

A POWERFUL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

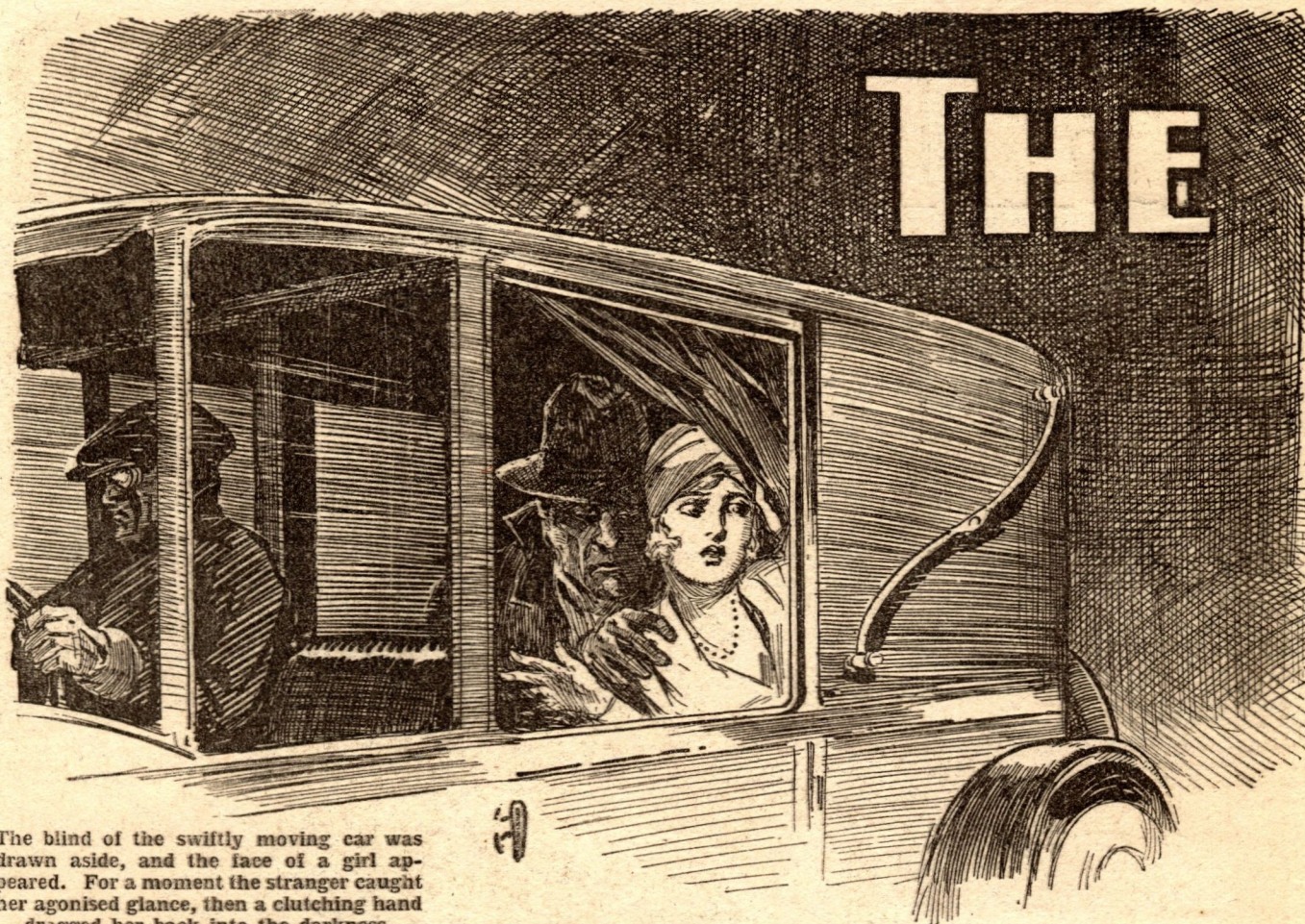
The **THRILLER**

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS **2^d**



The SILENT SIX

a Story of Baffling Mystery
BY T. ARTHUR PLUMMER



The blind of the swiftly moving car was drawn aside, and the face of a girl appeared. For a moment the stranger caught her agonised glance, then a clutching hand dragged her back into the darkness.

A GRIPPING LONG COMPLETE MYSTERY STORY.

Chapter I. IN THE FOG.

IT was absurd, Doctor Brandon told himself, but he could have sworn that now and then, in that swirling bank of fog behind him, he heard somebody following!

Twice he had halted, staring swiftly over his shoulder, but he had seen nothing—come to think of it, one could scarcely expect to see anything in that murky mass, clinging like a wet blanket.

Richard Brandon was not in the least a nervy individual, but he couldn't get the notion out of his mind that, quite close to him, was somebody who knew just where he was—could mark the spot with startling exactitude.

For the third time he halted and listened. On his right he heard faintly the lap-lap of the river as its sluggish waters caressed the piles of Dead End Wharf. From the distance he heard the surly murmur of London's traffic.

He shrugged his shoulders. It was his own fault for buying such a practice; nobody but an incurable optimist could stand the life he led—the daily routine, the uphill fight, the ceaseless struggle to keep his head above water, and—that home he lived in—the rambling house in Dead End, over whose portal hung the red lamp—symbol of mercy.

He had had an extraordinary experience three days earlier—he had seen a girl's face stare out at him from round the drawn-down blind of a swiftly-moving car. He never

remembered seeing a more beautiful face; but it was not its beauty—it was the agonised expression in the dark eyes, as they sent an appeal for help to him! A hundred times he told himself that he had been wrong. Why on earth should a girl in a handsome car send out a wordless plea to him—an utter stranger?

The silence of Dead End at this moment was uncanny! It must be that confounded fog that made it almost impossible to realise that darkness had fallen.

He reached home. The brass knocker on his door seemed to grin down at him like some hideous gargoyle. He took out his key and let himself into the house, shutting the door with a "Ugh!"

His daily woman had gone. In his surgery she had left a meal—he only had three rooms furnished. He had been a fool to sink his small capital in such a place, but one had to make a start somewhere, and he had always been a fighter! He put his kettle on a small spirit-stove, bending down to light it, when he straightened himself suddenly, for on the front door there came the sound of a sharp rat-tat!

The echoing crash of it was followed by the loud pealing of the ancient bell. Back went his mind to that somebody he had felt behind him in the fog.

Dick Brandon smiled grimly. Anyhow, this was something tangible—the knocking and the clanging bell. He walked out of his surgery and into the hall—just as the knock

came again. Whoever it was seemed in a deuce of a hurry!

He drew back the catch and opened the door. The woman who "did" for him had left a glimmer on the hall-lamp. It reached the face of a man standing, or rather leaning, against one of the door-posts.

"Doctor Brandon?" he gasped.

Dick Brandon opened the door a trifle wider, his grey eyes focussed upon the other's face. The latter's glance was furtive, his features were twitching.

"Yes, I'm Doctor Brandon! What's up?"

"I've been trying to find your house; they said a doctor lived along here. I've been to half a dozen doors—all were wrong!" He lifted his head, trying to control himself. "You see, sir," he apologised, "your red lamp is not lighted yet—that's what I was looking for!"

"There's been an accident?" Brandon was staring hard at the man now; he had a conviction that he had seen him somewhere before.

"Not an accident—no! She did it on purpose; didn't you hear the sound of the shot?"

"She—who?"

"Heavens, man, don't stand there. I tried to prevent her, but she broke from me. She's in the gully near Dead End Wharf!"

Then suddenly the doctor's eyes narrowed, and he recalled where he had seen this man before—he had been driving that handsome car through whose window a pair of terrified eyes had looked out appealingly.

SILENT SIX

By

T. ARTHUR PLUMMER



Dick Brandon did not hesitate. The red blood of youth ran in his veins. Adventure had always called to him—and here was adventure with a capital A.

"Right!" he said.

The fellow had moved away from the door. He seemed in a state bordering on madness. Brandon snatched his soft hat from the hall-stand, rammed it on his head, took his bag from the small table, pulled the front door to behind him, and joined the other—who was already hastening riverwards.

In his agitation the fellow was almost running, stopping now and then for the doctor to catch him up. Here, it was like a city of the dead—it seemed incredible that they were within a mile of the heart of London's pulsing life.

"I heard you in the fog behind me!" said Brandon once, and his voice came blanketing back at him.

"Did you, Doctor Brandon?"

The stranger made a clucking sound with his lips. Thirty yards along a road that dipped to the river's edge Brandon heard the soft purring of an engine. For a moment he didn't know whether it was a car or river-craft, until he made out a looming blur.

"Where's the girl?" Brandon demanded.

"There is no girl!" came the reply, coolly, insolently. "At any rate, not here!"

"A trap, eh?" Brandon's brain worked like lightning—and out shot his fist.

The other moved his head, just avoiding the blow.

"Stop that!" snarled the stranger. "Another move like that will be your last! Something's aiming uncomfortably near your ribs. When a fellow's as desperate as I am he doesn't hesitate to pull triggers, and it would be a pity to wipe out such a young and promising life!"

Dick Brandon felt a hard substance against his chest. God alone knew what the game was. It had seemed like a page from hectic fiction—the following footsteps, the passionate plea—and now this climax!

"Well, I don't know who you are or what you are, but I guess the first move is to you!"

"Wise man! It would be a lasting slur on humanity for Doctor Brandon's body to be found floating in the Thames with a bullet in it!"

The fellow gave a low whistle, and that blur at the foot of the incline was galvanised into action. When it came quite close it stopped. Dick Brandon recognised its lines in the dimness—it was the car from behind whose lowered blind that agonised face had peered!

He had no time for further thought, for he was hustled unceremoniously inside; but the man who dropped opposite to him was not the one who had tricked him. This fellow was an ugly-looking customer of the cut-throat breed.

"Don't hesitate to 'plug' him, Darkie!" said the other grimly.

The door clanged to—Dick Brandon knew that it was locked! The blinds were dragged down, and the great car went forward with a jerk. There was a tiny shaded light in the roof which enabled Brandon to take stock of his companion and his surroundings. The car appealed to his fastidiousness immensely, but his companion seemed out of the picture!

"What's the big idea at the back of this joke?" Brandon ventured.

"Shut up!" was the uncompromising bark. Then he added with an expansive grin: "Joke, you call it. You just wait. You'll find it a bit tragic!"

The car went humming along. Brandon had no notion of the direction it took. Just once he lifted a hand to try and move the blind.

"Come away!" came the snarling command.

Brandon stared down at the automatic the other held.

"And if I didn't—should you use that toy? You'd have a hornet's nest about you, wouldn't you? It isn't usual, my impetuous friend, for pistol shots to be heard coming from a flying motor-car, you know!"

"Anyhow, the funeral would be yours, so you wouldn't be in at the fun, would you?" Then he grinned. "Besides, this is a Yankee silent pistol—and they don't make much fuss!"

Soon it was evident that the car was in the open country and bowling along at a high speed. It was all very bewildering. At one moment Brandon wondered if this were some advertising stunt—he seemed to recollect something of the sort happening once before. But that would not account for the frightened face of the girl peering from behind this very car-blind against his left shoulder.

It was some time before the car slackened. Now and then they had swung past fleeting lights, village lights, maybe. It didn't matter much. He was cornered, trapped, whatever the motive was—or the destination! Soon the car stopped with a grinding of brakes, and he made to rise.

"Sit tight—you!" snapped the man, again with that automatic very much in evidence.

Outside there was a consultation of some sort, sharp and short. Then followed the sound of gates opening and the car passed on. Twisting and twirling—it seemed almost like a maze. Then once more the

car pulled up, rocking slightly as the driver sprang down and came to the door and unlocked it.

"You'll be a mite cramped, Doctor Brandon!" he mocked.

"I've enjoyed the trip, as much as I shall enjoy the explanation," came the retort. "You'd better keep your hand on your pistol, for I'm a frisky customer!"

"It's a deed of mercy you are called on to perform, doctor. It was not all lies I told you in Dead End!"

Brandon left the car. The night was pitch black. Far away in the distance he saw glimmering lights—so he gathered that they were lodge gates they had come through! He flung a hasty glance about him. The place at whose portals they had pulled up was a magnificent house, obviously standing in its own grounds. He was amazed—indeed, every minute he was becoming more and more amazed! A plea for help, a hustling into a hidden car, and a rush through the night at the point of a pistol, and now this palatial residence.

"Surprised, are you?" queried the younger man. The other had climbed behind the steering-wheel and was taking the car away somewhere round the back of the building.

"Don't you think it's about time you gave me a formal introduction to yourself?" demanded the young medico.

"I'm Harvey Debroy—if that conveys anything to you. But I'm sure it won't! I'm a wonderful chap—you'll think so before we part company!"

"Look here, what's the—"

Brandon stopped. The other's suavity had gone and his face hardened, and again he saw the menacing gleam of a barrel!

"We've wasted too much time. Get indoors, doctor!" said Harvey Debroy curtly.

"Manners are not your strong point, Mr. Debroy!" commented Brandon.

The front door opened, as though of its own accord, and Brandon saw a man in livery standing there whose face was a pattern of immobility. Brandon preceded Debroy into the hall and was taken to a room on the left. It was furnished with astonishing good taste—everywhere were signs of affluence. Debroy left him with that stolid-faced flunkey on guard at the door.

Brandon began to see that his quixotic impulse was likely to land him in serious difficulties. He had been swept along at the point of a pistol up to now. He raised his eyes. He wondered if it would be any use trying conclusions with his solitary custodian.

"Keep quite still, sir! Shouldn't move!" came the whisper, in low, husky notes. "In this house walls have ears. Shadows are dangerous and conceal much!"

Good lord! Had he landed in an asylum? He did not reply. He saw that tiny drops of moisture were glistening on the forehead of the uniformed servant! If only he could come to grips with the mystery—meet that smiling and suave ruffian who had trapped him. His muscles tensed at the mere thought.

"Shouldn't move, sir!" warned the stolid custodian again.

Then the door opened and Harvey Debroy entered. He flung a swift glance at the servant, a slow smile spreading over his good-looking features.

"You can go, Frant!"

The servant bowed. His lips moved, but no sound came from them. Then he went out—still silent.

