felt for days. He entered the room whistling, spun his hat adroitly to its peg, plumped down in his chair, and rang the bell marked "Secretary."

"Take a letter," he said. "This is to Rolands & Battersby, 240, Threadneedle Street. Dear Sirs,—With reference to your advertisement of a thousand-ton ocean-going motor-cruiser, in the current issue of 'Yachting,' I'll buy the darned thing at the price mentioned. Paragraph. I understand that the said hooker is at present lying in Southampton Water. Stop. You will kindly rake up a crew, shove them on board, and tell them to shoot the old tub along to Gravesend. Stop. This must be done immediately, as I am likely to be leaving with a party on short notice. Stop. Communicate these instructions to Southampton by telephone, and drum it into the fat heads of the big stiffs at the other end of the line that the barnacled barge aforesaid has got to arrive at Gravesend within forty-eight hours of your receipt of this letter. Yours faithfully. Turn that into respectable business English, and type it on plain paper."

She looked at him.

"Are you serious about this letter?" she asked.

"I was never more serious in my life," answered Jimmy.

"Then you're leaving Vanney's?"

Jimmy smiled.

"Certainly there's going to be a break in the partnership," he said. "But whether I shall leave Vanney's or Vanney's will leave me remains to be seen."

Business had been getting brisker every day, and that afternoon established a new record. Jimmy spent the whole of his time in a whirl of letters, telegrams, and telephone conversations, and he had no leisure in which to give vent to the high spirits which otherwise he would have enjoyed indulging.

He was not sorry to leave the office that night, for work was a thing in which he was accustomed to indulge spasmodically, and with the object of reaping sufficient profit from it to render further work unnecessary for a considerable period.

With a number of late nights behind him, and the prospect of tiring days ahead, he had intended to go to bed early that night; but, unfortunately for that plan, when he was half undressed he was smitten with an idea. With Jimmy Traill, to conceive an idea and to put it into execution were things so closely consecutive as to be almost simultaneous. He sighed, dressed again, and went out.

The next morning, however, he showed no trace of tiredness as he ran up the stairs to the office.

He was always the first to arrive, as only Vanney and himself, and one other man, held keys, and the other two were invariably late. He was feeling cheerful that morning as he let himself in, but the gay humming died swiftly on his lips as he endeavoured to extract the key from the lock.

He twisted, pulled, and wrenched, and eventually it came away. Then he looked at the lock, and discovered the reason for the jamb. It was a Yale, and it took him no more than ten seconds' expert investigation to see and appreciate how neatly it had been broken.

He went quickly through the offices—waiting-room, clerks'-room, his own room. The communicating doors were all open. He might have left them like that himself, but one door was open which he had never by any chance forgotten to close, and that was the door between his own office and the room marked "Private."

He passed quickly through, and what he saw made him pull up suddenly with his face gone strangely stern.

Facing him, on either side of the fireplace, were two tall cupboards, which, as has been mentioned, were kept locked. Presumably they were used for storing the private files of the company. But, since nobody except himself and his partners ever entered the room, the question was never a subject for curiosity and comment. Now both the cupboards had been roughly broken open, and the doors sagged wide, showing their interiors.

One was empty. The intruder, whoever he was, had drawn blank with his first guess. The other was also empty; but instead of the wooden back, which one might have expected to see, there was clearly visible the raw brickwork of the wall, and this had been broken away so that there was a large gap through which a man could easily pass. On the other side of this gap was a curtain, which had been drawn aside, and through the hole in the wall could be seen a room.

Jimmy stood still for a long time. Then he took out his cigarette-case and, very slowly and calmly, selected and lighted a cigarette. With this in his mouth he strolled forward, pushed through the doors of the right-hand cupboard, ducked through the aperture in the wall, and came out into the room beyond. It was furnished as a sitting-room, with a safe in one corner and a writing-desk in another. The safe had been smashed by an expert, and its heavy door stood wide open—a battered and drunken-looking apology for a door. Papers were strewn about the floor. The writing-desk was in a similar state of disrepair. Every drawer had been forced, and the contents were scattered on it, around it, and across the carpet.

After what he had already seen, these catastrophes were of minor importance to Jimmy Traill, and even the litter failed to exasperate his tidy instincts. Moving very slowly and deliberately, he examined the rest of the flat, and found that no part of it which might constitute a hiding-place had been overlooked.

Jimmy Traill smiled faintly, but it was not because he was amused.

He went back into Vanney's office, pulled the cupboard doors to, and returned to his own room, closing the door marked "Private" carefully behind him.

When Pamela Marlowe arrived he was comfortably blowing smoke rings, and no one would have known from his expression what a jar he had received.

She sat down, and it was some time before he became aware that she was expecting him to do something, and he pulled himself together with an effort.

"Oh, yes, the letters," murmured Jimmy, and swept the pile before him neatly into a drawer. "I've already opened those, and there's nothing to attend to yet."

He played a tattoo on the desk with a pencil.

"By the way," he said casually, "I'm giving you a week's notice, though the necessity for your services may cease to exist before then."

It was some moments before she could recover from her surprise.

"Why?" she stammered. "Isn't my work satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," said Jimmy. "But the firm you work for isn't. Later on in the day I shall be giving myself notice, so you needn't think you are the only victim. You will receive three months' salary in lieu of however much longer notice you thought you were entitled to, and a further three months' salary instead of a reference. The procedure may seem strange to you, but it is dictated by my wishes for your welfare. You could have a reference if you wanted one, but it would be quite useless. The money I spoke of has already been paid into your bank account, and you will receive confirmation of that from them as soon as the cheque has been passed through."

"But surely," said Pamela blankly, "six months' salary is not necessary in lieu of notice and a reference?"

"The firm of Vanney," answered the old Jimmy, "although eccentric to the point of being crooked, has a reputation for generosity to maintain. I have just started to give it that reputation, and you are the first beneficiary."

She hesitated.

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Traill," she said at length. "But, since the money has already been paid over, you must have known that this was going to happen."

"I did," he replied. "But I wasn't sure exactly when. I discovered this morning that it was going to happen to-day."

Pamela looked straight at him.

"Mr. Traill," she said, "since I am leaving Vanney's, and this looks like being the last eccentricity I shall have to puzzle over, is it any use asking you to give me the real reason for it—and that would be the first serious answer you had made to me since I met you."

Jimmy stood up. He was quite serious.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've stopped playing the fool, from this moment. So I'll just say that it's impossible to answer your question."

The last words were spoken almost in a whisper, and he was standing quite still with his head bent slightly forward, as though listening.

"One moment," he said, and went quickly into Vanney's office.

"George," said Jimmy Traill quickly to the porter, "yours not to reason why, yours but to promptly fly. In English, pull out of here right away. You also, my king beaver—' this to Vanney.' Go away and sit down, and open your hearts to each other. And wait till I come back—it will be within two hours."

He returned to his own office, taking no notice of Pamela, jerked his hat down from the rack, and went out.

A taxi took him to his flat in Cheyne Walk. It was there that Teal found him an hour later. There was a half-filled suitcase on the table, and Jimmy, having admitted the detective, returned unconcernedly to the task of trying to close the lid of a trunk that was already crammed to bursting point. A selection of clothes was laid out on the bed, and every chair in the room was similarly loaded.

Teal surveyed the disorder thoughtfully.

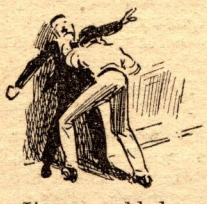
"Where are you going, Jimmy?" he inquired.

"Where am I going? Well, it isn't decided yet. I may be going abroad for a long holiday, or I may be staying quite near London. There's a good selection of prisons around London, I believe."

"And what," said Teal mildly, "do you expect to be going to prison for?"

"Perjury," said Jimmy cheerfully.

NO QUARTER.



TEAL did not seem surprised.

"That's what I came to see you about," he remarked. "It may not be necessary, or, at least, it mayn't delay your departure for foreign shores for very long."

Jimmy nodded.

"King's Evidence?"

"Something like that," said Teal.

"I'll remember the suggestion," said Jimmy, smiling. "You're not a bad fellow for a busy, Claude Eustace, and if there should be anything doing I'll let you know. But by the time that chance comes there may be another charge against me, and then I'd have to think very carefully. So would you."

Teal picked up his hat.

"There are some men who say 'No,'" he observed, "and you wonder whether they mean 'Yes.' You don't say yes or no, but one always knows what you mean. Sorry to have troubled you."

"The last man who said that to me," remarked Jimmy reminiscently, "is one of the only two possible starters for the Great Burglary Sweepstakes. Tell me, do the police ever indulge in what you might call judicially sanctioned crime?"

"Not that I know of."

"I just wondered," said Jimmy. "Now I know. It must have been Harry."