"Sad case, that!" said Debroy. "Mr. Frant was struck dumb by a terrible shock.

Perhaps one day his speech will return—through another shock."

Brandon felt himself shiver. "Shouldn't move, sir! Walls have ears! Shadows are dangerous!" that dumb man had said.

Brandon glanced quickly into Harvey Debroy's face. There was a cynical expression on it, and a strange light in his eyes.

"They are ready for you now, doctor!" he murmured softly.

"They?"

"The reason I kidnapped you and brought you here—or, rather, one of them!" Debroy cleared his throat. "You will walk in front of me; you will turn left or right as I order; you may take it for granted that you will be covered every instant. I tell you this in case you might contemplate anything foolish!"

"I'd like you just for one minute with that toy out of the way!" Brandon said.

"No doubt; but I'm a careful man, and take no chances!"

From somewhere up above, Dick Brandon heard a woman's shrill scream, and the sound of scuffling. The blood flamed to his face and his hands clenched.

"Look here, Debroy, or whatever your name is, what the deuce is the game?"

"Oh, don't let that scream upset you—that is not your patient. Women get hysterical now and then—so foolish, isn't it? Straight along the hall, doctor, and the door in the far right corner. Tap—and it will be opened for you from the other side. I hope that scream did not upset you—you will want your nerve in a moment!"

Along the hall they went. Brandon did as he had been ordered—he knocked on the door set deep in the thickness of the wall. Instantly it was opened—and there, in the brilliant light beyond, a strange sight met his gaze!

The person who had opened the door for him was a woman in nurse's uniform; her features were hard and mask-like; her eyes were deep-sunk, and her skin of a waxy pallor. Near her was another woman in nurse's uniform, while on an operating-table was stretched a figure with shut lids and compressed lips.

Nurses—an operating-table—his patient!

DOCTOR BRANDON'S PATIENT.

"WHAT'S the meaning of all this? What am I supposed to do?"

Brandon flung the questions at the man who had called himself Harvey Debroy. But now there had come a keen anxiety over Debroy's features; the suavity had gone—gone was the recklessness, too. At this instant Dick Brandon could not read the expression in those peculiar eyes.

"That man is my elder brother. He has a bullet in his lung. An effort has been made to remove it—it was bungled! That is your task, Doctor Brandon!"

"So I'm to clear up some other doctor's mess, eh?"

"No other doctor—I tried to remove it myself! There was emotion now in the penetrating eyes. "This is a house where no doctor can be called—in the ordinary way!"

"Yet you brought me here?"

A faint smile. "Your place in Dead End has been watched for more than a week, Doctor Brandon. We wanted to know how the land might lie in such an emergency as this; I did not dream that my brother would be the first victim!"

"A bullet? It's pretty mysterious! I'd like to know a bit more about it all!"

"Perform your operation, doctor; otherwise I shall not hesitate to kill you, for to me your life is of far less consequence than my brother's!"

A sound came from one of those women—a sound uncommonly like a sob. Brandon swung on her. But her face was merely a mask.

Brandon examined the patient, glanced about. This room could easily have been the operating-theatre of a modern hospital—everything was here to hand—even the white overall and surgical rubber gloves. He saw that the man on the operating-table was unconscious—perhaps dying. What did it really matter whom he was—how he had come by this wound? The calls of humanity were insistent.

"You'll get out of this room if I operate! I'm not going to have you hanging over me with your Yankee silent pistol sticking in my ribs!"

Harvey Debroy inclined his head. Brandon saw the flicker sweep through his magnetic eyes, and heard a sigh of relief leave his lips.

"Very well, Doctor Brandon. But, I warn you, all the time you will be within an ace of death, so don't try to double-cross me!"

He quitted the room, locking the door behind him, and that pair of impassive-faced nurses moved silently closer to carry out his directions.

The operation took an hour. During that time Dick Brandon struggled for a man's life. He knew if he let this patient slip through his fingers, his own life would be forfeit. And he had an urge to live—the strongest urge known to man—the voiceless call of one who had never uttered a word to him—that beautiful girl who had looked out from behind the lowered blind of a swiftly-moving car!

He wanted, too, to get at the bottom of this weird mystery. At the end of that long hour Dick Brandon straightened himself. The great drops of sweat stood on his forehead. He wondered if a doctor had ever performed an operation with such odds against him? The patient was breathing evenly, deeply.

"I think he should be all right now!" he said, addressing the woman nearest him. Then he added: "I suppose it's no use asking you where I am, and what this mystery means?"

The woman did not even speak in reply, but he thought he saw a fleeting glimpse of fear pass across her features—the first symptom of anything human he had seen there!

He went across to a wash-bowl in the corner, taking off his rubber gloves as he walked. It had been touch and go; and, after all, no matter how brave a man may be, he does not coolly contemplate with any degree of pleasure being hurtled into the Unknown through the medium of an assassin's bullet!

He took off the operating-coat and washed his hands. The door opened. Harvey Debroy stood on the threshold.

"I've been on the doormat all the while!" he breathed. "The operation has saved his life?"

"So far as I can tell—yes!"

"I hope you are right—for your sake!" Then he added: "I expect you are hungry?"

"You are about the queerest cuss I've ever come up against, Debroy!" Brandon replied. "But you are right—I can do with a snack!"

Brandon passed into the hall, followed closely by Harvey Debroy.

"Dinner is ready, doctor," said the latter. "You shall be excused dressing for it; and, as I am a law unto myself, I, too, am excused!"

A door opened on the opposite side. Brandon blinked and stared. It was a sumptuously appointed dining-room. Round the walls hung costly pictures. There was

dark oak furniture, and an oak dining-table whose top gleamed beneath the delicately-shaded lights.

It was not all this, however, that held his gaze. It was those who were seated around the table.

There were six men in immaculate evening clothes, with faces just as immobile as the faces of the two women in nurses' uniform. But that was not all. Seated at the far end of the table, dressed in a wonderful creation that must have cost a small fortune, was the girl whose image had rarely left his mind since she had gazed pleadingly out of that car at him!

WHEN THE DUMB SPEAK.

HE stared at Doctor Brandon. For a fleeting second he almost believed there was recognition in her eyes. Then he told himself he was wrong. Although she seemed at her ease, Brandon had the conviction that she was playing a part—that beneath her apparently calm exterior there was furtiveness.

That meal was the oddest Dick Brandon ever remembered. It came to Brandon that it was Harvey Debroy who kept the flow of conversation up—that over those other men there seemed a peculiar restraint, just for all the world as if they were waiting for something to happen. Not one of them spoke a single word.

At last the meal ended. Debroy saw to it that Brandon and the girl had no opportunity to speak to each other; indeed, the young medical man felt that all the while Debroy was watching him, as though trying to sum him up—his possibilities and his limits.

It was Debroy himself who rang, and there came in together the man who was supposed to be "dumb" and one of those two nurses; but now she was no longer attired in uniform, she wore a sombre, dark-hued dress. The girl seemed to shrink from her, but it merely brought a slow smile to Debroy's face. He made a sign, and the woman took the girl out, walking behind her. When they had gone Debroy spoke.

"Frant," he said, "you will take Doctor Brandon to his room!"

Frant's lips moved, but the sound was like some horrible gurgle in his throat.

"To my room? What the deuce do you mean?" Brandon exploded.

"You would not desert your patient till you know he is out of danger, I'm sure, doctor!" was the suave reply.

Brandon glanced round. All the diners had risen. Their faces were still masks, but the eyes that were turned on him were pools of menace. What chance had he against such odds? He followed Frant out of the room, and was taken up the wide marble stairs—rarely had he seen anything quite so magnificent.

He was shown into a bed-room—that, too, was the last word in comfort. The lavish display of wealth puzzled him—the intriguing mystery and the looming shadow that seemed to be hanging over everybody. He shut the door and stood with his back to it.

"Now, Frant, you humbug, you've got to tell me a few things. So your master thinks you are dumb, does he? You were struck dumb by some terrible shock, were you? Well, there's another terrible shock in store for you if you don't come out of your shell!"

"Hush—for God's sake, hush, sir! Didn't I tell you that walls have ears?" The fellow was in a terrible state, trembling, and bathed in sweat.

Brandon felt pity for him. Whatever the secret was, beyond a doubt this poor wretch was not so much a conspirator as a victim.

"Then tell me what you can, Mr. Frant. I was kidnapped—I expect you know that—to perform an operation. I mean to get to the bottom of this game! What is that girl doing here? Is she one of the mob—if so, what is her part in it all?"

"That's why I let you know I was not dumb, sir; I wanted to speak to you, to warn you, and to ask your help!"

"For whom?"

"For the young lady, sir!"

"Who is she?"

"I don't know, sir. But I know what they mean to do to her. They've done it to others!"

"Done what?"

"I daren't stay here, sir. That human devil will follow—he's always following, listening at keyholes, nodding and smiling at me, and waiting to pounce."

The fellow was wandering on. Obviously his mind was distraught—burdened by some terrible secret. He ended suddenly and shuddered.

"Get the young lady away from here, sir, somehow—anyhow. That's what I want. You see, sir, I had a girl of my own once. She married the man you know as Harvey Debroy—and she died. It was her death that sent me dumb—not the death itself, so much as the manner of it."

He went swiftly across the floor, put his finger in a depression of a panel and it slid along well-oiled grooves, revealing a passage-way beyond.

"Every room in this house has secret panels connecting them, sir," he whispered. "After I've left you, go along this passage. You will see a small knob at the far-end. Use care—ssh!"

The door slid to; Brandon observed the tiny depression into which Frant had thrust his finger to work the mechanism. The bedroom door opened. Smiling, suave and suspicious, Harvey Debroy stood on the threshold.

"You are a long time, Frant," he said curtly. "My brother has just recovered consciousness. He is asking for you."

Frant slipped noiselessly out of the room. Debroy watched him over his shoulder till his form had vanished round a bend in the passage, then he sighed.

"Strange fellow, Frant," he purred. "He is a source of anxiety to me and my brother. He is given to hallucinations—it was really an hallucination that struck him dumb—poor chap! My heart bleeds for him."

Dick Brandon thrust the door to, stood with his back to it and folded his arms across his chest. There came a flicker of the other's eyes—that was all the outward signs he showed of any nervousness.

"Now, let's get hold of this, Debroy," Brandon said grimly. "This is the first time I've had you alone, and, by gad, there's going to be an understanding!"

The other smiled faintly.

"I hate excitement and violence. They tire one so much. But I, too, would like to come to an understanding—indeed, that is precisely why I am here at this moment."

"I was kidnapped—taken from my work. These things can't stand in the twentieth century, you know."



"Don't waste time, doctor—it's serious," gasped the stranger. "Didn't you hear the shot?"

"I assure you, doctor, they can. You are here, for instance. D'you know where? Of course not. You performed that operation on my brother with marvellous celerity. You are wasted on a tenth-rate practice in Dead End—that is why I should like to come to some mutually satisfactory arrangement with you."

As he had been speaking he had thrust his hand into his breast pocket. He took out a bundle of Treasury notes and a sheet of paper, on which was scribbled something that from where he stood Brandon could not read.

"I am a wealthy man," Debroy continued. "Or rather I should say that my brother and I are wealthy people. For some while we have had our attention drawn to you. I recalled you first when you were attending to a poor devil, who had been run over. Your skill attracted me. I suggested to my brother that it was wasted."

"What the blazes is all this leading to?" Brandon demanded. "Come to the point."

The other went on with a deprecating wave of the hand. "We jotted a few figures down. That, of course, was before my brother's sad accident. We computed that your Dead End practice might be worth something like four hundred a year to you. We propose to pay you that amount each month—and as an earnest of good faith, please accept a month's salary in advance."

Doctor Brandon took the notes held towards him and flung them in the other's face.

"I don't want your filthy money!" he said tensely. "I'm content with my four hundred a year. The sooner you realise that the better."

"My dear Doctor Brandon, after having gone to all this trouble it is likely that we could possibly spare you? Your Dead End practice will never see you again. In fact, I doubt if you will ever leave this very charming house alive, unless you listen to reason."

"Reason be hanged! D'you think I'm going to dance to the tune of a cut-throat hooligan? Why, I have patients in the East End who will go straight to the police and—"

"The police, ah! By to-morrow's post they will receive a letter from you saying that you hate quitting in such a cowardly fashion; but the appalling conditions under which you laboured at Dead End have proved too much for you—that you have 'passed over.'"

Brandon laughed derisively, but the laughter died away when he saw what the other was holding up—a sheet of his own private note-paper bearing almost the identical words Debroy had spoken and written in his, Brandon's, own handwriting.

He stared hard. It was his own—yet he had never written such words!

"You blighter—it's a forgery!" he said, making a grab at it.

But like a flash, the other moved back, and out came that pistol—and now the suavity was gone and Debroy's face was ugly and the dark eyes gleamed.

"That's right—a forgery!" he hissed. "But so excellent a forgery that it deceived even *you*. One of my men entered your house in Dead End—even as you followed me down that lane. To enter your surgery was such an easy matter to him, and the borrowing of your note-paper was a mere trifle. Now, Doctor Brandon, what is your answer? You will be one of us—or—when the police begin to search they will find your dead body floating in the Thames."

"My answer is—no!" said Brandon.

"Ah, that's a pity. Such a young and promising life wasted, a career ended—like the snuffing out of a candle."

He made a loud clucking sound with his lips. Brandon remembered the little trick down Dead End earlier that night. Instantly the door opened and a man slithered in. Brandon recognised him as one of those who had dined a little while before. Indeed he was still in his dress-clothes.

"You will take one of our fastest cars and motor to Town," said Debroy. "You will post this letter in a box within a stone's-throw of Scotland Yard. It should arrive by the mid-day delivery."

The man in dress-clothes took the note, together with the already-stamped and addressed envelope which Debroy had produced from his breast-pocket.

"You see," Debroy remarked pleasantly, "it would never do to post it in this neigh-

bourhood; that might localise things, if I may use so cumbersome a word."

The man in dress-clothes went out—the door was shut. Brandon's brain was working. Back came poor Frant's warning—to get the unknown young lady out of this hell-hole. Here was a chance—and he took it. Just as Harvey Debroy was glancing towards that closed door, and nodding his head approvingly, Dick Brandon sprang.