Teal put down his hat again. If he had not been so obviously incapable of such contortions one would have said that he pricked up his ears.

"Harry?" he repeated.

"The same," said Jimmy. "But if you think you're going to get anything out of me before you've got me in the dock, you may have another guess free. Good-morning, Claude—and don't forget to close the door as you go out."

Obediently, Teal went to the door.

"By the way," he said from the threshold, "you were working late at the office last night, Jimmy."

"I was," said Jimmy, folding a dinner-jacket. "What about it?"

"I made some inquiries, and I found that the rule in those offices is that everyone must be out of them by eight o'clock."

"True," said Jimmy. "But, since Mr. Vanney owns not only the offices, but the whole block of flats also, and since he made that rule, I think one may say that he and his staff were allowed to break it. Good-bye."

"See you again soon," said Teal, and went.

The two hours which the gentlemen known as George and the King Beaver had been told to wait had expired to the minute when Jimmy Traill returned. He knew that

Flinging a blanket over her head, they forced Pamela Marlowe into the lift.

he had been followed from Cheyne Walk back to the office, but he was not bothering about such trifling troubles.

He walked quickly down the corridor and turned into his own office.

It was empty.

With a sick foreboding, Jimmy swung round on his heel and flung open the door leading into the clerks' room.

"Anybody seen or heard of Miss Marlowe?" he observed.

They had not.

"You're an idle bunch, and you know it," Jimmy rapped back. "Don't waste your breath telling me you were so busy working you couldn't hear anything, because I shan't believe it. She couldn't have left the office without your hearing the door close. Have you heard her go out?"

They had not.

"Right," said Jimmy violently, and closed the door with a contrasting gentleness.

He went through into Vanney's room, closing the door behind him, passed through the cupboard and the wall beyond, and entered the flat. There was only one man there.

"Stenning," said Jimmy, "I want to know where Miss Marlowe is, and I want to know it quick!"

"Miss Marlowe?" repeated the big man blankly.

"You heard me the first time," snapped Jimmy.

"I don't know anything about her."

Jimmy put his hands in his pockets.

"You're a liar and a dog, Stenning, my man," he said. "But I'll settle that account later. Where's your partner in crime?"

Jimmy looked round the room.

"He was here when I left you," he said. "He can't have gone without your knowing—unless you weren't here yourself. Which is it?"

Stenning rose.

"I left him," he said.

"I told you to stay here."

"And I chose to leave. Have you got anything to say?"

"A mouthful," said Jimmy, "but that'll wait. Where did you go?"

"I went out to buy a bottle of whisky, if you want to know."

Jimmy's eye fell on the table.

"I see. Well, we'll come to that in due course. I'm only putting it off because I think that when I've finished my interview with you you'll be more disposed to tell me all the things I want to know about Connell."

He flung some papers on the table.

"Take a look at those," he said.

Stenning looked.

"A cheque for twenty thousand pounds, which only needs your signature to make it worth that amount, payable to Miss Pamela Marlowe. That is the sum of twelve thousand pounds which you swindled off her father, plus a sum of interest which, I grant you, is extortionate, but which you will pay all the same. A receipt for that sum, signed by Miss Marlowe. I know it'll pass in a court of law, because I forged the signature myself."

Stenning's mouth twisted.

"And how do you think you're going to make me sign?"

"Moral persuasion," said Jimmy. "Reinforced, if necessary, by physical. Take your pen and follow the dotted line."

Stenning laughed.

"You're mad," he said.

"Absolutely," agreed Jimmy cordially. "Sign, please."

Stenning sneered.

"I refuse."

"Right," said Jimmy. "If you maintain your refusal, I shall be compelled to inflict divers unpleasant forms of physical violence on your person. But, before I start, I'll tell you something. Anything I can do to you may not make you sign. But if my methods of persuasion fail to convince you, I have one argument up my sleeve. Do what you're told, and I'll fade out of the picture and say nothing. Without my assistance the firm of Vanney will probably be seriously handicapped, but I can't help that. I'll get out, and nothing will be said. But don't sign, and the firm of Vanney will be shown up within an hour. Teal's on to you already, but if he's got to make his own way he can't get going in time to stop your getaway—if you're quick enough. But if I help him, there'll be a long, long gaol waiting for you, Stenning."

Stenning sat down. He seemed to be enjoying the joke.

"Jimmy," he said, "that's one too old for me. I know the game as well as you do, and I tell you it won't work. There are two things to stop you squealing. One is that if you squeal you'll be in the same boat with the rest of us. The other is that even if you squeal, that won't make me sign."

"Granted," said Jimmy. "There are two answers to that. One is that I planned this little meeting, and everything is plotted out on my time-table to the last minute. Within one hour Teal could have all the evidence he needs, and I can be away and out on the high seas. Can you say the same?"

Stenning made no answer.

"The second," said Jimmy, "is that, even if putting you away for at least ten years' penal servitude won't make you pay Miss Marlowe back that money, it'll be the least I can do for her by way of compensation. I'll do it cheerfully—don't make any mistake about that!"

The other showed his teeth.

"You rat!" he snarled.

"Possibly," said Jimmy coolly. "I've got an idea lately that I'd like to go straight, and I'm going to give it a chance. It's eccentric and exceptional, I know, but I can't help that. This Vanney's game has turned out a bit bigger than I ever wanted anything to be. It looked a sporting proposition to me once, and that's why I came into it, but I've changed my mind now. For one thing, I bar murder."

Stenning sat quite still.

"Murder," said Jimmy again. "I haven't got the proof, or I'd offer to send that along to Teal as well, but I'm not a fool. You've got to remember that I fixed up your fake death for you. I found Connell and Long Harry for you, and they were able to rake up Red Mulligan—who, most fortunately for our purpose, had just decided to die, and who, still more considerately, had contrived to end up his useless days with much the same build as yourself. Then Long Harry was of no further use, but he was dangerous. He didn't know much, but he might guess a lot. You framed him for a job in Bayswater, but it wasn't your fault that the man didn't die and so put Harry out of the way for ever. Connell stayed in the partnership, but he was always a danger. Because he's a mug, it took him some time to realise how important he was, but you know as well as I do that he was starting to realise that he held the whip hand; and, what's more, he had started to put the screw on, feeling his way. You disposed of that—by fixing him for a job in Battersea. That time you made no mistake about it being a murder job. I expect you were feeling safer after that, because if Connell started to get any more uppish, you could hold the threat of the gallows over him."

Stenning remained motionless in his chair, hunched up. His face had gone pale, and in that set, pallid mask his eyes glowed with hate. Jimmy, lounged against the table, went on speaking in the same calm, level tones.

"You were clever," he admitted. "You even realised that since Harry was out and was known to be looking for Connell, Harry might be pulled in by mistake for the Battersea job. Knowing your man, you sent Harry money, and, as you expected, he got very tight on it, and was arrested, thereby establishing his alibi beyond all dispute. But I've seen through it, Stenning, and I'm not in a game like that. Now sign!"

"You're a fool!" said Stenning harshly. "Even if you made me sign, I could still stop the cheque."

"You wouldn't," said Jimmy. "But in case you thought of doing so I'd take care that I put you in a place where you wouldn't have a chance of stopping it until it had been paid."

"And even then," said Stenning, "I could recover the money, because my signature was obtained under duress."

Jimmy smiled.

"You'll have a job proving it," he murmured. "In any case, it won't be necessary, because you're going to sign that cheque voluntarily."

"Am I?"

"You certainly are," said Jimmy. "Because, if you don't sign it voluntarily, I shall now proceed to beat you up."

Stenning came to his feet again.

"You're going to beat me up, are you?"

"I am," said Jimmy, with a certain enthusiasm. "And it will be no ordinary beating-up. I'm an expert in the beating-up game, and I may mention that the mercy of a knock-out does not figure in my programme until—oh, well beyond the thirtieth round. It will be painful for you, and I'm afraid your face will be rather crudely damaged; but, unfortunately, I haven't any more subtle instruments of torture than my fists."

Stenning came round the table, and Jimmy, who was unarmed, but prepared for a display of armoury, divined the next move in the game before Stenning's hand had reached his hip pocket. The toe of his right shoe caught the big man on the wrist as the automatic came into sight, and the force of the kick was shattering.

Jimmy fell to the floor a second after the gun, and his legs, flailing round in a scissors motion, knocked Stenning's feet from under him. Stenning went down with a crash, but Jimmy was up again in an instant, with the automatic in his hand. He slipped it into his hip pocket, and shed his coat as Stenning scrambled up again.

"The show devolves on me now—what?" murmured Jimmy. "That wrist of yours won't help you a lot."

The next instant Stenning was upon him.

It was not a pretty fight to watch, nor would any boxing referee have allowed it to continue for more than three seconds. Jimmy Traill was giving at least three stone away, and he was not prepared to take chances. The encounter lasted nine minutes by the clock, and at the end of that time Stenning went to the floor for the eleventh time, and stayed there.

"Up, Jenkins!" encouraged Jimmy. "You're not nearly out yet, so it's no good shamming. The only Queensbury rule we haven't broken yet is the one which forbids rolling about on the floor fighting, but if

you don't come up again quickly I'll break that rule, too."

Stenning came to a sitting position.

"I'll sign," he gasped.

Jimmy took him by the collar, yanked him to his feet, and pushed him into a chair.

"Here's your pen, and here's the cheque," he said briskly. "Get on with it, because I'm in a hurry. And mind you don't drip blood all over it, because the bank might ask questions."

LAUGHING DEATH.

JIMMY examined the signature, folded the cheque carefully, and put it in his pocket. His hair was tousled, and his shirt torn, and he was breathing heavily; but he felt ready to begin again any time, and in spirits he was completely unruffled.

"Now for Connell," he remarked. "Where is he, Stenning?"

The limp mess at the table buried its pulped face in its hands.

"You may as well know now—he's with Miss Marlowe."

"And where's that?"

"Downstairs. There are vaults under the building that I never told you about. The only way into them is from this flat. I had a private lift put in—I was going to use the cellars to hide in if the police got on to us and there was no time to make a bolt for it. Connell was putting the screw on—he said he must have the girl, and I helped him take her. They're down there now."

Jimmy took the automatic from his pocket, and thumbed back the safety catch. His lips were set grimly.

"If anything's happened to her," he said, "you're certainly for a bullet, Stenning. Where is this lift?"

Stenning gestured weakly towards the wall.

"Press the panel next to that picture," he said.

Jimmy did so. The panel slipped back a fraction of an inch at his touch, and he waited. For a few moments it seemed as if nothing was going to happen. There was no sound, but then a piece of panelling swung open with a click, and in front of him was a small lift. He stepped in, and the panelling closed behind him automatically.

In the wall of the lift were two switches. He tried one without result, but when he clicked over the other the lift began to move downwards.

Presently it stopped. In front of him was a gap in the shaft, hardly distinguishable in the darkness. He stepped out, and then he was able to see better.

A tunnel ran to left and right of him. The paving, walls, and ceiling were of stone, and the passage lost itself in darkness at either end. But a little way down to his right there was a space in the wall from which a faint light came. That must have been a branch tunnel, and since light came from it it seemed as if his search would not have to be a long one. He began to creep towards it, moving as silently as possible over the flags, but he had hardly taken two steps before a low hum from behind made him swing round. He saw the lift by which he had just descended commencing to move upwards, and for an instant he weighed up in his mind the possibility of reaching it and checking its ascent, but the idea was no sooner formulated than it was discarded. That was Stenning, of course—he should have knocked him out completely or tied him up—but it was too late to think of that now. For a moment again he thought of retracing his steps and waiting for Stenning to arrive, but before he could figure out the pros and cons of that scheme it was driven out of his head by a scream that shrilled and echoed hollowly down the passage. It made him oblivious of his own danger, of the possibility of attack from behind, of every sane and cautious counsel of prudence.

He leapt towards the turning from which the light came. Another shorter tunnel stretched before him, dimly lighted by two flickering gas jets. At the end it appeared to open into a room so brightly lighted that at that point the gas jets must have given place to electricity. He could see a chair and the end of a table—nothing else—but it was the only place from which the scream could have come.

Jimmy Traill murdered the intervening distance of ten yards of tunnelling in a blinding red mist of fury, and he was inside that brightly illuminated room in a matter of seconds.

Pamela Marlowe was there, and so was Connell. Connell was holding her in his great arms. Pamela was struggling, but she was a child in Connell's terrific embrace.

Jimmy never took in more than the bare details of the scene. His hand gripped Connell's collar, and he wrenched the man round with homicidal violence.

"Connell, my man," said Jimmy, his voice coming shakily through his clenched teeth, "that will be all from you."

Connell's fist came up like lightning, but Jimmy was even quicker, and the big man went sprawling against the wall from a mule-kick of a punch that carried every ounce of Jimmy's weight and strength and concentrated hate behind it.

Connell reeled, and nearly fell. Then he came catapulting back to reply, like a jack-in-the-box. Jimmy side-stepped coolly, and landed an uppercut that started at his knees and travelled skywards with detonating force to impact smashingly on the point of Connell's jaw, and Connell went down like a log.

Through the locked gates he watched them sagging helplessly to the floor. Yet he was powerless to aid them.

"We must get out of this in double-quick time, Pamela!" said Jimmy briskly, and he was just in time to catch her with his arm as she staggered.

In those few moments of seeing red, he had forgotten everything else, and he was brought back to reality with a jar that sent a stream of cold air whistling down his spine.

The sound was slight—no more than a subdued rattle that told of a lock being turned home. But Jimmy heard it, and whipped round—a few seconds too late.

What had been an unguarded way out back into the tunnel was now barred by a solid iron gate, and on the other side of the gate was Stenning—Stenning leaning weakly against the wall, with his face mashed to a jelly and his coat spattered

with blood, but Stenning, vindictive and triumphant.

"Now will you squeal, Jimmy Traill?" he croaked.

Jimmy made no answer.

The nearest gas jet was directly over Stenning's head. Stenning reached up one hand, and the flame was extinguished. A faint hissing sound could be heard.

"Do you know what I've done, Jimmy Traill?" said Stenning shrilly.

Jimmy's left arm was round the girl. With his right hand he was fumbling behind him.

But Stenning was taking no notice. Forcing his tortured body to obedience by the exercise of a tremendous effort of will, he was reeling back down the corridor, lurching from side to side like a drunken man, keeping himself erect half the time by resting against the wall, but dragging himself, somehow, to the other end of the corridor and the second gas jet. He reached it.

"Shall I tell you what I've done, Jimmy Traill?" Stenning's voice came booming hollowly down the tunnel, and as he spoke his hand went up and found the tap he sought.

Jimmy knew then that the man was mad. The last gas jet went out, and the hissing sound became louder. The only light in the corridor now was that which came from the electric bulb in the room in which Jimmy and the girl were imprisoned.

"I have turned on the gas," said Stenning.

And he laughed—a harsh, strident, demoniacal laugh. He was still laughing when Jimmy shot him dead.

. . . . . .

After the shot the silence that followed was so unbroken that Jimmy could hear his own breathing. Stenning would never speak again, and Connell was out for a long time.

Slowly Jimmy returned Stenning's automatic to his hip pocket. It was no use now. One glance at the massive lock on the barred gate, which went from the floor to the top of the tunnel arch, told him that any attempt to shoot away the fastening would be wasted. Besides, with the gas continuing to escape, even the flash of a pistol would be enough to blow them all up.

He felt quite cool now. He had done everything there was to do, and he had failed. Violence would not help him now; and, anyway, there was no one to fight unless Connell came to. Strength and skill were of no use. He had been caught in a trap, and he knew that it was the end.

He had thought that the girl had fainted, but he saw that her eyes were open. Even so, he did not let go of her.

"I am very sorry," said Jimmy, and even as he uttered the words he realised how ridiculously inadequate they were.

She nodded.

"I understand," she said.

"They took you when I was away, of course," he said. "It doesn't seem to have been much use—my coming in the nick of time. But I was thinking of something else."

He told her of the cheque he had made Stenning sign, and took it out of his pocket to show her. Even then he could not help smiling.

"It may be of some use to your heirs and legatees—if you've made a will," he said.

She looked up at him, steady-eyed; and it was not only that he was holding her, but she was holding on to him. At that moment it seemed the most natural thing to do.

"Is there no chance?" she asked.

"None," said Jimmy bitterly. "Listen. I'd planned out everything I was going to do to-day, but this was the one possibility that I never foresaw. I wrote a complete account of everything I knew about Vanney—or Stenning, as he really was—and what I proposed to do to-day, and left it at a District Messenger office, addressed to Teal.

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They were to send it straight round to him when I instructed them to do so by telegram. The motor-boat is at Gravesend, as I ordered it, and I should have wired from there. That way, I could have given all the information to Teal exactly when I chose to without risking a delay in the post, and, at the same time, he wouldn't have received it before I was beyond his reach. But until they receive my wire, the letter will not be delivered; and so I'm afraid—there is no chance. The gas will spread; it'll have to fill all the cellars. I don't know how big they are, but it will creep up all the same."

There was a long silence, and then Jimmy said:

"Will you believe me now, when death is only a few minutes away, if I tell you that I'd meant to make a fresh start because—I love you?"

"I know you do," she answered. "It has taken me all this time to realise that I love you."

"Kiss me," said Jimmy.

She put up her lips, and he kissed her, and held her close.