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

It took that grinning scoundrel unawares. Before he could twist the pistol and use it Brandon was on him. The weapon clattered to the carpet—sinister-looking but harmless now. Brandon's right arm was thrust about the other's throat—choking into a guttural gurgling the sound of dismay that rose to his lips.

That's what had to be done—keep this hound from calling for help. Brandon hated to take an advantage like this, but he was thinking of that girl's danger. His chivalry was touched. Besides, the thought of her was like a match to a powdered trail. He wanted to serve her, wanted to know that she was safe and free; wanted, too, to fathom the mystery that was hidden in this lonely house.

Harvey Debroy struggled with the frenzy of a madman, striving to break from that strangle-hold; he was immensely strong and lithe. He wrapped his legs about Brandon, bringing them both to the floor with a thud.

There were no rules of the game now. Brandon knew that. This brute had to be silenced before he could summon assistance. Brandon clambered to his feet, drawing the other with him by sheer strength.

Debroy's mouth was gaping-wide, for Brandon's arm was still miraculously entwined about his throat; his eyes were bulging from their sockets; he was gasping wheezily—but still he fought.

Then Brandon loosened his hold and took a pace back, the other hurtling towards him. The doctor steadied himself, set his feet firmly; then out shot his right fist with every ounce of his great strength behind it. It connected with Debroy's jaw, lifting him clean off the floor. His knees sagged, down he crashed—lying quite still with his lips agape and eyes staring ceilingwards.

It was a matter of moments then—Brandon knew it had to be. With his chest heaving he dived across the floor to lock the door, but found to his dismay that there was no key. Well, it could not be helped. He picked up Debroy's pistol and thrust it into his pocket. Then he slithered over to the bed, flung the clothes back, snatching off the top sheet. He tore it into strips, twisting it to make a rope of it. With cunning ingenuity he bound it round his victim, so that it would be impossible for Debroy to move when he came round. Then he made a wad of his handkerchief and thrust it into his mouth as a gag, winding another strip firmly about his mouth and face.

His brain was working rapidly. What had that poor devil, Frant, said? That these rooms were a network connected with secret passages. Well, there was no secret passage beyond the outer door—out there was the main corridor; so the only danger lay through that corridor door, or through the mysterious secret passage, which the sliding panel had revealed—and along which Frant had asked him to go.

Brandon went to the panel, sought with his hand for the depression. The next instant the panel slid back. Inside it was pitch-dark. He fumbled in his pocket—thank Heaven, he had matches and his cigarette-lighter—both might be useful. What should he do with the unconscious Debroy? He wondered if everybody in the house knew of this secret passage, or only the two Debroy's and the "dumb" Frant? Possibly the three of them only—so it might be a wise plan to take this scoundrel along with him.

He caught Harvey Debroy by his coat-collar and dragged him unceremoniously after him and into the secret passage. He dumped him down whilst he ran his eyes over the inner side of the panel. At the bottom of it in one corner was a small projection, which he touched, and the panel moved. So it would be safe to close it, for now he knew its working he could get back this way if necessary.

He was shut in with Harvey Debroy. As the panel had slipped into place his ears caught the sound of someone knocking on the door of the room he had quitted.

So he had only just been in time, then. His blood tingled. He was full of fight and ready for any adventure—so long as he knew he would be serving that little girl, whose image was impressed upon the lens of his brain.

He struck a match. It gleamed in the gloom, throwing ghostly shadows about him. The passage was quite short—indeed it seemed scarcely bigger than a cellar-like apartment. He stretched out and tapped the sides of it. Solid masonry, without a doubt!

He felt his way gingerly along and came to the obstruction at the far end, striking another match. He found the knob, the companion to that projection in the other panel. He blew his match out and pressed the projection, and the panel slid back. He listened acutely. He heard something. It was uncanny in that death-like silence—the sound of human breathing.

It was deep, even—suggesting that the person did not know of his proximity—unless it were part of a trap. He heard a movement, too, and waited. But nothing came of it. What should he do now? Obviously he had to do something, for Harvey Debroy's absence would soon be discovered and a search made for him.

He threw the gauntlet down to Fate and, taking out Debroy's pistol from his pocket, struck a third match. And what met his gaze brought an exclamation of amazement from him.

He was in a handsomely appointed apartment—splendid furniture and Turkey carpet. He knew the mystery of the breathing, too, for stretched out upon a bed with arms wide-spread, was the girl of his dreams.

WAS SHE DEAD? ■

DICK BRANDON stared. She was dead—that was it. This beautiful girl, who had sent her wordless appeal to him that day from the flying motor-car had passed beyond human ken, and he would never know the meaning of that mute plea; never, indeed, know who she even was!

He squared his shoulders as the match flickered out, dropping the pistol back into



The car sped swiftly through the night, while Brandon's companion kept him covered with an automatic.

his pocket, but keeping his hand on it, ready for any emergency.

Dead?—What a fool he was—hadn't he heard breathing? But *had* it been her breathing he had heard?

He stood there listening in the uncanny darkness with every nerve strained. He could hear breathing now—but it wasn't coming from the direction of the bed; nor yet from that passage behind him, where he had left Harvey Debroy trussed and gagged. It seemed to be coming from a spot somewhere in this room, but on the opposite side of it from the bed.

His eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and then he became aware of another sound. That, too, seemed to come from the direction of the breathing. At first he could not place it. Then he knew that it was the sound of a door-handle being twisted.

He stood still, his gaze fastened in that direction. He saw a faint streak of light. Obviously it came from underneath the door whose handle was being tried. Dick Brandon crept across the floor and ran his hand over the woodwork. His fingers came in contact with the door edge—still closed—so that person out there had met with a rebuff. The door was locked!

Brandon's first impulse was to fling back into that passage and, taking Harvey Debroy by the throat, demand an explanation. But he was in a great lonely house hidden in the depth of its own park, and far in the country. More, he was beset by spies, grim-visaged men, who would not hesitate to wipe him out of existence if it were the only way. Besides, on that bed was a girl of whom he knew nothing, when he longed to know so much.

It had been but a matter of seconds since he had emerged from the secret passage—hasty, crowded seconds. He was essentially a man of action—life had made him something of a cynic, too. Strange, if that wonderful girl were part and parcel of Harvey Debroy's menage—for, from the bed itself, he now heard the distinct sound of breathing and a stir, as of somebody moving!

He swung round, his hand gripping the butt of his pistol, waiting for eventualities. But they did not come. All he heard now was a sobbing moan that ended in a long-drawn sigh.

Behind him the light had vanished from beneath the door, and as it had vanished the muffled sound of retreating footsteps had gone, too.

Before that last match had flickered out his roving glance had caught sight of an electric switch near the door: he backed to the wall, keeping his eyes fixed in the direction of that bed, and, reaching out, fumbled with his fingers.

The first indication he had that he had found the switch was when the apartment was flooded with light. A stifled cry came from the bed, and his eyes, blinking with the dazzle, saw that girl sitting up, her right hand pressed against her breast, her other hand extended as though to keep off some enemy!

"Let me be—let me be!" she whispered in terror. "Don't torture me any more!"

"For the love of Mike, be quiet!" said



Desperate though he was, the doctor stood no chance against his armed opponents, and was hustled into the car.

Brandon. Then: "I thought at first you were dead! Phew!"

Slowly she rose, swaying from side to side. "Who are you? Ah, I remember; you are the man who dined with those horrible men to-night; you are the man I saw when I was being taken away in that car!"

She broke off hysterically. The breath left her quivering lips in fluttering sobs. She swayed towards him, and he caught her in his arms. A great tenderness swept through his being. He hated himself for fancying, even for a moment, that she could have been part of this gigantic plot that was being hatched against—what, whom? He felt the beating of her heart as she lay against him—and a wild desire came to him to be of service to her.

"Look here, young lady, you'll have to get a grip on yourself!" he said.

She was clinging to him. "You've come to save me, haven't you? Say you have!"

"If it's humanly possible, I will, never fear!" he replied reassuringly. "A minute!"

He ran back to the secret door which he had left open. He stared into its cavernous depths to a spot where the light from this room just touched. That beauty, Harvey Debroy, was still unconscious. He was glad. He had "outed" him with greater force than he had imagined!

He thrust his finger into the depression that operated the mechanism, and the girl, who now was seated on the edge of the bed, watched with amazed eyes the panel slip to.

"That's how you got in, was it?" she said.

"That's it! Reminds you of a jack-in-the-box, eh?"

He looked at the solitary window the room possessed. It was closely shuttered. He passed swiftly over to the door—the only one. He listened for a moment, then he twisted the key in the lock and dragged it open, switching off the room light as he did so. Out there—nothing! He closed the door, locked it again, thrust the door-mat at the bottom edge, and switched on the light again.

"That's that!" he said with a grin.

His blood was tingling. He wanted to know who this girl was; how she had come to be here, what the whole secret meant; but that would have to wait—explanations could follow freedom. He looked at her quickly.

"Are you pretty 'game'?" he asked.

"Now I know I've got a friend here, yes! You see, I thought for the moment you were Harvey Debroy! He has made love to me! It was odious!"

"The cur!" It wasn't genteel, but forceful, and it relieved his feelings. "Forgive me," he added, "but he's about the dirtiest thing in human shape it has ever been my misfortune to meet. What floor is this on?"

"The third!"

She was coming out of her terrible stupor now. He saw that there was a tiny spot of blood on the neck of her evening-gown; that there were vivid finger-marks discolouring her right wrist, and he was filled with fury.

"What's this window overlook?"—pointing.

"The lawn!"

His lips were set in a straight line. "And this is the third floor—so that means a drop of, perhaps, thirty feet! Are you sporty enough to do just as you are told?"

The thrill of adventure was on him now—her glance of gratitude sent the blood surging through him.

"I'll do anything you tell me, Doctor Brandon!"

"So you know my name?"—sharply.

"Harvey Debroy said that he was bringing a—Doctor Brandon to perform an operation!"

Brandon had flung the bedclothes unceremoniously back; was proceeding to tear the sheets into narrow, strong strips. Before he had felt helpless—now he had something tangible to work upon!

"I performed the operation as soon as I arrived!" He was twisting the torn strips into a temporary rope as he spoke, knotting their ends together.

"No, you didn't, Doctor Brandon!"

"I did, I tell you! I took a bullet from a man's lung—the man whom Harvey Debroy said was his brother!"

She shuddered. "But you were not brought here for that only; you were brought here to perform an operation on me!" she whispered.

Three lengths of the rope were completed now.

"What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing, Doctor Brandon!"

Good lord, what was this girl saying? Back came that "dumb" man's words: "I don't know who she is, but I know what they mean to do to her!"

"Operation? Operation?" he said.

"It's horrible, Doctor Brandon—horrible!"—shudderingly.

"What is this place? Are they all mad?"

"I don't know. Now and then I think they are—Harvey Debroy and his brother; those

THE FIGHT.

THE breath left Brandon's mouth with a hissing sound, and his hands went out gropingly.

"Where are you—you scum?" he cried.

"Quite close to you—no, don't move!"

"A bullet, eh? Well, fire—your yellow skunk!"

"You might get badly hurt, and I can't afford that! Stand still, you fool; you are ringed round by some of your fellow guests

SAFETY FIRST

Do not risk missing next
week's "THRILLER"

ANOTHER LESLIE CHARTERIS STORY.

two women; those six men who come and go silently—who stare at me with eyes that seem to lack soul!"

"Ah, you've noticed that, too, have you?"

The rope was completed now. He tested it. It would stand any weight put on it. He tied the end securely to the bed and dragged it close to the shuttered window; then he unfastened its catches.

"Well, are you ready for the great adventure?" he asked breezily. "When the windows are opened I shall drop the end of this out and clamber down. I'll hold it firm. For the love of glory, don't lose your head—the fall might kill you!"

Brandon heard a sound. Somebody was again turning the handle of the door—was pressing hard upon the woodwork! The lock would hold—anyhow, long enough!

He glanced about him; then he dragged a heavy chest of drawers across the floor and placed it against the secret panel; that would impede any interference from that direction for a short while. He took out the Yankee silent pistol and thrust it into the girl's unwilling hand.

"Don't hesitate to use it!" he said. "Any intelligent jury would acquit you!"

He switched off the light, pulled open the shutters, fumbled with the window-fastener. It was of the French window type, and opened outwards. He threw the end of the knotted sheets into space. It seemed miles down there. He was strong and agile. It was but a matter of seconds before he had vaulted over the sill. Down he went.

"I'll hold it firm when I get to the bottom!" he had whispered as he swung out of the girl's sight.

His toes scraped against the stonework. He felt that he was on the edge of unknown things. Presently his feet touched the velvet softness of the shaven lawn. He gripped the linen rope, dangling ghost-like in the blackness.

"Now!" he called up.

"I hope you didn't hurt yourself, Doctor Brandon!"

He swung round—the voice had not come from above. It had come from near his elbow—the voice of that man he had left trussed in the secret passage, Harvey Debroy!

at the dinner-table this evening—those gentlemen in dress clothes!"

From above there came a scream from the girl. He had wanted to serve her, and had failed. God knew he had done his best. The lights of her room were switched on, and he saw her struggling—saw that pistol wrenched from her fingers. She did not scream again, for rough hands had been thrust over her mouth. All this he saw, like one edged about with nightmares—saw who was holding her—and a cry of rage broke from him, followed by an oath.

It was the fellow whom Debroy had called Frant—the "dumb" man who had sworn to help him! Frant—that hypocrite who had wept crocodile-tears and had mouthed about his dead daughter! Dick Brandon's first impulse was to climb back and give his life, if need be, in that poor girl's cause. But even as his hand reached out Harvey Debroy spoke again—there was no suaveness in his tones now!

"Let go that rope, or I'll 'plug' you, after all! So you fancied you could get away, eh? It has been a source of amusement to watch your efforts from here! It was mean of me—but I hated to interrupt!" Then his manner changed. "You dared to strike me, did you—dared to lay hands on me? You'll pay for that! No one takes liberties with me without suffering!"

Brandon scarcely heard him. That light from above not only illuminated the apartment, it sent out quivering shafts across the lawn like ghostly, living arms. It showed him those men who circled him—standing there, gaunt and grim, their faces ghastly in the brightness. He stood with his back to the house. Debroy was speaking again, slowly, sneeringly.