Presently she seemed to grow heavier in his arms. He was stronger himself, and his mind was still clear, but his eyes felt strangely heavy, and his chest was starting to ache with the labour of trying to extract some life-giving oxygen from that poisoned air. There was a rushing as of many waters in his ears, and it seemed as if a thousand trip-hammers were pounding on his brain.

He wondered if she was already gone, but then she spoke. It was no more than a whisper, but her voice seemed to come from a tremendous distance.

"Good-bye, Jimmy," she said.

"Good-bye," he said, and kissed her again.

She was quite still now.

"Good-bye, Pamela," he said, and he could not tell whether she heard him. "We never belonged to each other in all our lives, but at least we take the last adventure together."

He was starting to feel very weak, and the room was swaying dizzily before his eyes. He leant against the wall, but he still held her with the last of his strength. It seemed to be getting dark, and he knew that he could not last much longer, but he was not afraid.

"THERE'S a man to see you, sir," said Sergeant Barrow, entering the room.

Teal looked at the card, and read the note that accompanied it.

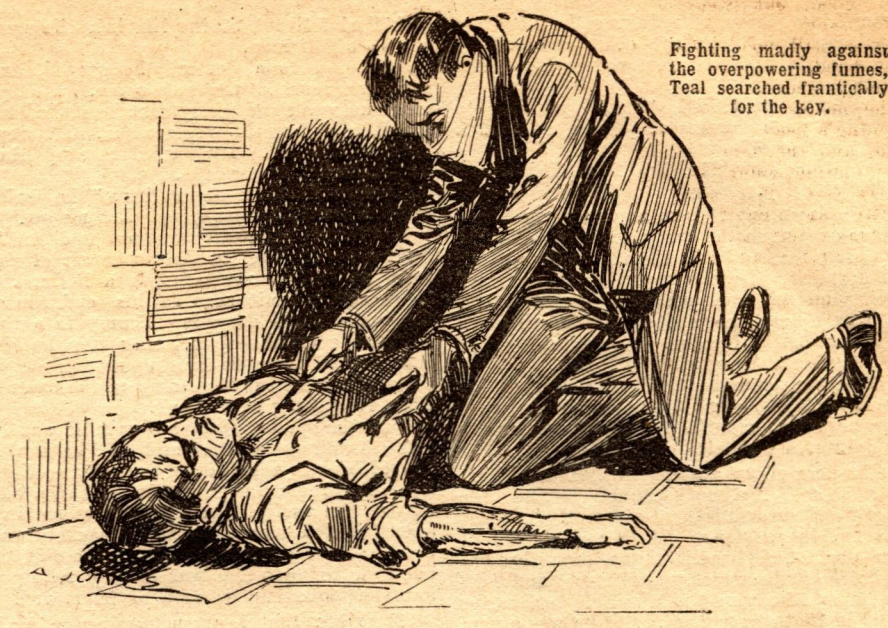
"Send him up," he said.

He started a fresh piece of chewing-gum, and waited as though asleep. He remained in that attitude when the visitor was shown in, for his party manners were not his strong point.

"Go right ahead," said Teal, without opening his eyes

The man sat down

"The circumstances are rather peculiar," he explained. "At about eleven o'clock this morning a rather bulky letter was deposited at one of our branches, addressed to you, with instructions that it was not to be delivered until we received a telegram authorising us to do so. It seemed a rather extraordinary proceeding to me at the time, especially as the address on the envelope told me that it was likely to be a message



Fighting madly against the overpowering fumes, Teal searched frantically for the key.

with some bearing on your professional activities. So, after thinking it over, and taking the opinion of our head office by telephone, I decided that it was my duty to come round and see you at once."

"Have you the letter with you?" asked Teal.

"Naturally I brought it along."

Teal stretched out his hand.

"Let's have a look at it," he suggested.

He had to open his eyes to read the address, and then he was suddenly galvanised into life. He sat up with a violence that made his chair, solid as it was, creak protestingly.

"Jimmy Traill!" he muttered. "I'd know that writing in a million."

"I hope I did right," ventured the stranger.

"You did one of the best things you're ever likely to do in your life," said Teal, and pressed a bell on his desk.

"Barrow," said Teal, as his subordinate entered, "take this gentleman away, fill him up with whatever he likes to drink, and thank him as profusely as you know how. I'm going to be busy!"

Left alone again, he sat down and ripped open the envelope. He read, and he read quickly, and in five minutes he was leaping down the stone stairs in the direction of that wing of Scotland Yard which constitutes Cannon Row Police Station.

"Every man you've got, armed and at the double!" rapped Teal.

And the sergeant in charge was so astonished at this display of energy and hustle on the part of his normally drowsy superior officer that the order was obeyed in what must have come close to record time.

At about half-past twelve, the keen observer might have noticed a number of burly men in plain clothes unostentatiously taking up positions round the block in which Vanney's stood. Teal circumnavigated the block himself, and made certain that every possible exit was watched. Then he went in alone.

A clerk met him in the waiting-room, but Teal had pushed past him before his business could be questioned. He went through the clerks' room, into Jimmy Traill's office, took in the emptiness of it at a glance, and went straight across to the door marked "Private." His hand was on the gun in his pocket as he walked in.

"Ah!" said Teal.

One cupboard was still open as Jimmy had left it, and Teal could see through into the disorder of the room beyond. He went forward cautiously, and squeezed through the hole in the wall

There was a man in the room, and Teal had him in an iron grip before the other could be quite sure what was happening.

"I'll take you for a start, Harry," said Teal. "Now tell me what you've done with the rest of the gang, and tell me quick!"

Long Harry straightened up.

"I've been in this place all day," he said. "I bust in. I don't mind telling you that now. I was looking for Connell, or something that would tell me where he was, but I couldn't find him. So I waited. I hid in the bath-room. Traill came in early in the morning, saw the mess, and looked round, but he never saw me. Then Connell arrived, but he wasn't alone, and I didn't dare start anything with witnesses. I heard them talking. Then, presently, after Traill had been in and spoken to them, Connell and the other man went out into the office and grabbed a girl who works in there. They had a blanket over her head, so I couldn't see who it was, but I was watching round the corner of the door, and I saw Connell take her down."

"Down where?" snapped Teal.

"I'll tell you in a moment. Connell took her down, but the other man stayed here, and I didn't dare follow. Then Jimmy came in, and there was a fight. He knocked the other man out, and made him tell where Connell had taken the girl, and he went after her. Presently the other man followed. I waited, hoping Connell would come back alone. Then I heard something like a shot."

"Can't you get to the point?" snarled Teal. "Where did they go?"

"There," said Harry, and pointed.

Teal stared.

"I can't see anything."

"I'll show you," said Harry.

He went across and pressed a panel, as Jimmy had done. Presently a larger piece of the panelling opened, and the lift was revealed.

Teal put his head inside, and stepped back quickly.

"Gas," he muttered. "For the love of mud, don't strike a match!"

He came back into the room, and stood

over Long Harry, who, taking the situation philosophically, had sat down comfortably in a chair to await removal to his home from home.

"Harry," said Teal, "would you like to improve your chances of getting off with a light sentence?"

"Tell me how, Mr. Teal!" replied Harry with alacrity.

"Go down out of here any way you like—there are busies at every door. Send them up after me, and tell them I've gone down in that lift. There's been something funny going on with all that gas about, and if you only heard one shot it means someone's likely to be in trouble. Now jump!"

Long Harry jumped.

Teal went into the bath-room, soaked his handkerchief under the tap, and tied it over his nose and mouth. Then he went back and entered the lift.

The door closed automatically behind him, and he was fortunate enough to find the right switch at his first attempt. The lift started to go down. With every yard of the descent the smell of gas, even through his wet handkerchief, grew worse, and Teal knew that he would not be able to live for long in that atmosphere. But he was a man without fear.

Presently the lift stopped, and he stepped out. He saw a faint light coming from the branch tunnel, and hurried towards it. At the end was a lighted room, and in one corner he could see Jimmy Traill sagging against the wall with Pamela Marlowe in his arms. With the fumes already starting to make their presence felt, Teal hurried forward.

He tried the iron gate, but it was immovable.

"Jimmy!" he roared.

Jimmy's eyes half opened dazedly, but Teal knew that he could see nothing.

"Jimmy!" he bellowed again. "Where's the key?"

Jimmy's chest heaved, and Teal had to strain his ears to catch the reply. It came, with a fearful effort.

"Stenning's pocket——"

Teal went stumbling back down the corridor towards the inert figure that he had nearly tripped over on his first journey. He bent down, and fumbled with the man's pockets. The gas lay more heavily near the ground, and Teal wondered if he could hold out. But he found the bunch of keys, straightened up, and went staggering back down the tunnel. Somehow he found the lock. The gate opened. He was in time to catch the girl as Jimmy fell.

By this time his heart was pounding furiously, and his head seemed to weigh a ton. Few men could have remained conscious and active for so long, but Inspector Teal was a giant in strength.

He picked the girl up as if she were a feather, and fireman's-lifted her on to his shoulder. He bent down again, and got an arm round Jimmy. Carrying the girl, and dragging Jimmy behind him, he began the terrible journey back along the tunnel to the lift. It was like a nightmare. At ever step he seemed to grow weaker, and it was only by a superhuman effort of grim determination that he was able to move at all. He never knew how he accomplished the journey with his double load; but after what seemed an eternity of ineffective struggling he found the lift in front of him.

It would only hold two at a time. He dragged the girl in, and pressed the switch. The lift crept upwards.

At the end of a thousand years the bare wall of the lift turned into panelling, and the panelling sprang open in front of him; and Teal fell out of the lift into the arms of two of his men.

"Get her to a doctor," he gasped, and somehow reached the bath-room. He felt sick and weak and giddy, but he soaked his handkerchief again, replaced it, and went back to the lift. They tried to stop him, and then he was savage.

"Jimmy Traill's down there," he said, "and I owe him something. Let me go!"

This time the journey was not so difficult, for his short relief in the purer air of the room above had revived him a little, but there was a limit even to his endurance. He remembered dragging Jimmy into the lift: he remembered pressing the button that started them on their upward journey; he remembered the beginning of the ascent. Then everything went black.

When he opened his eyes again he was in bed. Looking to right and left he saw a row of beds in which other men lay motionless. The room was almost in darkness, but in the dim twilight he saw nurses moving about, and a man in a white jacket was bending over the next cot. At the side of his own bed a nurse was sitting reading, but she looked up as soon as he moved.

"I gather that I am not going to die," drawled Teal. But this time he spoke drowsily, because he really felt drowsy.

The nurse smiled.

"You'll be back at work in a couple of days," she said cheerfully.

Teal sighed comfortably, and rolled over. As he did so, the doctor moved away from the next bed, and Teal saw who the patient was.

"How are you, Jimmy?" said Teal.

"I'm going to be all right," said Jimmy weakly.

"Remind me to arrest you when you're better," said Teal, and went to sleep.

FOUR days later, Mr. Teal, a trifle pale, but otherwise his old self, rang the bell of 113, Cheyne Walk, and Jimmy answered the door himself.

"Why, it's old Claude Eustace," said Jimmy. "Come right in!"

Teal came in.

"Say when," murmured Jimmy.

Teal said when.

"Cheerio!" said Jimmy.

"Cheerio!" said Teal.

"By the way," said Jimmy, "before you arrest me. I believe you saved my life, and all that sort of thing. God bless you, and so forth!"

For the first time in his life Mr. Teal looked embarrassed, but he shook the hand which Jimmy offered.

"And before I arrest you," said Teal presently, "why haven't you tried to jump for it on that boat you've got lying at Gravesend?"

"Didn't feel like it," said Jimmy. "For one thing, Miss Marlowe's been taking longer to get over the gassing, and I kind of wanted to be around; but she's going ahead fine now, and we're going to be married as soon as I come out of stir. I don't want her to spend her married life being chased all round the world with me. How long do you think I'll get?"

Teal sat down, and unwrapped a fresh packet of his favourite sweetmeat.

"This is our one consolation for having lost America," he remarked, and then he came back to the point. "How long will you get, Jimmy? Well, I should say six months in the second division, at the outside—no more than you'd have for making a fool of yourself in a car. You needn't worry, we shan't put up much of a case against you. Of course, you shot Stenning, but that will go down as self-defence."

"How's Connell?" asked Jimmy.

"Enjoying a tropical climate, I should say," replied Teal dispassionately. "They got him up later, when the firemen had arrived with gas masks, but he was one of the deadest men I've ever seen."

Jimmy lighted a cigarette.

"He was Vanney, of course," he said. "And at the same time he wasn't. It would have been too risky to let Stenning interview people that he had probably done business with before, although he had grown a moustache and made one or two little alterations to his face. But dressed up in livery, as George—a mere porter—nobody ever noticed him. There was a door opening right out of the private office to the passage, only a yard from his cubicle. When I went through to speak to Vanney, I went further through, and spoke to George. When Vanney had to interview people I got my instructions from Stenning, and conducted most of the interview myself. Connell simply said 'Yes' and 'No' as I tipped him the wink."

Teal nodded.

"I guessed all that," he said.

"I don't suppose you'd have spotted us so soon if we had been able to keep Connell in order. He looked great in a false beard, but he started getting uppish. He had to have money, and wanted more and more money. We tried to keep him indoors in case he got tight and spilled the beans, but he got away the other night."

"I found him," said Teal. "He told me a lot that I wanted to know. It was clever the way you and Stenning arranged for him to drive you and the body of Red Mulligan, recently deceased, into the country at night, upset the car, and have both you and Connell to swear that it was Stenning who had been killed. In fact it was all very clever, but it wasn't good enough. You've got to be a genius to beat the law these days, and if you are a genius you can make money more honourable, and less dangerously."

Jimmy smiled.

"Carry right on with the moral lecture," he said. "I've already decided that you're right, so I won't argue."

Teal got ponderously to his feet.

"Well," he said, "I'm sorry to have to do this, but I'm afraid you'll have to come along with me and be arrested. You can go into court and be committed for trial this afternoon, so we shan't keep you long. I'll see that you get bail."

Jimmy Traill rose also, picked up his hat, and brushed it carefully. He adjusted it carefully at a rakish angle on his head, and turned to Teal with a smile.

"You shall be the guest of honour at my wedding," he said. "Lead on, Claude Eustace!"

THE END.

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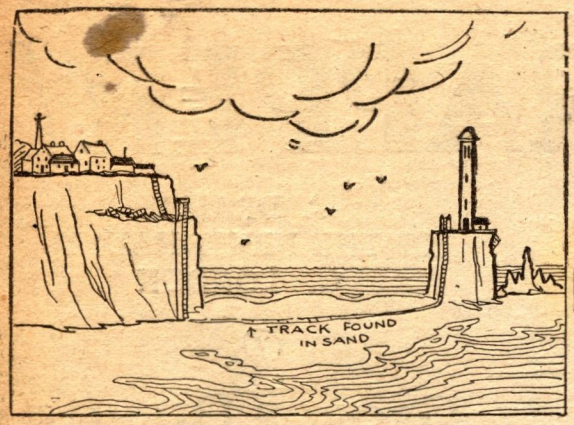
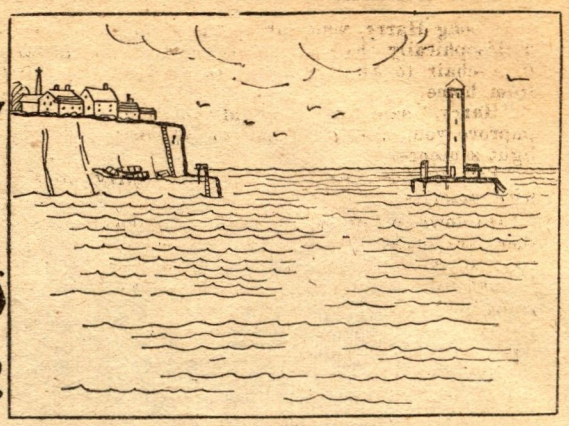
THE MYSTERY OF DEAD MAN'S HARBOUR



The Promontory and the lighthouse at low tide—



—and at High tide.

AT Dead Man's Harbour, situated on a small bay in a little known part of the north coast of Ireland, is an isolated village with a population of not more than two hundred persons. At high tide the village is on a rocky peninsula which rises sheer, twenty feet above the water.

But when the great forty-foot tide rushes out, it leaves the village on a promontory sixty feet in the air; while the island of the lighthouse, almost circular in shape, rises like a great squat cylinder, nearly forty-three feet above the flat sands.

At ebb tide, for the space of forty minutes, it is possible to cross dry-shod from village to island. Reeled wire ladders, let down the rock, permit descent from the village to the sands below. One can cross to the island and ascend by similar means the almost perpendicular sides of the rock, where a level, green lawn surrounds the old lighthouse.

The island in Dead Man's Harbour is lonely enough when surrounded by the whipping waters of the bay, but when the cruel rocks rise steeply from the wet sands below it is grim indeed.

On the night of the strange disappearance of Captain Ebenezer Williams, veteran keeper of the lighthouse, high tide came at 11.51, long after Daniel Cobb, the captain's helper, had gone to his home in the village. A heavy fog had settled on the harbour just before eleven o'clock, and the weird moan of the foghorn broke the night with a dismal regularity.

The following morning Daniel Cobb, coming soon after low tide, as was his custom, to relieve the captain, climbed down the ladder on the face of the cliff to cross the sands to the lighthouse.