"What you have done, Doctor Brandon, to-night, has shown me that you are a brave man. Few would venture to pit their strength against me—not even in the name of chivalry! Don't move—you will walk back to the house. You will find the operating-room ready for you again—your next patient ready, too!"

He raised his right hand and pointed. That girl was no longer in sight. Frant had picked her up and borne her, struggling, away from the window. Her moaning, pitiful cries beat upon Brandon's brain. He saw that Debroy's pointing hand held something—the vicious, gleaming barrel of a Yankee pistol. It was this fact, and the fact that one of those silent men had moved closer to him, that gave Brandon his chance. His arms shot out. He didn't care what advantages he took. They fastened round the throat of the man who had moved

close to him. The pressure upon the other's windpipe choked out his breath, leaving him limp and helpless. Brandon didn't waste words. He picked his victim bodily up and used him as a shield.

Debroy came forward. Still gripping his shield with one arm, Brandon hit out with the other straight from the shoulder. The blow was a glancing one. But it was hard enough to send Debroy reeling back. He lost his balance and fell, but he was up again like a flash.

"Close on him—you fools!" he howled.

They did. There was something uncanny in their movements—as if they were obeying some force outside themselves. To a man with less nerve it would have been terrifying, but John Brandon was all out now. That circle lessened, and then—up above, the light went out.

"Put on that light!" Debroy called. But nothing happened.

"THE SECRET OF BEACON INN"

"Frant, you fool, put on that light!"

This was Brandon's opportunity! In the confusion of the darkness he dropped his living shield. Now he saw red—gleaming red—in which human faces seemed to glare at him, topped by the evil, leering face of Harvey Debroy. He fought like fury, lashing out right and left. That's what he wanted—to feel his fists connect with human flesh!

"Strike a light—somebody!" shouted Debroy.

Brandon marked the spot from where that voice had come and hit out with all his force. A howl of pain, followed by violent oaths, told him that he had hurt badly.

A light flashed—a match. Above it he saw the face of one of those men—grinning and evil. His dress shirt was bespattered with blood. It was not the time to stand on ceremony. Out drove Brandon's fist, and that light vanished. Then he came to grips with Debroy himself. He heard his hissing voice near his ear.

"She'll suffer for this—that girl you tried to save!"

He felt something sticking in his ribs. Down went his hand as a splutter of fire gleamed. Brandon fought like a demon—then he was free. He was away like the wind. He had to get clear—that was it. Only so could he serve that unknown girl. He raced across the lawn. That crowd was fighting now in the darkness amongst themselves. There would have been humour in it if the whole ugly business had not been so tragic.

Soon he slackened. He was not being followed—they didn't know where he was—still believed he was there. By the time a feeble splutter of light from a match told them he had escaped, he was close to the lodge gates. It was sheer luck that had guided him here. He paused. The lights in the lodge were extinguished. Most likely the lodge-keeper had gone to join in the melee; anyhow, he wouldn't take unnecessary risks, so he thought it safer not to go to the lodge gates, for fear of being seen—and he had reason to thank heaven after that he didn't!

He examined the hedge close to the lodge wall. He made out dimly a gap that he should be able to climb through. It was difficult to manage, the sharp thicket

sticking in his flesh. Then something happened—so suddenly that, before he could save himself, he was lying full length on the ground outside with a strange feeling running through him and his wits befuddled.

His mind struggled out of the murk, and he rose shakily to his feet. Queer! It had seemed as though somebody had struck him. He stood there, puzzled. It was when he was scrambling through that hedge. He had received a shock of some sort.

What should he do now—go to the nearest police-station? But what would he say—calmly tell a stolid village constable exactly what had happened? Why, he would probably be looked on as a maniac, and by the time he had got in touch with his own house in Dead End and established his *bona-fides*, heaven alone knew what might have happened to that girl!

Now and then an odd sensation came over him; he could give no explanation for it, but a peculiar mental stupor gripped him. He hadn't the vaguest idea where he was—not even which side of London he was on. He rarely remembered so black a night.

He was in a pretty pickle. Miles from anywhere but a lonely country house, where a number of weird humans were gathered, and a girl who had appealed to him for help—a girl whose name he didn't even know! A girl in deadly danger!

He straightened himself. He ached from tip to toe. Just faintly he could make out the winding ribbon of road before him. He tried to take stock of events. So he was supposed to perform an operation on that girl, was he? Well, if he were here it was plain he couldn't be performing an operation on somebody in that hell-hole. It was a comforting thought, till he recalled that Harvey Debroy had said that he himself had attempted to remove that bullet from his brother's lung!

Suppose Debroy tried his own hand on the girl! He had visions of that beautiful girl on the operating-table, at the mercy of—Debroy! Murder—that's what it would be! Sheer cold-blooded murder!

"This won't do, my boy! You mustn't panic—she needs the assistance of a cool customer! Pull yourself together!"

He stuck his hands in his pocket, and one of them came in contact with his cigarette-lighter. Thank heaven, he still had that. It was a storm-lighter, too. He twisted the wheel and it spluttered into flame. He must look a pretty object. There was blood on his hands and the knuckles of his right fist were slightly puffed.

The light showed him a milestone. He went to it. London—fifteen miles, it said. He swore softly to himself, for the other side had been obliterated by time and weather. So London was fifteen miles away!

He was about to blow his lighter out, when, to the left of the road, he saw a dull shadow in front of him. It was obviously a cottage—apparently the only habitation in the neighbourhood. His mind took on possibilities—he'd do it! In the light of after events he doubted if he would have gone to that cottage at all if he had been quite himself.

He put on his lighter again, then rubbed his hand in the dusty surface of the road, cleaning it on his trouser-legs and coat-sleeves. He nodded with satisfaction, but he wished he didn't feel so groggy. In five minutes he was in a pretty mess. He made his way towards that cottage, staggered up to the door, and beat upon it. He had to do this for more than a couple of minutes before he gained any response. Then a small window beneath the protruding thatched roof flew open, and a head popped out.

MR. BROWN.

"Who's theer? Who's theer?"

"For Heaven's sake, come and help me! I'm hurt!" Brandon groaned.

"Dearie, dearie!"

The casement clattered to. It seemed hours before anything else happened. Then Brandon heard a creaking of stairs and the fumbling with door-fasteners. It was a very old man whose face appeared above the candle he held. He peered out quizzingly from beneath bushy brows. And what he saw was a well-dressed stranger whose clothes were covered with dust, upon whose face and hands there was blood, and who was minus a hat!

Brandon had already made up his story—one that would sound the most feasible. That odd sensation of mental instability seemed to have left him entirely now. The old chap was regarding him with child-like eyes, in which there was not even a hint of suspicion.

"I was biking to London—motor-biking," Brandon said. "A car smashed into me down the lane. The blighters drove on—scandalous!"

"Dearie, dearie; come right in, sir!" quavered the old voice. "Come in and sit ye down!"

Brandon leaned against the door-post.

"You be hurt bad-like, sir?" said the old chap.

"Just shaken, that's all, I think—thanks! Perhaps you can put me in the way of getting a conveyance of some sort?"

The old fellow broke in quickly: "Conveyance? Lordie, sir, theer bain't no conveyance I could get ye at this time o' night! Better come in an' let me put ye up till mornin'!"

He helped Brandon into the cottage. He was amazingly strong for one so old! He lighted the small paraffin lamp on the table, pottering about in his effort to do all he could for Brandon.

"I'll make ye a bed up, sir, and glad of it!" he said hospitably.

He was anxious to hear all about the accident—insisting on preparing a shake-down for Brandon, and chattering all the while.

Brandon bore with him. His objective was to discover where he was. He asked the

There was not a moment to spare. Hastily tearing a sheet from his bed, Brandon bound his unconscious victim.



question in as casual a voice as he could muster.

"That's the village o' Sweival ye passed through, sir, just afore yer come to the big house!" was the reply. "Sweival Grange, it's called. Gentleman o' the name of Debroy lives there—Mr. Harvey Debroy!"

"Debroy—Debroy! Have I heard that name before?"

Brandon was knocking the dust from his clothes whilst the old fellow stared for a moment into the yellow flame.

"Daresay ye have, sir," said the latter. "That is, if ye've ever stopped at the village o' Sweival. Mr. Debroy's the lord o' the manor, as ye might say!"

Started, the old man wandered on. It appeared that nobody on earth was quite like Mr. Harvey Debroy. He had built a village club for the labouring men, had endowed it, too—indeed, he was a positive Sir Bountiful!

Brandon gave it up! He had been kidnapped and spirited away to a lonely and terrifying mansion—compelled, at the pistol-point, to perform an operation—had dined with six silent men, and had heard a "dumb" man speak, whom he fancied was his friend, but who had turned out to be merely a cog in the vile machine. Further, he had tried to help a trapped girl escape, and had barely escaped himself—and now this old fellow calmly told him that this desperado was a kindly gentleman who built men's clubs and endowed them!

He meant to get to the bottom of the whole ugly business! The old man had finished preparing the shakedown on the kitchen sofa! He, Brandon, would have to map out some plan, and he might as well do it in the sanctuary of this cottage as wandering about in the open!

As soon as he'd fixed on something he'd leave a few shillings on the table for the obliging old chap and slip out of the place. He must get this old fellow to go back to his bed.

"I'd like to get to sleep now, Mr.—"

"Brown's my name, sir—Enoch Brown! In the mornin' we'll be havin' to look arter that motey-boike o' yours?"

Brandon nodded. That motor-bike had been a brilliant idea! He threw himself down on the sofa and pulled the blankets over him. The old chap left him. Brandon heard his trundling steps as he mounted the creaking stairs. The doctor was thankful now that he hadn't tried to find the village police-station. What a fool he would have appeared trying to convince some unsophisticated limb of the law that their patron-saint-in-human-form was a veritable monster.

He lay there turning the problem in his mind. He felt absurdly drowsy. Despite his utmost effort his brain refused to respond to its task of organising his immediate plan of campaign. Lord, how his head ached! No wonder, too! He'd been through a lifetime during the last few hours. But about this girl. There was no time to lose. He must think—think—

It was odd, but he found himself having to struggle to keep awake! What in the name of Heaven was that peculiar smell that seemed to be pervading the atmosphere—for all the world like incense? He sat up, throwing the blankets from him! Good gosh, the smell was coming from *them*!

He clambered to his feet, fighting now for breath. He went to the cottage door! It was locked. He fumbled for the key—it was gone. Matches—he couldn't find them! He thrust his hand in his pocket—his lighter was gone, too! He staggered to the window. It was shut, fastened—more, it was barred on the outside! A blind instinct

led him towards the stair-foot door. He grasped its latch. The stair-foot door was locked, too!

He was in a trap—slowly being choked to death! He stumbled about like a drunken man. He tried to keep his wits, but they were slipping from him. He thought he heard a sound—a slithering, scraping sound, as of the movement of feet. There came a laugh—it seemed to strike at him mockingly from a hundred angles. His feet caught in something, and down he went. He did not realise that he had tripped against those infernal blankets from which the suffocating fumes rose, penetrating every corner of the small apartment.

His last thoughts were of that girl in that mansion. Then consciousness drifted from him.

TREACHERY.

PRESENTLY the window-casement was opened cautiously from the outside. In five minutes the cottage door was opened, too, and a form crept in. It looked weird in that aperture—a faintly-limned shadow moving against the background of night.

A match was struck and a candle lighted, and the face that showed in the ghostly gleam was the wrinkled face of the old cottager! He unlocked the stair-foot door, picking up those blankets and throwing them into the open.

"Poor gentleman!" he murmured chuckingly. "I think somebody must ha' stolen his motey-boike!"

A muffled tinkle sounded behind him in a corner. He swung back from that form lying on the floor and went to what apparently was a cupboard, and opened its roughly-made door. Inside were cups and saucers, and the few utensils that an ancient countryman might be expected to require. He moved these, revealing a telephone-receiver. It was a strange-looking receiver, all metal. He was talking into it for some time.

"That's right, sir!" he ended. "He's here—sleeping soundly. He won't wake for hours. Thank ye, sir!"

The old man rang off, replaced the receiver, putting back the cups and saucers. Then he stood regarding the senseless figure. He filled his lungs and exhaled. The air was purer now. He went into the open, picking those blankets gingerly up and shaking them.

Then he carried them back to his cottage, and sat down! Presently his sharp ears caught the sound of a high-powered engine. He scuttled to the door. Outside he saw the blurred shape of a car with no lights! Two forms separated themselves from that blur.

"Where is Doctor Brandon?" demanded a voice.

"Nice and comfer'able, and resting!" The words were followed by a cackle.

"Shut up!" came the peremptory command, and the old man did!

Brandon's senseless form was picked up and carried to the car. Soon the car moved, manœuvring on the grassway to turn. It seemed uncanny, this great car hurtling along. Only once did the driver speak. And the words he said were:

"He didn't get far, did he?"

The voice was that of Harvey Debroy!

When Brandon came to himself he looked about him. He was lying, fully dressed, on a bed in a sumptuously-appointed room—the room in which, not a great while before, he had pounced upon Harvey Debroy! He passed his hands over his aching eyes, and bit by bit the night's adventures returned to

him. A feeling of nausea crept over him. He still had that sickly-sweet smell in his nostrils. The window-blinds were raised. The morning sun streamed into the room—it was this that had wakened him.

"Your breakfast, Doctor Brandon," said a voice. "You didn't expect to breakfast here this morning, did you? Well, this is to show you that I wish to return kindness for ingratitude!"

Brandon stared round. At the head of the bed, standing regarding him with cynical eyes, was Harvey Debroy.

"So you've got me back, have you? I seem to be giving you a devil of a lot of trouble, Debroy!"

"Doctor Brandon, if you are wise you will eat your breakfast—meditating the while!"

"Don't say you've got me covered. And, if so, for the love of Mike, don't let it be with an infernal Yankee silent pistol!"

"You are pleased to be sarcastic, doctor—that is a good sign! I think you were very foolish last night! You have yet to learn that—once without my power—there is no escape! Others have learned it!"

"I suppose I may sit up to eat, Debroy? As any doctor will tell you, it's bad for the digestion to eat whilst lying down!"

Debroy came round and stood at the bedside. Brandon saw the ugly nose of something sticking out of the other's coat-pocket.