He noticed a broad trail in the hard-packed, damp sand—as though a board some fifteen inches wide had been dragged over the surface. The impression, Cobb said, was not deep. The board, if it was a board, seemed to have been dragged rather lightly over the sand. The trail ran from the foot of the ladder at the cliff, straight to the cliffs of the lighthouse island.

Cobb entered the lighthouse at 6.1 a.m. He called to the captain and started upstairs. There was no answer. He went to look for him. The captain was not in the lighthouse, nor anywhere on the tiny island. Mystified, Cobb ran to the little boathouse expecting to find the captain's boat gone, only to discover the boat stored away, with the oars in their usual place, all dry. The island is less than ninety yards in diameter, and is covered with a close-cropped lawn. There was no other place for anyone to hide.

Cobb shouted everywhere and searched diligently in every conceivable place, but there was no trace of Captain Williams. Cobb, it may be stated, was promptly and justifiably exonerated for all suspicion by the examining police; he was of excellent character and deeply attached to the captain.

Cobb then rushed to the edge of the island and peered down the steep sides, but nowhere on the smooth rocks or in the tell-tale expanse of wet sand, which surrounded the island completely, were any traces whatever, except for the fifteen-inch-wide trail which he had observed before reaching the island.

Cobb summoned aid from the village, and searching parties were sent out, since it was unprecedented for the captain to have left the lighthouse untended. The local constable, with Cobb and several villagers, made a thorough examination of the island and the lighthouse. They could find no trace from which a struggle or foul play could be deduced. They remarked that the foghorn was still blowing, although the fog had lifted that morning a few minutes before low tide. The engine of the foghorn, which had to be refueled every two hours, still had enough petrol on hand at 6.5 a.m. (when Cobb examined it) to last for nearly another hour.

By 6.20 a.m. the tide was beginning to wash in in earnest. The entire party, therefore, made a minute examination of the single trail to ascertain whether there were any footprints near it. None could be found. Hours went by. It was a mystery—inexplicable, baffling, and to some of the superstitious sailors and fishermen of the village, terrifying. The captain, although he was not a popular man, and led an existence much aloof from the villagers, was not known to have any enemies; while no one knew much of his former life, he had been a respected member of the community for eleven years. Where had he gone? The villagers even went to such lengths as to inspect carefully the soil and sod of the island, to see if a body might have been cleverly concealed; but there were no traces. Nor could anyone be found to defend the theory that the captain, strictly devoted to his governmental duty, could have suddenly decided to abandon his post without explanation. Assuming that there had been foul play, it was highly improbable that the murderer, having dragged his victim's corpse across to the cliff base, would have carried it up the ladder and through the single street of the village, as he would have to do to reach the wooded portions of the promontory. Search everywhere in the neighbourhood proved fruitless.

Now it happened that a former official of Scotland Yard was visiting at one of the summer homes in the vicinity—Mr. James Thompson, who is credited with the solution of many big and well-remembered murder cases. Having heard of the strange disappearance of the captain, he came to the island. Delighted at the interest of so celebrated a detective, the constable requested him to examine the scene and the witnesses, and to pronounce an opinion on the mystery. After a half-hour examination had yielded the facts which have been stated, and after familiarising himself with the locale of the mystery, the detective startled everyone by pronouncing it a case of cold-blooded murder.

"Murder!" Thompson stated with the greatest confidence, "by someone who had planned the crime most carefully." The detective even predicted the circumstances under which the body of the captain would be found, and with remarkable astuteness reconstructed many of the events of the tragedy.

Two weeks later his predictions concerning the finding of the body proved correct. The mysterious assailant of the captain was subsequently captured, although this was more the result of extreme good luck on the part of the local police than anything else.

The local constabulary were amazed at the confident deduction of Mr. Thompson. To them, the clues seemed to be meagre indeed, and yet Mr. Thompson, apparently, had found no difficulty in solving the riddle. Put yourself in the detective's place. Collect the facts, and then see if you can clear up the mystery.

The questions to be answered are:

1.—How did Mr. Thompson know that it was murder? (Marks 2.)

2.—How did the murderer probably reach the island? (Marks 2.)

3.—How did he dispose of the body of Captain Williams? (Marks 2.)

4.—How did he escape from the island? (Marks 2.)

5.—Under what circumstances would the captain's body probably be found? (Marks 2.)

Problem No. 4 of

Baffler!

THE POPULAR DETECTIVE STORY GAME.

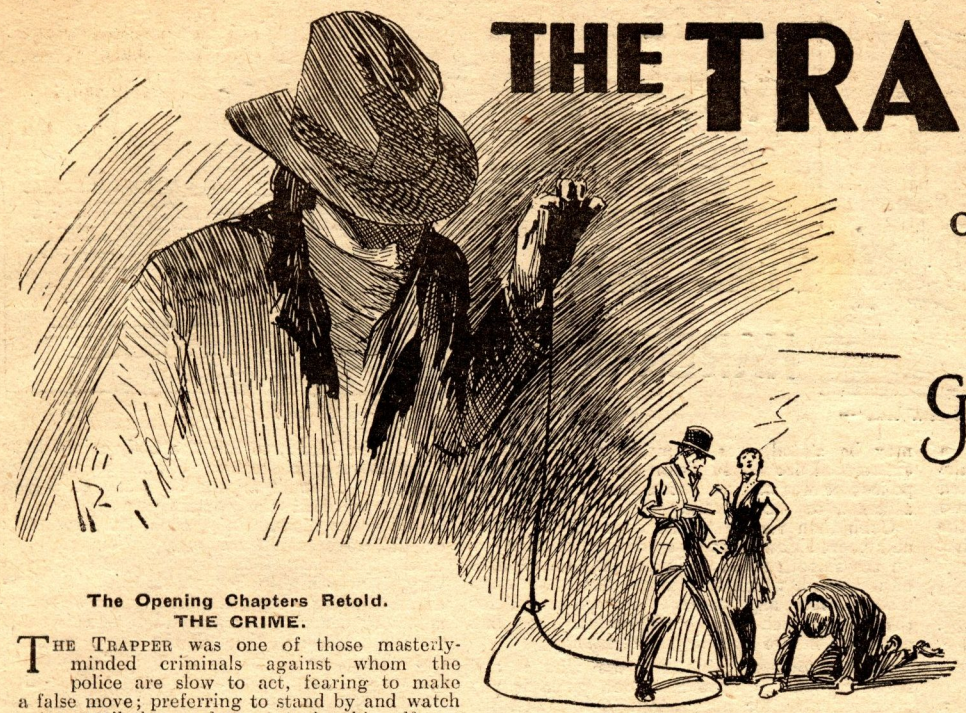
THE RULES.

The rules are simplicity itself. On this page you are given details of Baffler Problem No. 4—there will be another next week. Briefly, you are told the story of a crime and given ALL the clues necessary for its solution. Be your own detective. Read the problem through very carefully, giving consideration to every detail, then try to answer the questions at the end.

Award yourself marks as indicated after comparing your answers with those given on page 28. These answers are printed upside down so that they may not catch your eye before you have had a chance to test your skill. Remember, it is the sense of your solution, not its exact wording, that counts.

Try a baffler on your friends. Read the problem to them and see what they can make of it, awarding a small prize—if you like—to the first to give the correct solution.

BEGIN READING THIS POWERFUL NEW SERIAL NOW.



THE TRAPPER!

A DRAMA OF THE NIGHT-HAUNTS OF LONDON

By GEORGE DILNOT

Author of "Scotland Yard," etc.

The Opening Chapters Retold.

THE CRIME.

THE TRAPPER was one of those masterly-minded criminals against whom the police are slow to act, fearing to make a false move; preferring to stand by and watch points until the crook over-reaches himself.

Yet sometimes it is difficult to hold oneself in check when the enemy becomes daily more impudent.

Chief Constable Winter, of the C.I.D., almost let go when he received an envelope from the Trapper enclosing a wire noose such as the game-keeper uses for snaring rabbits. It was a deliberate insult—a challenge, too. He felt a deal worse when the Trapper had the impudence to leave behind him a similar token after his raid on Dutchy Ogle, the noted "fence," of Dalston.

Then came the climax with the case of young Dick Estrehan—an affair that gave the Yard no option but to act.

Estrehan was a clerk in the employ of Messrs. Hint, Hint, Sons & Barter, a reputable firm of stockbrokers. He decamped with £20,000.

Investigations proved that Dick Estrehan had been hitting the high spots around the West End of London with a girl named Stella Cliffe. On her he had spent the money he had embezzled from his employers. That she was a crook he discovered too late; that she had a soft corner in her heart for him he did not realise at all. To be quite fair to Stella, it must be recorded that Estrehan had posed as the son of a millionaire and that she and her confederate—Velvet Grimshaw—had believed they were merely parting a fool from his money.