"The pistol you hate, doctor!" he remarked. He had a discolouration under one eye and a small cut at the corner of his mouth. "The other bruises are out of sight, Doctor Brandon," he commented. "You are a brave man. You made an amazing fight of it on the lawn last night against heavy odds. You were aided by the confusion!"

Brandon grinned. "It must have been great fun—forgive the little pleasantry—some of your Silent Six fighting against themselves!"

A terrible change came over Harvey Debroy's features. The tolerant smile gave place to a look of fury. "The Silent Six!" he hissed. "What do you know about the Silent Six?"

Nor was Brandon smiling now. By an odd coincidence he had lighted on some tiny part of this mystery.

"I may know more than you think, Debroy!" he challenged.

"That will be a pity! People who get too inquisitive often regret it!"

Brandon was eating now. "It's pretty obvious, Mr. Debroy, that when you and I really come to grips there will be fireworks!"

"Judging from last night, I entirely agree with you," Debroy answered suavely.

"My luck was dead out or by now this hell-hole would have been surrounded by police!"

"Doctor Brandon, shall I try to convince you that luck played no part in it? The mystery to me is that you ever managed to get clear of the grounds at all! Anyhow, what happened to you afterwards was almost as sure as destiny!"

Brandon put his cup down with a clatter in his saucer. "What the blazes do you mean, Debroy?"

Debroy took out a cigarette and lighted it—apologising for doing so. "The blankets you had round you last night gave off deadly vapours that were let loose by the warmth of your body! That wise old cottager is one of my best men!"

"You are mad—or must think I am!"

Debroy's finger-tips were together. He was speaking softly, insinuatingly.

"On every road leading from, and past the grounds of this house, there is a small cottage. They were all built by my generosity—you, Doctor Brandon, might

give it another name. In the country surrounding my very spacious grounds there are other cottages dotted here and there—watch-houses you might call them! Each cottage is in telephonic communication with this mansion. Once within these walls it is next to impossible for a victim to escape. I'm telling you this so that you may become more reconciled!"

"But you—you—"
Brandon finished. He wanted his optimism now—every mite of it! His mind had gone back to what the old cottager had said—that the village of Sweival was nearby; that this house was Sweival Grange.

Debroy seemed to read his thoughts. "I understand that you were told the name of this house is Sweival Grange! The name varies according to the imagination of the person who speaks it! You may be interested to hear that the nearest village is fifteen miles away; that that most Circian of cities, London, is fifty miles as the crow flies. You may yet decide to accept that four hundred pounds a month which I offered you last evening, doctor!"

Brandon swore violently. "I'd see you and your infernal cut-throat crew in flames first!"

"That's the word, doctor—cut-throat!" rapped out Debroy grimly. "I'm leaving you now to think things over. The sooner you realise the futility of foolishness the happier you will be. And"—and now his tones had dropped to a threatening whisper—"there is always one strong lever to bring you to reason—that very charming young lady whom you so valiantly tried to help last night!"

He went out, after bowing low in derision. Brandon ate his breakfast. He knew that a man can do little on an empty stomach. He found that he was hungry, too, strange to say! This house was fifty miles from London, was it? Brandon nodded, and smiled. That was a bad slip on Debroy's part, for the milestone by the roadside near that cottage had said fifteen!

Just as he'd finished his breakfast there came a tap on the door, and someone came in. Brandon's eyes gleamed. It was the man who was supposed to be "dumb," Frant!

"Frant, if there's one thing I loathe above all else it is a traitor!" Brandon said.

Frant shuddered, glancing swiftly over his shoulder towards the door. "For heaven's sake, sir, keep your tones down!"

"Why should I? You are a jewel that your precious master should be proud of!"

Frant's form stiffened and his eyes blazed. "My master—that's it!" he hissed. "But not for much longer! Soon his sway over me will end!"

Brandon slipped from the bed.

"Oh, drop that cant, you humbug—you dumb man. Anyhow, that farce can cease. There's no need to keep your pretence of dumbness up any longer!"

"My master thinks I am dumb. If you tell him you have heard me speak, he would simply wipe me out. That would be a pity, both for you and the young lady, sir!"

Frant stared out of the big bay-window. There was a far-away expression in his eyes. For fully a minute Brandon watched him, saw strange spasms cross his features; saw, too, his frame stiffen and relax—as though terrible thoughts were passing through his mind.

"Frant," he said suddenly, "you were against me last night. You held that girl back—I saw you!"

Frant twisted away from the window, pulled himself shudderingly together, and spoke.

"That's right, sir!" he whispered huskily. "And prior to that I passed from this bed-

room and into the secret passage. I untied the man you had left trussed up. I dragged him back into here and brought him round!"

"In thunder's name, why?"

"Because I am your friend, and not your enemy. Because I did not want Harvey Debroy to know you had been told of the secret of the hidden passage—and he would have known if he had come to, to find himself there!"

"But you pleaded with me to save that girl—said that she was in terrible danger!"

"Yes, I did, sir. But I didn't dream you would be so impulsive! I would have told you more—explained how you would have to use subterfuge and cunning, but you will remember that Harvey Debroy interrupted us, and I had no chance!" Then he added: "How did you get out of the grounds?"

Brandon told him, and Frant said nothing, but he shuddered.

"You held that girl back!" Brandon reminded him again.

"Because I knew she couldn't escape last night, any more than you could!" Frant

He struck a match. Stretched out upon the bed was the motionless figure of a girl.



whispered. "I tried to warn you of your terrible danger earlier, when I realised you had gone through into the young lady's room. I twisted her door-handle—but this house is alive, sir, like some human monster; spies creep about in the night!"

"So it was you out in the corridor, Frant? I heard the door-handle turn. Look straight at me—into my eyes. Now—you are my friend and hers—that unknown girl?"

"Before Heaven, sir!"

"Those six men—I called them the Silent Six to Debroy. He was startled—asked me what I knew about them. Why was he startled, Frant?"

"Because they are silent, sir!" replied Frant grimly.

"By Jupiter—you mean they are dumb?" gasped Brandon.

THE GARDEN OF MYSTERY.

"DUMB, sir, as Harvey Debroy believes I am dumb! The dead—and the dumb cannot speak—cannot tell of what they see!"

"You mean that Harvey Debroy made them dumb? Good heavens, man, it's horrible!"

"Not Harvey Debroy, sir, but Doctor Debroy! It was Doctor Debroy from whose lung you took that bullet—a devil if ever there were one! You were brought here to save Doctor Debroy's life. My master said your house in Dead End had been watched for days—that's lies. Harvey Debroy had never heard of you till the day before he kidnapped you. He saw you attend an accident near the river's edge! You are being kept here until Doctor Debroy is better. Then he will do to you what he has done to the others—he will make you dumb!"

Dick Brandon breathed in deeply, his features tensed with passionate anger.

"And you, Frant—this brute made you dumb, too?" he asked.

"No, that was the truth Harvey Debroy told you, sir—it was a shock that made me dumb. Those beasts don't know that my speech has returned, that's all! Those silent men do just as the Debroys tell them.

They are automatons. Their minds are a blank. And that's what the doctor will do to you, sir, unless you—"

A gurgling sound broke in Frant's throat as the door opened suddenly. It was Harvey Debroy. He was smiling!

"Frant is a treasure, isn't he, Doctor Brandon? He's the most perfect 'gentleman's man' that Nature ever made! No one would think, looking at your clothes, that only last night you were—knocked off your motor-cycle by a car, and left to stagger to a lonely cottage!" He laughed softly. "You can go, Frant! Shut the door after you!"

Frant did, bowing with an amazing calm. Debroy waited, tapping the tips of his fingers together.

"I am curious, Doctor Brandon, to know how it happened that you should be in—that young lady's room last night?" he said abruptly.

Brandon knew he had to take a chance, and took it.

"Isn't it plain, Debroy?" he said. "You

and your mob interrupted what I went there for—to help her escape."

"But how should you know she was being kept here against her will?"

Silence for a long moment. Then Brandon said boldly:

"I saw that young lady being kidnapped; saw her stare out of the car window; recognised you as the driver of that car, when you came to my door at Dead End!"

"Ah, coincidence is almost as strange as Fate, Doctor," whispered Debroy. "And so chivalry made you play the brave gallant—eh? You do not dream what her fate will be, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you fall in with my plan, my medico friend!"

"And that plan?"

"The first part is—that you will perform a certain operation on her!"

"That's the first part—eh? Then you can hear me right away—I'll see you and your filthy crew in the nethermost depths of Hades first!"

Harvey Debroy's eyes gleamed, and he came a half-step closer. Brandon's fingers itched to close about that throat—to choke the life out of the vile carcase. He kept control of himself only by an effort. He knew what the outcome would be—just a bullet in him, that's all! And that girl? He had done with impulses—they led nowhere!

"The nethermost depths of Hades—eh, Doctor Brandon? You will know what hell a human being can suffer, if you are not careful! The hot blood of youth runs through your veins. I rather like the term—the hot blood of youth. It conveys bravery, sacrifice!"

Brandon stared at the other, his eyes challenging. They met no mockery now, but something cold as steel.

"Sacrifice, Debroy?" Brandon demanded.

"Sacrifice for—her! Love is a synonym of sacrifice—with fools. It is an emotion that I never let disturb my tranquillity. I may desire to *possess*, but you would scarcely call that love!"

Brandon remembered what that terrified girl had called out that night in her room: "Let me be! Don't torture me any more!" Oh, it was loathsome, bestial.

"The day of reckoning will come, Harvey Debroy!" Brandon said, and now there was a dangerous note in his voice.

"Reckonings do come, my friend, to each one of us. I trust mine is yet a long way off!"

He walked over to the bay-window, standing where he could keep an eye on Brandon. He spoke slowly, deliberately.

"When a man loves a girl, Doctor Brandon, he wants to—be with her. Wants to talk to her. I am going to give you that opportunity. She will tell you who she is—if she did not do so last night! Will tell you how she came to be here—but not the reason she was brought here. Oh, no—my brother and I alone know that! Look through this window—no, don't come too close to me. There is a magnificent garden! You would enjoy a walk in it with her? You will be interested to know that the garden is surrounded by a high wall—a little hobby of mine. You might, in your enthusiasm, be inclined to think escape lies that way! It doesn't, take it from me! I might tell you that that wall was the cause of poor Frant's dumbness!"

He paused. He was watching the other out of the corners of his eyes. Brandon knew it—his face was like a mask. He heard Debroy draw in his breath with a slow, hissing sound.

"Poor Frant, my heart bleeds for him. He is the one soft spot in it! You see, his daughter was found dead against that wall!"

THE GIRL'S STORY.

BRANDON was silent. He had imagined that he had "touched bottom" in his everyday life at Dead End; but he had stumbled on something here that made Dead End, by comparison, into a veritable fairyland!

Harvey Debroy rang. "Frant," he said, when the servant came, "you will show Doctor Brandon into the walled garden—that exquisite oasis that delights the eye!"

Brandon was watching Frant's face. He saw the features quiver, heard that odd gurgle flutter into silence in his throat.

"Poor Frant!" went on Debroy with a sigh. "That walled garden has memories for him—that never leave him! I have told Doctor Brandon, Frant, of the tragedy that struck you dumb!"

The servant's face was normal again. His lids were shut. He opened them when his master went on speaking.

"You will take the young lady into the garden with the doctor, Frant. The fresh air will be beneficial to them both!"

Debroy bowed to Brandon. There was insolent mockery in the act. He went out, closing the door softly behind him.

"Good lord, Frant, what's it all mean? What did that brute do to your daughter?" Brandon demanded.

The manservant touched his lips to enjoin silence. He opened the door. Brandon heard the sound of scurrying feet in the passage.

"Walls have ears in this house!" whispered the servant beneath his breath.

Brandon followed Frant along that corridor. The servant tapped on a door, and a voice called from within, "Who's there?"—the voice of that mystery girl.

It was John Brandon who replied. "Mr. Debroy suggests that you and I should take a stroll in the garden!"

The girl appeared. Her eyes were ringed beneath. She caught her breath when she saw Frant there—Frant, the person who had



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

FULL OF PRAISE! THE EDITOR GREET'S YOU

I AM highly satisfied with the unanimous reception of Edgar Wallace's story, "The Crook in Crimson," in last week's issue of The THRILLER. Every letter I have received sings a loud song of praise. My own opinion of the story is fully in agreement with those of my correspondents. One could hardly draw a different conclusion, but it is most gratifying to know that every reader is of one and the same mind; the adventure of "The Crook in Crimson"—the man with a "kink," and the elucidation of the mystery by the whimsical J. G. Reeder was a real winner.

"I know we have the reputation for being mean—which we aren't," says Mac from Aberdeen—"but when are you going to give us another book-price novel by Edgar Wallace in your twopenny THRILLER? Another like 'The Crook in Crimson.'"

This correspondent gives no address, therefore I conclude he is one spicing his remarks with humour, at the expense of the Aberdonians, but we all know that this aspersion upon our Northern friends is quite unwarranted. Nevertheless, our jocular reader expresses exactly what is our particular aim—to supply in The THRILLER stories for which you would otherwise have to pay two shillings and sixpence, or even more.

I cannot make any definite promise concerning the publishing date of Edgar Wallace's next story in this paper, but I promise to do my best for you. You can rest assured that no opportunity will be missed, and as soon as Mr. Wallace informs me that the next story is complete, I shall place it in your hands with all speed. Keep a

sharp look-out in the pages of The THRILLER for special announcements that may appear any week. There are many good things coming.

Next week we welcome the return of Mr. Leslie Charteris, whose "Story of a Dead Man" will remain fresh in your minds. This contributor has already proved that he can "deliver the goods," if one may so express oneself. His story in next week's issue will be entitled "The Secret of Beacon Inn," and will be a story of sterling quality. It opens up in the most lively manner; the situation in the first chapter will most certainly grip you as in a vice, and then follows a series of thrilling adventures to the very last word. When you come to the end you will be glad to read it through again.

I would again like to impress upon the minds of all readers that I have a number of stories by star authors in hand, among them being such well-known writers as Sydney Horler, John G. Brandon, and many others of "Thriller" fame. The BEST authors and the BEST stories will appear week by week in The THRILLER—that will always be our policy. So stick solidly to the paper that will never fail to give the BEST value.