So Dick Estrehan vanished into the blue, and Detective Martin Wilde was given the job of finding him. During the next few days matters moved rapidly; Velvet Grimshaw was murdered at the Gnomes night-club, and a wire noose fastened to his jacket was the only clue discovered by Wilde. Immediately on top of this Dick's employers, Messrs. Hint, Hint, Sons & Barter received bonds to the value of £20,000 from an unknown source, accompanied by a wire noose of a type with which the police were already familiar.

The Yard now realised that the Estrehan case was involved in a larger issue—the capture of the Trapper—that the young clerk had fallen into the hands of the master crook.

The Trapper, a wealthy but dangerous fanatic, under the impression that he was performing a very necessary and wanted service to the community at large, by independently dealing with criminals where he considered the police powerless or incompetent to deal with. He was ruthless, fiendish in his methods, and in his power Dick Estrehan stood no chance—he must either carry out the master crook's instructions or face the obvious alternative of going to prison.

The Trapper directed operations from an office in Farringdon Street, London, E.C., under the fictitious name of Messrs. Maule, James & Co., Indian Merchants. It was in an outer room here that Estrehan, disguised as an Eurasian, was established as an inquiry clerk, or, more correctly, a watchdog to hold the fort.

The next people to receive attention at the hands of the Trapper were Isaac Markwell, a swindling private investigator, and a merciless moneylender named Murraystein. They were found in the street at dawn, tarred and feathered, and had been so severely manhandled that they had to be conveyed to hospital almost dead. Upon each of them was found a wire noose, indicating that they were victims of the Trapper, and it was also disclosed that both had been compelled to make large cheques in favour of the Middlesex Hospital.

Detective Wilde was obliged to accept the assistance, although in only an unofficial capacity, of Quenton Thorold and Patricia Langton. Thorold, an American millionaire, was already known to the Yard on account of valuable services he had previously rendered. On the night that Grimshaw was murdered at the Gnomes Club, it was Thorold who handed to Detective Wilde a flash-lamp belonging to the murderer, and curiously enough Thorold was the only person present that night who possessed a revolver. The following day Wilde called at Thorold's flat, and while there discussing the situation with the American and Patricia Langton, an envelope was delivered to each of them—and each contained a wire noose.

Throughout his investigations Martin Wilde realised the importance of getting into touch with Stella Cliffe, and it was by the influence of Patricia Langton that the girl consented to an interview at Scotland Yard. She proved an obstinate witness and he could not break her silence, beyond the fact that she knew Dick Estrehan had no hand in the killing of Velvet Grimshaw. Detective Wilde was not satisfied and before Stella Cliffe left, had arranged for two men to shadow and report her movements.

(Now continue the story.)

WILDE MEETS THE TRAPPER.

THE art of shadowing has been brought to a very fine perfection by Scotland Yard. But none know better than the men of the Criminal Investigation Department that no reasonably alert person can be trailed for any length of time without becoming aware of the fact. Martin Wilde had no expectation that such a wide awake person as Stella Cliffe would not within a short while realise that she was being watched. It was likely, however, that some little period might elapse before she became conscious of her followers. In that time it was just possible that she might do something indiscreet.

Wilde had to confess himself baffled as to the part this girl of the underworld was playing in the drama. His first impression had been that she was merely a lay figure with no direct connection with the case. That view had been shaken when she disappeared. Her attitude now that she had been questioned puzzled him. By all the rules a girl of her antecedents who had been innocently involved should have behaved differently. She should have been anxious to exculpate herself at any cost. His reason told him that she must be deep in the case, yet his instinct was against that conclusion.

There would have been justification for holding her as one under suspicion, but he had felt that would be bad tactics. Stella was only a pawn—though an important pawn—in the game. He did not want the little fish until he was sure of the bigger ones. While she was at large there was always a chance that some triviality might betray her confederates. For although the shadowing might fail there were other ways by which a hint might come to him. Among her acquaintances were men and women who, for fear or favour, would not hesitate to reveal to the men of the Yard anything that came to them. At any rate, he had no fear that he would again lose sight of her.

There were other matters demanding his attention, and he dismissed the girl from his mind to deal with them. In the course of hours a man drifted in to him. The inspector, collating a thick dossier of reports and statements looked up impatiently.

"Well, Linke," he demanded, "what do you want?"

"It's about this girl Cliffe, sir."

"Ah!" Wilde pushed the papers away and leaned back in his chair, prepared to listen. "What about her?"

The young detective—he looked like a spruce salesman—cleared his throat.

"I don't know whether it's important, sir, but I thought I ought to report right away. I've left Monson outside her old rooms in Earls Court, and as Moody is also on duty there—he's been observing the place ever since she disappeared disguised as a road sweeper—it seemed a good opportunity to get back to you, while they kept an eye on her. She and the lady she was with took a taxi from outside here to Piccadilly Circus, where they got out, said goodbye to each other, and separated. Cliffe strolled up Regent Street looking at the shop windows. She only spoke to one person on the way. That was Swift Jack, the con. man. We couldn't hear the conversation."

"Never mind that," interjected Wilde, making a mental note. "Did she spot you at all?"

Linke smiled with a touch of complacency.

"You can trust me that she didn't. She passed on after a few minutes and turned into Oxford Street. It appeared rather as if she was killing time. Then she went into one of the big stores and spent some time shopping. We found that she ordered all the goods to be sent to her rooms at Earls Court."

"What kind of things did she buy?"

"Mostly clothes. She was a long time there. She had lunch in the stores restaurant, and sat for a while drinking coffee. At a quarter past two she went to the telephone. I entered the adjoining box. It was impossible to hear what she said, but I got on to the operator and found that the number she was ringing"—he consulted a notebook—"was Central 20043."

Wilde smoothed his chin.

"Who was that?" he asked quietly.

The young man gave a shake of the head.

"I didn't think it wise to follow it up at the time. She was on the point of leaving. Afterwards she went straight home to Earls Court. We saw her safely home, and I came away to report."

Wilde uncoiled his gaunt figure from his desk.

"There might be something in this," he commented. "Ring up the Central Exchange and find out to whom the number belongs. Then we'll take a little walk, you and I."

Within ten minutes he and Linke were on their way to Messrs. Maule, James & Co., East India merchants, in Farringdon Street. The inspector knew that there was no certainty that this new line would lead anywhere. The message sent by Stella might be quite innocent. On the other hand, there was a possibility that she would be concerned to report the result of her visit to Scotland Yard. There was at least a reasonable chance.

They found the name of Maule, James & Co. scribed on a brass plate at the entrance to mall block of offices, with an indication that he affairs of the firm were carried out on the third floor. There was no lift and they climbed the stairs to the second floor, which were occupied by a firm of paper agents. Here Wilde took the opportunity of making a few inquiries. He explained to the head of the paper firm that he was associated with a wholesale boot factory, and desired to know something of the standing of Maule, James & Co., who wished to open an account. The paper man knew little. The overhead offices had been taken and furnished some six weeks before, and he had passed the time of day on the stairs with Mr. James, who seemed to be the only active member of the firm. There was only one clerk, a kind of black man.

Thanking his informant, Wilde moved up the next flight. Signalling to his companion to remain on the landing he listened at the outer door of the office. The clatter of a typewriter was the only sound that came to him. He gave a perfunctory tap and flung the door open.

From a typewriter at the other end of the room a man looked up, and, as the visitor entered, put by a cigarette and came to the counter. In a swift and apparently casual glance the inspector took in a well-dressed and spectacled young Eurasian who moved listlessly across the room towards him. But in that nonchalant look Wilde saw something that caused the lines on his face to deepen momentarily.

"One of the heads of the firm in?" he asked.

The Eurasian shook his head.

"You have just missed Mr. James. Mr. Maule is in India."

A little exclamation of annoyance came to the lips of the detective.

"That's the dickens of a nuisance. I wished to see someone badly. I have come specially from Blackburn. I represent the Grand Eastern Textile Corporation."

"I am sorry," said the Eurasian. "If you will leave a message——"

"I don't know." Wilde's hands fidgeted uncertainly on the counter while his face was full of perplexity. "It's very urgent. Have you any idea when the next boat leaves for Bombay?"

The Eurasian stared blankly.

"I couldn't say," he replied.

"But you could look it up," persisted Wilde.

Again there was a doubtful shake of the head.

"Soor," remarked Wilde conventionally.

"I beg your pardon," said the other.

Wilde laughed, and leaning across the counter caught the other by the wrists.

"You're too innocent for this game, my young friend," he said. "Why did you stain the inside of your hands? Don't you know that the colour of the palms should be less deep there? I called you a swine in your own language and you did not understand me. And I asked you what any office boy in the genuine Indian trade could have answered, and you didn't know. This office is a fake—and you're a fake. What about it? Going to make any fuss?"