Yours sincerely,

The Editor

held her back last night. The old man smiled faintly; he hated having to deceive this girl; he would much rather have told her he was her friend.

"That will be splendid, Doctor Brandon," she said.

Her tones were shaky. It struck the medico that she was on the verge of hysteria.

"You won't want a hat, or anything of that sort, will you?" Brandon cried cheerily.

She was dressed now in a tweed skirt and jumper. Brandon thought he had never seen anything feminine quite so lovely. But it was not the time for sentiment. She came into the corridor, shutting the door behind her, keeping as far away from the manservant as she could.

They traversed numerous passages, until, descending short flights of stairs now and then, they were on the ground level. The girl talked as they walked; as though she wanted to hear the sound of her voice.

Soon they emerged into the open. A great terrace stretched away in front of them with exquisite lawns beyond, and, further still, semi-tropical gardens.

Brandon filled his lungs with the pure air. Until now he had had no notion that the grounds were so extensive. As far as the eye could see there was nothing but a rioting feast of colour. He shook his head. It was a puzzle beyond him.

Frant pointed, making that queer, rattling sound in his throat—as though he were trying to explain. He was pointing to where, immediately on the left, was a large walled-in garden. Paths intersected it. Masses of flowers and spreading trees were on every hand. It was altogether charming—this garden of death!

Frant managed to whisper to Brandon as he left him, "Don't try to escape from the walled garden! And don't tell the young lady who and what I am—it might not be safe!"

He swung on his heel and left them. The man and girl walked along a path. Harvey Debroy had said that "the blood of youth ran through his veins." Brandon smiled. This girl seemed so lovely, like some delicate flower—that had been ruthlessly torn from—where?

Brandon moved impulsively nearer to the girl and slipped his hand through her arm. She did not resent it—it was as though she felt the act to be one of palship. He heard the breath leave her lips in a quivering sigh. Here they were amid a mass of foliage shutting them away from the world, as it were.

"Thank you for trying to save me last night, Doctor Brandon!"

He laughed awkwardly. "It was a mess-up, wasn't it?" he said. Then he added: "But I'll get you out—never fear!"

She halted abruptly. "No, Doctor Brandon, you mustn't try again!"

"My dear girl," he replied, "this won't do at all! I'll have to prescribe for you—I'm a beggar for seeing the bright side of things!"

She glanced over her shoulder towards the thick foliage, whose fragrance filled the air. "You don't think anybody's there—listening?" she asked.

He laughed and shook his head. It was obvious to him that something unnerving had happened to her since he had seen her last.

"I woke up in the night, Doctor Brandon!" she continued, so low he scarcely heard. "I had a feeling that somebody was standing by my bed. I stretched out my hand. It came in contact with a form. I was just going to scream when a hand was thrust over my mouth, warning me to be silent!"



Knowing their fate should the gang succeed in gaining admittance, Brandon heaved a heavy chest against the secret panel.

"Phew!"

"I heard somebody speak, telling me not to try to escape again! It wasn't a commanding voice—it was pleading!"

Instantly Brandon's mind went to Frant. Last night Frant would not know what had happened to him; Brandon. He might think that the girl, in her terror, would attempt to get away on her own!

"And then he went, eh?" Brandon queried.

"Doctor Brandon, it wasn't a man's voice. It was a woman's!"

"Good lord!" he ejaculated in sheer astonishment.

The mystery was deepening. A woman had warned this girl in the night—had reached her room by, either the secret passage or the door.

"Was your room door locked?" he asked.

"Yes; she must have come through the secret panel you entered by, Doctor Brandon!" Then: "What happened to you?"

"Oh, I had a terrific time! Scraps, and all that, you know! I nearly got away, but didn't quite, and so here I am waiting for another chance!"

They had walked on again now. The girl had unconsciously hurried, as though she wanted to get away from that thick foliage. In places it completely arched the pathway, hanging down and nearly touching their heads. They were free of it soon, and were in a flower garden surrounded by a high wall. This was the wall Harvey Debroy had indicated from the house, Brandon was sure.

He looked curiously at it. It was not less than twelve feet high. It was built of smooth stone that would give but little foothold, and was topped by a mass of formidable barbed wire.

He glanced back over his shoulder. He was right—there was the house, frowning down on them. It was at the base of that wall where poor Frant's daughter had been found dead!

It was all very queer. He turned to her. "Has it occurred to you that I don't know your name?" he said, with a laugh.

"My name's Langdale—Celia Langdale!"

"Celia's a pretty name! Mine's Richard—but many call me Dick!" She, too, laughed.

"That's better, Miss Langdale! D'you know," he continued briskly, "I'd thought quite a lot about you before I met you—yesterday!"

"Was it only yesterday? It seems ages!" On their immediate left was a tiny arbour. Brandon remembered seeing it when Debroy had pointed to the wall. In there they would be concealed from the house itself, and that was something. He took her arm and, without any resistance on her part, led her into the arbour.

"Now, you'll be good enough to sit down!" he said. "Please remember that I am a medical man, and for the moment yours! I am a martinet with my patients, so do as you are told!"

She did so. He glanced at her. She was even lovelier than he had thought her—with a haunting beauty that lingers in the memory.

"What are you looking at me like that for, Doctor Brandon?" she asked, a splash of colour in her cheeks.

"I can't tell you, Miss Langdale. You see, I haven't known you quite long enough!"

"What you tried to do last night was very brave, Doctor Brandon," she said.

"I never allow my patients to throw bouquets, Miss Langdale. But if I do manage to get you out of this confounded mess, I may claim payment one day! Now, tell me about things! Oh, yes, you can! That bright spark, Harvey Debroy, sent us out for that purpose!"

At mention of his name, the girl half-rose to her feet, but his hand drew her back gently. "Sit down, little lady. You just haven't got to bother about him! You were brave enough last night, you know!"

"Last night I thought we were going to escape. Oh, I'm not blaming you—how could I? You have been splendid. Only I—"

He patted her arm. "I understand, my dear!"

There was a deepness in his tones that made her look up.

"Now," he went on hurriedly, "where were

we? Oh, yes, tell me about this mystery—I mean, your being here, and all that!"

"There's so little to tell, Doctor Brandon. My father and I were coming from the Frivolity Theatre after the performance. Our car was to call for us—it was out there in the line of other cars. My father was stopped by a stranger in the foyer of the theatre. I got in the car. The door clanged to, and—"

"Kidnapped in your own car, by your own chauffeur?" It was a question.

"As soon as the car moved I realised that it was not our chauffeur. I called out, telling him that father was not in—but he took no notice. He accelerated and turned into a maze of side streets!"

"But, my dear girl, why didn't you scream?" Brandon asked, amazed.

"I tried—and felt a hand over my mouth! That's why I was so horrified last night, for it brought it all back to me! Somebody was sitting in the corner beside me—the man I now know as Harvey Debroy. He must have chloroformed me, or something, for when I came out of the stupor I was no longer in our own car, but in another one with blinds drawn down. That's when I tried to attract your attention!"

"But why were you kidnapped, Miss Langdale?"

"I don't know. Soon after I arrived at this house I was told an operation was to be performed on me presently—that the doctor who was to perform it had been hurt in an accident, but that another was to be procured!"

WHAT THE GARDEN HID!

BRANDON whistled. Kidnapped—for some operation to be performed on her?

Was anything more fantastic? Operation! He remembered—those Silent Six.

"Miss Langdale, the doctor who would have performed the operation on you was shot—Harvey Debroy's brother! I extracted the bullet from his lung!"

"Are these men maniacs, Doctor Brandon? Why should I, of all the people in London, have been chosen for this—experiment?" Her tones had risen. No wonder!

"What is this operation?" she went on. "What do they expect you to do to me?"

He did not look at her. "I don't know, Miss Langdale!" he said. Then he added, pointing to her clothes: "You were not kidnapped in those?"

"It sounds ridiculous, I know, but a fortnight or more ago a quantity of my clothes were stolen from my home. I found them all in my bed-room in this house!"

"Then the kidnapping had been decided on some time before. It's obvious your stay here was meant to be a long one! That's interesting, anyhow!"

"I'm terribly afraid of Harvey Debroy—the way he looks at me!" Then she went on: "What's the matter with all those men, Doctor Brandon? I have never heard them speak! Can they speak?"

"What nonsense, Miss Langdale!"

"They can't!"

It was no higher than a whisper. Brandon tried to reassure the girl, telling her that she was getting morbid.

"That's what you'll be asked to do to me, Doctor Brandon," she said at last, and now there was something in her words that told the man how very brave a girl can be.

"I said I hadn't known you long enough to tell you something, Miss Langdale," he answered abruptly. "I was wrong. I love you. So, loving you, I swear that I will never make you dumb!"

"Thank you, Doctor Brandon," she said—and she was smiling now.

A figure appeared in front of the arbour. Brandon rose to his feet with an imprecation, but it died away. It was a woman. Although she was not in uniform, Brandon recognised her as one of those two nurses who had assisted him at the operation on Harvey Debroy's brother.

"I have come to take you back to the house, miss!" she said in level tones.

Brandon shaped his lips to a whistle. So he had been wrong in thinking the women were dumb, too? One of them, at any rate, could speak! He glanced quickly at the girl—the same thought was in both their minds! Was this the woman who had warned Celia in the night against trying to escape?

Brandon stood until they had both disappeared. The breeze fanned his temples. He started trying to piece this business together. So Harvey Debroy's brother could not perform that operation on Celia Langdale because he had been shot? How had he been shot? By whom?

Brandon had thought at the time he had removed it that the bullet had been a queer-looking affair—like no bullet he ever remembered seeing before. One of those Yankee silent pistol bullets? Most probably! But who in this house would shoot him? It was no good—nothing was to be gained by following that trend.

Something that Frant had told him came back to him at this moment. Frant had said that those Silent Six had been made dumb because dead and dumb men could not speak of what they saw!

What had they seen? What devilish schemes were carried out in this place? Frant had also said that none of the victims could remember whom they were afterwards; that their minds were a complete blank! Part of the same operation, beyond a doubt!

Brandon sat down, looking out through the open door of the arbour. His eyes lighted on that high wall with its tangled

mass of barbed wire. Escape over there? The odds were a thousand to one against it! In his mind he measured the height of it from the ground. From that little bump it would be about—

He rose to his feet. *That little bump* at the foot of the towering wall where poor Frant's daughter had been found dead!

The conviction came upon him that that bump was the grave of old Frant's daughter!

He shook himself! He was not of that breed who give way to morbid thoughts. This nest of vice had to be exterminated—and by him! A shadow loomed before him—it was one of those Silent Six!

The newcomer made a gurgling sound in his throat, indicating that Brandon was wanted in the house. Without a word Brandon followed the other. He was taken into the building. Their footsteps echoed as they went along many passages and up flights of stairs.

Brandon was conducted along a wide corridor. At the far end there was a door set deep in the wall, upon which that dumb man knocked.

"Who's there?"

The tones were low and rasping—the most unpleasant tones that Dick Brandon ever remembered hearing.

The dumb man opened the door. He was almost tip-toeing now. Brandon was ushered through, and the door shut. Like all the other apartments in this vast house, this room, too, was sumptuously furnished. Brandon glanced swiftly at the man reclining on a big bed, enveloped in a dressing-gown of startling hues.

His face was pale. The essence of cruelty lay in his light-blue eyes—so light, indeed, as to be almost colourless. His hair was extraordinarily fair.

"I sent for the man whose name they tell me is Doctor Brandon—are you Doctor Brandon?"

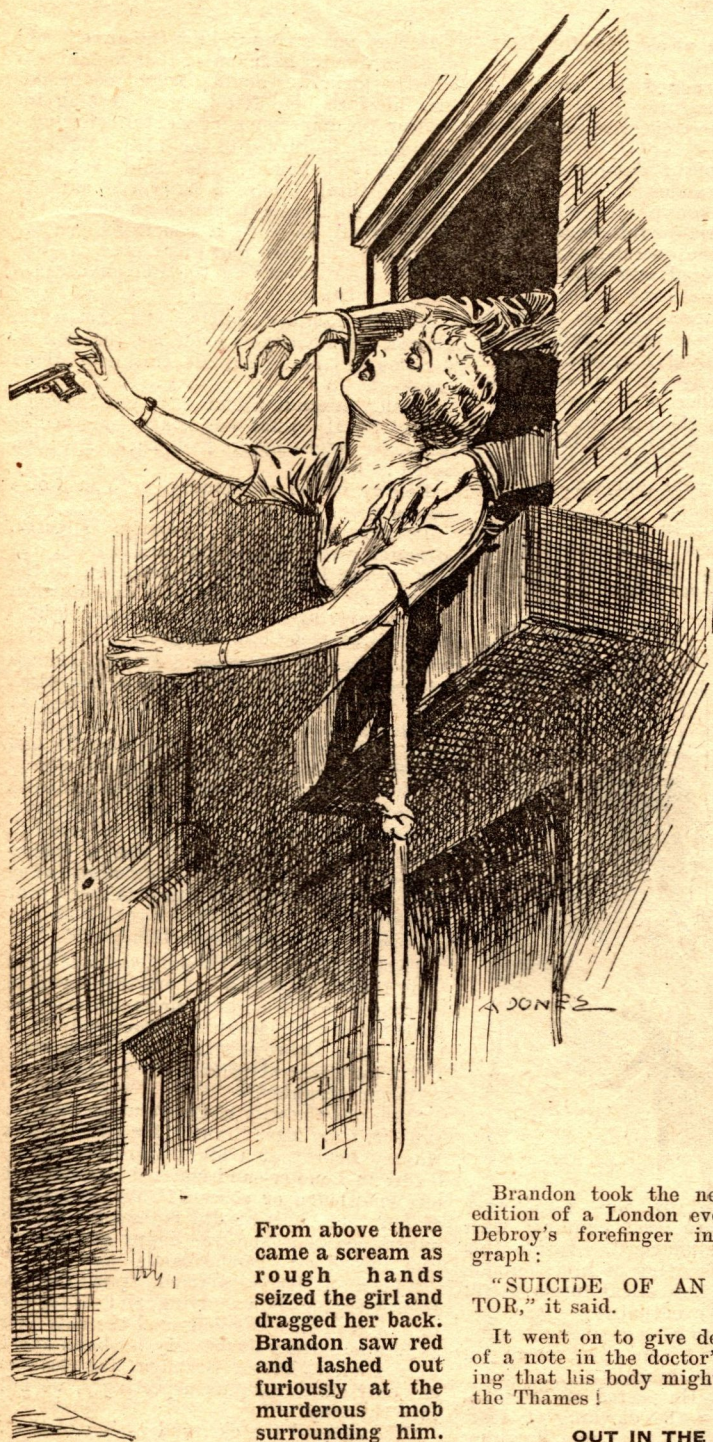
"A most accurate guess, sir!"