Beneath his stain Dick Estrehan felt the blood drain from his cheeks. He struggled ineffectually to free his hands, but it would have taken a stronger man than he to shake off Martin Wilde. He relinquished the effort and stared dully at the deepset, menacing eyes that looked into his. His breath came in short, sharp gasps.

"What has it got to do with you?" he demanded with feeble bravado. "I'm not doing anything wrong. My name is Thompson."

"We'll see about that," said Wilde grimly. "There's lots of things I want to ask you. Now, you be a good fellow and don't stir." He relinquished his grip and took a step to move round the counter. A gulping sob and a thud made him wheel on his heels and tear the door open. A hand came in through the opening and the blue muzzle of an automatic came to a steady rest within a foot of his chest.

"Put up your hands, Mr. Wilde," said a pleasant voice. "I seem to be just in time."

Wilde was no coward, but neither was he a fool. His hands went above his head and his chagrin found expression in a well-chosen oath.

"Please don't swear," went on the voice. "At least, keep your voice low. If anyone

A tall, masked figure forced Detective Wilde slowly back. Estrehen follows them, dragging the unconscious body of Linke.

should interfere just now it might be fatal to you. And you will do me a favour if you will continue to face this way and to step backwards. Thompson, be good enough to collect the gentleman from outside. He might attract attention. You will have gathered, Mr. Wilde, that he has met with a little accident. You should warn your men to be more careful."

The detective, with every nerve tingling and alert for an opportunity, backed slowly into the inner-office, but his face had regained its usual impassivity. A tall masked figure followed him closely, and the detective diagnosed that the pause at the door had been for the purpose of adjusting the mask.

Meanwhile, Estrehan followed them, dragging the unconscious body of Linke from the landing. Breathless with the exertion, he left his burden on the carpeted floor of the inner-room and straightened himself.

"Thank you, Thompson," said the stranger. "That will do. Kindly lock the door and remain in the outer office."

Wilde cast an anxious glance upon his colleague.

"He looks pretty bad," he commented in a loud voice that was intended to reach Estrehan. "If you have killed him you and your nigger minstrel friend will have another murder to answer for."

The other made a menacing gesture with his weapon.

"Don't attempt to frighten Thompson," he commanded. "Bluff won't worry him. As for that fellow"—he nodded carelessly towards the injured detective—"he'll wake up with nothing worse than a sore head in an hour or two. There's a couch over there, Mr. Wilde. Make yourself at home. If you give me your assurance that you're not armed you may take your hands down."

"Thank you," said Wilde. "I've got no gun, but I assure you that after this I shall make a point of carrying one."

"Always a wise precaution in your profession, I should imagine," assented the other, sinking into a big armchair facing the detective, the hand with the pistol resting on his knee. "But let's get down to business. How did you get on to this joint?"

"Ask me," Wilde returned with irony.

His questioner tapped the floor with his foot.

"I scarcely expected you to give away your methods," he observed. "I must have slipped up somewhere. I hate to make mistakes. I confess I underestimated you. It is not the least use asking you how much you know, is it?"

Wilde yawned elaborately.

"I suppose you are the fellow who deals out the nooses?" he countered.

"Your deduction is perfectly accurate," agreed the other politely. "I am that very man."

"In that case," said Wilde, "it seems to me that you're in the position of the man who had hold of the tiger's tail. You daren't hang on and you daren't let go. You know," he hitched his chair a little closer—"you're not the kind of man who would shoot me in cold blood. You're three stories up, and a shot would bring all sorts of curious people here. You couldn't escape. On the whole, it strikes me that you're more up against it than I am. What are you going to do with me now?" His eyes looked sidelong at the other.

"Don't be too sure of what I may do," said the stranger easily. "I'd be reluctant to kill you, but higher consideration might force that upon me yet." His voice was cold and passionless as though he was discussing some small point of business policy. "But although this meeting is accidental, I confess I'm not altogether sorry about it. I have wanted to meet you, but there have been obvious difficulties. This gives me an opportunity to say something I have in mind.

"This is what I wanted to say," went on the masked man. "You're a manhunter by profession—a paid emissary of the law. Ethics don't bother you much. A man breaks the law or he doesn't break the law. You're only concerned with one sort. There are villains you can't touch. I'll admit that you put away more bad men than you do good ones. Now, I also am a man hunter. I get no pay—in fact, I am heavily out of pocket. I run enormous risks. And I punish those who deserve punishment according to their deserts."

Wilde's eyebrows came together.

"You make yourself police-officer, judge, jury, and executioner," he remarked. "You've elected yourself to some job."

"Because there is no other way in the present state of civilisation of teaching men the higher law," asserted the stranger. "So long as men can do evil with impunity they will continue to do so. No consideration will deter them, but one—the fear of punishment. If they know that there is another power than the written law which may at any time call them to account—if they realise that their lack of scruple can bring them no profit—then the world may be fit to live in. I do not pretend to be infallible, and I am selecting the more glaring cases in which no mistake is possible at first. When my organisation is perfected, I shall go more fully into the doubtful cases."

He leaned forward.

"I don't know if you have ever devoted any thought to these things. You are an intelligent man, and during your career you must have come across many instances that, if you paused to think, would convince you that I am right. Who have made those men that you have put in prison criminals? The very people who take good care that their own skins are safe. I will leave that aspect to your conscience. There is another side. Scotland Yard can hamper me—it cannot stop me. You may sneer, but that is the truth. Now, if there was some person—a man, say, of high rank in the Criminal Investigation Department—who was working with me I could carry my plans much farther."

"Take yourself. You have got so far. Where will you finish? In the course of years you will be put on the shelf with a pittance of a pension. Suppose that you agreed to ally yourself with me. I can make you a rich man. If you are seeking thrills I can give you those that you have never known. I believe you to be a sincere and conscientious man. What a pair we should make. We could scourge crime till the world would become a new Eden. Think what it would mean."

(Did the Trapper succeed in bribing the man from Scotland Yard? Read another long instalment of this powerful serial next week in the THRILLER.*)*

The Solution of this week's 'BAFFLER' PROBLEM

on page 25.

DO NOT READ THIS ANSWER until you have made your effort to solve the crime. To this end the facts are printed upside down.

1. *There could be only two explanations of the mystery at Dead Man's Harbour. Either the captain had deserted his post, or he had met with foul play. Mr. Thompson believed the latter, because he deduced that whoever had left the island by foot had taken pains to conceal his footprints, which he had done by dragging a board over them. The fact that this board had been dragged, obviously to efface footprints since not a trace of a footprint remained, pointed to concealment, and indicated a strong motive for mystifying the townspeople. The captain's boat was still on the island, so he couldn't have left in it. He had not been seen in the town, and there was no evidence that he had deserted voluntarily. If the captain had suddenly become a victim of loss of memory and had wandered off into the woods, he would hardly have taken the precaution to conceal his footprints. Everything considered, it looked like foul play, especially since Mr. Thompson saw that a murderer could have done his deed, disposed of the body, and escaped, as will be seen later.*

2. *The murderer had probably reached the island in a boat on the incoming tide the night before—in all probability before eleven, when the fog settled down.*

3. *The murderer disposed of the body of Captain Williams by putting it into the boat in which he had come to the island. He left the oars in the boat and set it adrift, just as the tide began to go out again, knowing that the rush of the outgoing tide would carry the boat out to sea. A forty-foot tide necessarily moves RAPIDLY, and the murderer took advantage of this. Undoubtedly he had planned to take the body off in his boat, but feared not risk getting lost in the fog.*

4. *The murderer escaped from the island by walking over the damp sand at low tide (dragging the board behind him to destroy footprints which, otherwise would have indicated the direction taken). By so doing he completely wiped out the local authorities. The murderer would undoubtedly have left the island much sooner, perhaps wading when only shallow water remained, except for the dense fog which hung over the region. It is probable that he did not feel certain of finding his way in the fog to the ladder—the only means of ascent to the promontory at low tide.*

5. *The captain's body probably would be found in the boat, which might be picked up at sea by some vessel, or along the coast by fishermen.*

Thirteen days after the disappearance of the captain, a dead body in a small boat was picked up twenty-five miles out by a freighter. WALTER NEWAH. It was that of Captain Williams. He had been shot through the heart.

The small boat was brought to port. The name had been painted out, but careful removal of the obliterating coat of paint disclosed the name DODGER. This rather unusual name for a boat enabled the police to find and investigate the owner, a former seaman, who had lived in the nearby town of Greetham for the previous ten months, doing odd jobs for the fish canneries there.

They found that the seaman, Jacobs, had sailed under Captain Williams on the captain's last voyage more than twelve years before. The records showed that he had headed a mutiny which had been sternly put down by the captain. Several of the mutineers had been killed: Jacobs and two others had been brought home in irons and tried. Jacobs had received ten years in a penitentiary. He confessed when captured (having returned in the police line-up) that ever since his release he had been shadowing Captain Williams to "get him."

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