"I am Amos Debroy. I understand that I owe my life to your skill—that is, if I live! But you are a wise man, Doctor Brandon, and you will see that I *do* live! Would you be surprised to hear that I, too, am a surgeon?"

"I should be surprised at nothing in this house!" was Brandon's retort.

"If you are reasonable, you will find Amos Debroy the most generous man you ever met."





From above there came a scream as rough hands seized the girl and dragged her back. Brandon saw red and lashed out furiously at the murderous mob surrounding him.

"Your brother has already tried to bribe me!" said Brandon cynically. "I follow a noble calling, and—"

"We follow a noble calling, Doctor Brandon!"—sharply.

"You? Oh, don't!"

A gleam swept into the other's pale eyes.

"It will be safer to keep that tone out of your voice, Doctor Brandon! I sent for you to thank you for what you have done."

"Don't waste your breath!"

That gleam went, and a half-smile showed.

"My brother tells me that you have had a rather rough time of it, Doctor Brandon. That was because you were foolish enough

to try to escape. No one escapes from here! I believe you have been to the walled garden with—with a lady. I hope it was an experience you enjoyed, Doctor Brandon!"

Brandon was silent. What a pity this beauty was ill! He would have loved to try conclusions with him! Amos Debroy saw the look on Brandon's face, and snapped his fingers. The door opened, revealing two of those Silent Six.

"I am a sick man, Doctor Brandon, so I have to take every precaution. Model servants ours, don't you think? They never talk! Don't go too far away—shut the door—thanks!" he ordered.

He reached out and drew a newspaper towards him as the door closed.

"Doctor Brandon," he proceeded slowly, "You will be interested to know that you are officially dead! My brother is a very clever man—very clever! Look!"

Brandon took the newspaper—the early edition of a London evening paper. Amos Debroy's forefinger indicated the paragraph:

"SUICIDE OF AN EAST-END DOCTOR," it said.

It went on to give details of the receipt of a note in the doctor's handwriting, saying that his body might be dragged for in the Thames!

OUT IN THE DARKNESS.

A VERY brilliant notion on the part of my brother, don't you think?" Amos Debroy inquired. "Instead of looking for a kidnapped Doctor Brandon, the authorities will be dragging the Thames for his corpse! It isn't often a man has the pleasure of knowing they are searching for his body, you know!"

A cynical twist distorted Amos Debroy's lips. There was something loathsome in the fellow, something almost bestial. He was older than Harvey Debroy by some ten years, Brandon surmised—which meant that he had lived ten more years of sin!

"You are silent, Doctor Brandon?"

"I am trying to remember what you said, that you are a sick man!" was Brandon's curt response.

"The wisdom of discretion—eh, Doctor Brandon? A foolish move on your part,

and you would have solved life's greatest problem—death!"

Brandon let it go. Where was the use in bandying words with this brute?

"To us—me and my brother, that is—Miss Langdale is merely a pawn in the game we are playing. When we have finished with her we may return her to the bosom of her family—or we may not!"

"Look here, Amos Debroy, you and your skunk of a brother can call the tune for the moment, so let's know what the idea is!"

"Well, amongst other things you will be required to take a small parcel to Sir Henry Langdale—oh, yes, your lady friend's father is a real, live baronet! This parcel will contain something that we stole from him, and yet I doubt if he will be pleased to receive it!"

Amos Debroy chuckled. Dick Brandon was beginning to understand the frame of mind of a potential murderer; willingly could he have closed his fingers about this wretch's throat.

Amos Debroy was speaking again.

"Sir Henry Langdale had fixed on a yachting cruise before his daughter was kidnapped. Indeed, it was because he announced that fact in the newspapers that we decided on the abduction! For our purpose it will still be necessary for him to start that cruise on the day he meant to go, next Saturday. He had hoped to have his daughter with him. She may join him eventually, or she may not; that will depend on your powers of persuasion, Doctor Brandon! This is a puzzle to you—eh? Soon it will all be so clear that you will laugh at your stupidity—unless you have forgotten how to laugh!"

His eyes were closed now; his lips were moving. He reached out and touched a bell, keeping his finger upon it; but when the door opened it was Frant who stood there this time!

"Take Doctor Brandon away, Frant. I'm tired. Take him to his room. See that he stays there until he is required!"

Frant held the door open. Brandon saw in the passage outside one of those stolid, Silent Six; hanging from his right hand was a Yankee pistol!

The doctor was conducted to his bedroom. He was not allowed out of it again. Once he opened the door, to find an armed custodian on guard. He did not leave his room all day. His meals were brought to him—but not by Frant!

Just before dusk he crept over to his door and silently twisted the key. Then he moved to the panel concealing that secret passage and opened it.

He felt for his lighter. It was not there. He remembered—it had been taken from his pocket in that lonely cottage, when he was unconscious!

He glanced round. By the side of his candlestick was a box of matches! It was almost the first bit of luck that had come his way since his great adventure had started!

He crept through the panel, closing it behind him. He struck a match and went forward. He caught his foot and lurched, thrusting forth a hand as the match went out, to save himself from falling. His hand came in contact with the wall, and he heard a whirr as of mechanism coming into operation!

It was as though Fate, having proved a fickle jade so long, was now favouring him with a vengeance, for obviously he had touched some vital point.

He struck another match, shielding it from the draught with his curved hand. It revealed to his astounded gaze a flight of stone steps going—where? He examined the panel, finding it worked just as the

others did! He hesitated, then went through and down those steps. In less than five minutes he had returned. He had used nearly all his matches, but, although his face was wet with perspiration, he was smiling.

He closed the secret panel and continued on along the passage till he reached the panel leading to Celia's room.

He put his ear to it. He heard nothing beyond. Cautiously he opened the panel—Celia Langdale's room was empty.

Where was she? He went into her room and crossed to the outer door. It was locked, and the key had been removed! He hastened back to his room, shutting the two panels behind him as he went. He unlocked his own door, hoping that nobody had tried it during his absence.

Then he sat in his window. He saw the shadows lengthen, watched them creep bit by bit over that walled garden. Presently it was quite dark. What the deuce was it he had to take to Sir Henry Langdale—the "something" that had been stolen from him?

His thoughts ended. Out in the pitch blackness of the night came a flash of flame, vividly blue and startling! No sooner had it died down than another spurted a little further along, until there were dozens of them!

He stared, fascinated! What was happening out there? He raised his window. He listened. He heard the splutterings of some subtle sound! He heard something else, too, the unmistakable squeaking of rats! Rats—climbing that wall from the grounds! Rats coming in contact with the mass of barbed wire on the top and being—electrocuted!

Frant's daughter had tried to escape and had been electrocuted!

This would explain the mystery of the voice in the night that had warned Celia Langdale not to try to escape. It was pretty plain that the warning person knew that she and he—Brandon—were to meet in the walled garden! It explained something else, too, that had puzzled him—the queer sensation that came over him that night of his cottage adventure, when he had clambered through the gap in the hedge and he had crashed to the ground! Some part of his clothing had come in contact with a live wire! Phew!

His pulses tingled. Bit by bit he was solving the mystery! He turned abruptly away from the window, shutting it as there came a tap on the door.

It opened, letting the light from the corridor beyond stream in. It was a woman—one of those nurses. She was in uniform. Her face was colourless. The eyes seemed queer.

"You are wanted at once, Doctor Brandon," she said in a monotone. "There has been an accident!"

THE OPERATION.

"AN accident to whom?"—sharply. The woman did not answer. It was Harvey Debroy's voice that took the question up.

"Such a slight accident, doctor—a little fall!" he said with a mocking laugh. "You will operate at once!"

Brandon's eyes met those of the other man. For a long moment they measured glances. Brandon seemed to sense something in Debroy's manner—as though a definite point had been reached in the game he was playing.

Brandon glanced down. "I see you've got your protector with you, Debroy!"—pointing contemptuously to the pistol in Debroy's hand.

"This way, if you please, Doctor Brandon!" murmured Debroy.

Dick Brandon shrugged his shoulders. There was no use arguing—that Yankee silent pistol was a most effective persuader. He preceded Debroy.

"The left—now right; danger lurks in hesitation, Doctor Brandon!"

The latter was taken to the operating-room—he had been certain this would be his destination. Upon the operating-table was a form. It was covered over save for one limb. He stood there staring at that limb.

"There was no excuse for this accident, Doctor Brandon, it was sheer carelessness. Carelessness is a failing I cannot tolerate in servants! She fell—you will remember her—she was that other very capable nurse who assisted you at the operation on my poor brother! I hope you will be able to manage with this one nurse. She should prove sufficient for your purpose, for the operation is very simple!"

Brandon's eyes took in the whole length of that motionless form! The slenderness of it beneath the sheet. Back went his mind to a pair of pleading eyes behind a car-blind!

Outside, the old man saw a stranger with blood on his hands and face.



He knew that Debroy was watching—knew that he had to meet cunning with cunning! He was unarmed. Inside this room a pistol was pointing at him; outside the room he knew that silent forms would be waiting for any eventuality.

"You've no right to have careless servants, Debroy!" he said. "A man as clever as you ought not to make mistakes!"

Debroy frowned. He peered at Brandon, and thought he saw the dawning of fear. Debroy smiled. At last he was breaking down the iron nerve of Brandon.

"This woman has hurt her foot. It may take bad ways—gangrene, I believe, is the term my brother used! Just now it may only be necessary to remove that injured toe—later on you may have to remove the whole limb. But we must hope for the best!"

Brandon's face was a mask. He had to remove a toe—later, the limb? He wanted to gain time—that was it!

"You'll do it at once, dear Doctor Brandon? You see—during your absence from this house so much can happen, and it would be a pity for this poor woman to lose a limb when merely a toe might suffice if you operate now!"

"I'm to quit this house?"

"Yes; I understand my brother has warned you. There is a small parcel you are required to take to Sir Henry Langdale; you may have to leave before dawn!"

Debroy was trying to keep the anxiety out of his manner. Brandon at that instant was superb—flickering doubts swept one by one over his face. He felt he was creating for Debroy the impression of mental suffering.

Suddenly he turned to the other. "You've got me, you bound!" he said hoarsely. "D'you think I care a hang for myself? But you hold Celia Langdale in your filthy paw! Well, anyhow, if you think you are going to stop here and gloat over it—like one of those brutes in the Roman arena—you are mistaken!"

Debroy laughed softly. "I am sure, Doctor Brandon, you know me too well to double-cross me! Outside this door there are—"

"Your infernal Silent Six—you needn't tell me!" His voice was hoarse—his nerves were on edge—never had Dick Brandon acted so well!

Debroy bowed profoundly. "You won't be too long; will you, doctor?"

Debroy went out, swiftly, silently. Brandon went to the door and turned the key in the lock; then he returned to the patient on the operating-table and whisked off the covering-sheet. He had been right—the patient was Celia Langdale!

He looked at the nurse. A great change had come over her. Her face was convulsed with hatred and fear and a mingling of other emotions. There was no time to hesitate; if he wanted to win through he had to take chances—and he took them!

"Were you the woman who warned Miss Langdale in the night?" he asked abruptly.

She glanced at the locked door and nodded. She pointed to the girl. "She is chloroformed. They kept that other nurse away from here to make you think *she* was your patient!"

"Nothing is wrong with this girl?"

"Nothing. For pity's sake, listen! I am your friend—and hers. I am the friend of everybody who is against those devils! The death of my daughter sent me mad for a time. The Debroys still think I am mad. But I am desperately sane!"

"Your daughter?"

"She was the wife of the younger Debroy; you see, I am Mrs. Frant! My girl had met Harvey Debroy at a night club some while before in London—and married him without our knowledge or consent! We lost sight of her then, but we did not worry, for we understood that she was happy and travelling abroad with her husband!"

"Then a letter arrived from Harvey Debroy saying she was dying, and asking for us! A man in a car delivered the note just as it was getting dusk! My husband and I were frantic, Doctor Brandon, for she was our only child, and, unsuspectingly, we fell into the trap!"

"We entered the car, and as it moved off my husband and I lost consciousness. We found out afterwards that the seats had been saturated with some drug. When we came to we were both in this house. We don't know where it is; we were never allowed to leave it except for exercise in the walled garden!"

"What happened to your girl?" Brandon asked.

"We learnt from her what these devils were doing. She tried one day to escape—I think the horror of it unhinged her mind! She didn't escape! She was found dead near that wall!"

She had spoken quickly—feverishly.

"She was electrocuted—was that it?"

"Yes—that was it!"

Brandon pointed to the operating-table. "I fancied I was to be called on to make this girl—dumb!" he said.

"That may come after. First the toe—"

then, perhaps, the limb! Oh, God, it's terrible!" By a mighty effort she recovered.

"Mrs. Frant, I'm going to take my own toe off! But I'm going to bandage her foot up—she must not know!"

"And you, Doctor Brandon?"

"I'm a man!"

He was bending down. Suddenly the woman caught his hand. "Doctor Brandon, you are splendid, but you can't do this thing! You have too much to carry out. The life of this poor girl hangs in the balance. I have a better scheme. You will take off my toe!"

"My good woman, I——"

"Oh, there's no time to argue. My husband and I have talked this over—and he is with me! All I want is the opportunity to serve. There is no reason why the deception should not succeed! After the operation I am to nurse Miss Langdale—Harvey Debroy told me. I shall be in her room for the next few days! I know how to be brave—for I have suffered!"

Brandon was amazed. The wonder of it took his mind out of the slime, lifted it high. It was a sacrifice sublime—the symbol of something that humiliated him.

"No!" he said.

"Yes! For pity's sake—yes!"

The veins stood on his temples; this woman, by her amazing self-oblation, had shaken him more than those brutes and their hideous place had done.

"Don't you see, you will be wanted to save her life. You must not be handicapped—my life is nearly finished. I could not risk it in a nobler cause!"

Again he had to act. This brave woman was right—of such stuff were martyrs made. She refused anything, save a local anæsthetic.

"I want my wits about me, Doctor Brandon," she explained.

The next fifteen minutes was a lifetime to Dick Brandon. He dared not let himself even think of it. Presently there came a clattering knock on the door.

"Give me another ten minutes, Debroy!" said Brandon.

It was twenty minutes before the door was opened. Mrs. Frant had borne the ordeal with amazing fortitude! She was sitting by the side of the supposed patient—bandaging that protruding foot!

Brandon wondered if she would fail at the crucial moment! He needn't have wondered! Inside her shoe her own foot was bound up tightly. In the justness of her cause she felt strong to endure the pain. And when she left the operating theatre and went to Celia's room to turn back the bed-clothes, she scarcely even limped!

"The operation was not easy. I ought to have had a second nurse with me!" Brandon said. "Have her carried to her room!"

Debroy grinned. "Good man!" he murmured. "The wisdom of the ages is yours!" He called out, and several of those silent watchdogs came. "Take the patient away!" he leered.

Brandon's features were set as they picked Celia up and took her out.

"And now, Debroy?" he queried.

Debroy nodded his head. "You will go to your room and rest! You may be called on at any moment to begin your—mission!"

Stealthily forms followed in Brandon's wake as he passed along the corridor. He reached his own room. As he went through the door he heard a sharp click from the outside. He was locked in!

He listened acutely. If only the key had been on this side he could have turned it. He wanted to go along that secret passage—to make sure that that very brave woman was all right, and to reassure Celia herself.

He prayed to God that Mrs. Frant would

have the courage to go through with it to the end. "Ugh!" he exclaimed, when he thought of it.

He sat at his window, staring into the darkness. From somewhere he heard a church clock tongue the hour of ten. Just as it stopped the key was twisted in the lock.

"What, in the dark?" said a voice—Harvey Debroy's.

Brandon did not answer, and Debroy came in, switching on the light as he did so. Brandon observed one of those silent men behind him carrying a tray.

"Put the shutters up—fasten them!" ordered Debroy.

The fellow put the tray down and obeyed. The room seemed like a vault now.

"You can go!" snapped Debroy, and the man withdrew.

Brandon's repugnance was so great that he could scarcely keep his hands off the brute.

"You have fifteen minutes to eat that, doctor," Debroy resumed. "You have a long journey in front of you. Food may be nauseous at times, but it is—how shall I put it—fuel for the human machine!"

He was looking at something he held in his hand as he spoke—a small, square parcel. It was like a minute jewel-case wrapped up in brown paper. It was sealed securely. Brandon gazed at it as Debroy put it on the edge of the bed.

THE JOURNEY.

"My brother told you that it was something we stole from Sir Henry Langdale. You would be amazed if you knew what it is—as amazed as Sir Henry will be to receive it! It is fully addressed. You will deliver it! The rest is in Sir Henry Langdale's hands!"



You Remember

"THE STORY OF A DEAD MAN"?

EVEN BETTER

is next week's brilliant
novel by the same author.

Be sure you read

"THE SECRET OF BEACON INN"

by

LESLIE CHARTERIS.

"I'm to be your dupe?" Brandon asked quietly.

"You are to be our unwilling accomplice!"—with a slow smile. "Your reward may be the hand of that little girl of whom you have grown fond. The trend of romance is strange. Why should not a poor medico aspire to such heights?"

Brandon was reading the address. It was 23, Park Avenue, London, W. He looked up. He saw now that Harvey Debroy had taken his pistol out, was fondling it lovingly.

"You will deliver that packet, doctor!" Debroy's eyes were gleaming. "You won't give us away, for we hold Miss Langdale as hostage!"

"I see—if I came back with a horde of detectives you would wipe her out?" Brandon demanded.

"Where should you bring your horde of detectives to? Do you know where this house is? It may be south, north, east, or west. Am I likely to give you the chance of knowing? You will be taken in a car with drawn blinds. Before dawn you will be deposited somewhere in an environ of London!"

"If I don't deliver this packet?" Brandon said slowly.

"You will! It would be a crying shame for a tender romance to be nipped in the bud, and for one so young as Celia Langdale to die!"

Brandon kept his temper; he was playing a lone hand now, he knew. He had to make this bound believe that he—Brandon—realised his impotence.

"What do I do after this is delivered, Debroy?" he asked.

"That will be in the hands of Sir Henry Langdale!" was the soft reply.

"That's all I'm to know?"

"That's all—unless you'd like to take your month's money in advance with you, Doctor Brandon!"

"You hound! D'you think this sort of thing can go on? You and your infernal brother will be brought crashing in the dust soon!"

"Please—please—I do so hate hints of violence! You see, I am a man of calmness myself, and threats to me may react upon others—say, upon Celia Langdale!"

Frant came in at that moment. He gesticulated, his lips moving quickly, Harvey Debroy watching the while.

"My poor dumb servant says your car is ready, doctor!" murmured Debroy. "It is a pity you left your house that night without your topcoat. The night air gets chilly, and I should hate you to take cold. There is your hat on the table beside you. I would lend you a topcoat of my own, but clothes sometimes provide dangerous clues!"

His eyes fell upon the untouched food. "If you hadn't been so aggressive, Doctor Brandon, you might have had your meal. As it is you will have to depart without it—unless you care to take it with you? No? Please yourself! This is an interesting phase in the strangest adventure that ever befell you. It will make your Dead End practice seem dull—if you ever return to it!"

Brandon put on his hat and took up the packet. Destiny was moving on—thrusting him with it, like a piece of driftwood upon a swirling stream! Out at the front door was a big car. He could not see the face of the man who sat behind the steering-wheel, but he recognised the man who climbed into the saloon behind him. It was the fellow who had helped kidnap him, and whom Debroy had called Darkie!

"Don't try to get away, doctor!" Debroy called softly. "Darkie never misses!"

As the car began to glide into the night Harvey Debroy chuckled. "Another phase forward. Soon the final act will be staged! What the devil are you staring like that at me for?" This to Frant, whose eyes, big and mournful, were fixed upon his "master's" face.

Frant made that jabbering sound, and inclined his head—in deep humiliation! Then he followed his master back into the house.

"You can go, Frant! I shan't want you again to-night!"

A little later Harvey Debroy left his own room, crossed the hall, and began to mount the stairs. He went straight up to his brother's room, muttering all the while. He threw open the door, entering in a boisterous fashion that was alien to him, suggesting a nervous strain that was reaching the climax.

"Brandon's gone, Amos!" he said.

The breath left Amos Debroy's lips with a hissing sound. "I shall be glad when all this is over—one way or the other!" he replied.

"Other? There can be no 'other.' The gods are favouring us! Another district—another lease of life—with Celia Langdale!"

The door was not fastened. Right along the corridor a shadow detached itself from the heavier shadows, creeping stealthily towards that door. Soon a hand was reached out, moving the door fraction by fraction. Through the crack there came the tones of those two men within, now gleeful and chuckling, now doubtful and fear-filled. And from the darkened passage nothing but the soft breathing of—someone!

Ten minutes later that figure moved away, and the door moved, to—gave a tiny squeak.

"What's that?" Harvey Debroy cried.

He lurched to the door, dragging it violently open. He saw nothing—heard nothing—but beyond a bend in the corridor, missing the beam of light that shone from Amos Debroy's room, a figure pressed into the shadows—a figure that soon emerged and crept swiftly, silently away—old Frant!

He went to the servants' quarters, and to his own room, brought out pen and paper, and began to write.

His task didn't take him long. He knew that if he were discovered there would be only one end for him—death. But he did not hesitate. There was that little girl who loved Dick Brandon, and the splendid woman who had sacrificed herself for a cause—to say nothing of Dick Brandon himself.

Within a few minutes old Frant left the house from the servants' entrance, keeping within every bit of shadow! As he moved he kept praying for success. At length he reached the lodge-gates!

Of late vigilance over him had not been so strict, and one night he had crept into these grounds; and he had seen, what Dick Brandon had seen in the walled garden, a sudden splutter of flame preceded by the squeak of a rat near the ground close to the hedge, and he had realised that not only was the walled garden protected, but these grounds, too—two thin, but immensely strong electrified wires running on slender uprights only a few inches from the inside of the hedge. He had discovered, too, that this boundary was patrolled.

Frant listened. The lodge-keeper was apparently asleep. Of a patrolling guard he saw no sign. The old man sought about till he found a gap in the hedge. Then he produced a pair of queer-looking insulated gloves from his pocket and put them on. He fumbled till his groping hands found the wires, and he held them apart, climbing gingerly through.

He wondered if this were the self-same gap through which Brandon had reached the road. He shuddered when he realised what a narrow escape from death Brandon had had. He must have bent his head to thrust it through the gap, and so missed the top wire—a million to one chance against it, but luck had favoured him! Frant straightened himself. It was the first occasion he had been in the road since that time he and his wife had been kidnapped.

He smiled grimly as words came back to him which he had once heard Harvey Debroy say to Darkie: "Post these letters in the wall-box of the lodge as you go by!"

The wall-box of the lodge! He saw dimly the red square just along the lodge wall. He went forward, took the letter he had written in his room from his pocket, and dropped it through.

Frant took out his handkerchief and wiped the beads of sweat away. Just for one instant he was seized with the desire to go along that road—and put distance between himself and those fiends. But inside that house was his wife and that girl. Leave them? He shook himself. Besides, ever since the death of his daughter it was all he and his wife had lived for—to avenge her.

He crept back through the gap, again holding the wires apart; then he took off his gloves and began to creep amongst the shadows towards that gloomy pile standing there, seeming to frown down upon him.

THE PACKET.

MEANWHILE, with drawn blinds, the car containing Brandon and Darkie was moving swiftly along. Brandon was watching Darkie—and the Yankee silent pistol he was nursing on his knee.

"What a pity we can't have a hand of cards, Darkie, to while away the time, isn't it?" he remarked.

Brandon wondered if it would be any use putting out feelers to sound his companion. The cockney glared at him for a moment. Then:

"Shut up!" he ordered laconically, and Brandon decided that it wasn't!

That drive was a queer sensation—in a swift-moving car with a cut-throat who carried a loaded weapon on his knee! It was in the early hours when Darkie suddenly snapped the blinds up. For some while Brandon had known they were in London. He peered out. They were not far from the Marble Arch. Darkie said something through the speaking-tube, and the car slackened.

"Listen to my little bit, doctor," Darkie whispered threateningly. "Guv'nor told me to warn you to keep away from your house in Dead End; told me to say that if you tried any hanky-panky the little missie would foot your bill—see?"

Brandon did see. The car stopped. He picked up that tiny parcel and alighted, and as soon as his feet touched the ground, the car swung away. Brandon heard a click, and realised that by some clever device concealing shields had been dropped over the identification plates. The Debroy's didn't leave much to chance!

He nodded. Debroy had said his house was fifty miles from town—but that milestone near the old man's cottage had said it was only fifteen! They couldn't have been these hours doing fifteen miles! Obviously the driver had been travelling all over the place to baffle him!

London at this hour was grey and forbidding—the darkest hour before the dawn. The chauffeur had chosen his time of arrival well!

Brandon glanced at the address on that parcel again. Sir Henry Langdale, 23, Park

Avenue, London, W. Park Avenue was on the other side of Hyde Park. Well, it was plain he couldn't call on Sir Henry yet. He had visions of being ordered away by shocked and startled servants.

A constable eyed him suspiciously. Brandon moved along and up the Edgware Road. Life was already beginning in the London that never really sleeps. It was not long before he found a small place down a side street.

"Morning Coffee!" it said in the window.

"Yes, they could get him some breakfast. He was better-dressed than most of their patrons—but who cared? His money was good—that was the only thing that counted. Brandon smiled. He was glad that those people of the mystery house had left him his purse!

He had a wash, too. The coffee-house keeper even lent him a razor. A shilling, tactfully proffered, can work wonders! Brandon stayed chatting for a long while, and when at last he left, the Edgware Road had assumed the monotony of its daily clatter.

Number 23 Park Avenue was a big, grey-stoned house—relic of an age when men built for posterity. Brandon wondered what the next few minutes would have in store for him!

As a matter of fact, they had nothing, except a disappointment, for he was informed that the man he had come to interview was not at home! Brandon called again twice during the morning, and yet a fourth time—after lunch.

The manservant glanced down curiously at this very persistent visitor. Then: "Sir Henry is in now," he said. "I will inquire if he will see you!"

"Tell Sir Henry Langdale that it is a matter of the gravest importance!" Brandon warned, after giving his name.

Sir Henry saw Dick Brandon immediately. It was in the library Brandon was received, and Sir Henry proved to be a late middle-aged man with snow-white hair and haunted eyes. Brandon was sorry for him. His keen glance took in every detail. "My name is Brandon—Doctor Brandon!"

"Yes, I know. My servant told me that!" He passed his hand over his forehead.

"I'm from your daughter, Sir Henry!"

"My daughter—you?" The other swung round and towards the bell.

"Please don't! I want you to believe that I am your friend and hers! We are dealing with desperate men! The ruffians who have taken your daughter would no more hesitate to remove her than—"

He stopped. The baronet was trembling.

"Why have they kidnapped her, and how do you know all this?"—suspiciously.

"God knows why they've kidnapped her—I don't. I am as much their victim as she is! You see, I am the riverside doctor for whom the police are dragging the Thames!"

"Doctor? Riverside? Dragging the Thames?" He shook his head.

Then, very briefly, Dick Brandon told the other the whole story, fantastic and weird though it was!

"And you expect me to believe a tale like that? Is this the blackmailing trick of a scoundrel who has learnt of my loss? I'm going to call the police and give you in charge!"

It was easy to see that the old man was bordering on the verge of a breakdown.

"Sir Henry Langdale, what I have told you is the simple truth!" He slipped his hand in his coat pocket and produced the small parcel. "I had to deliver this to you—something that was stolen from you and which those brutes now return!"

The baronet took it, staring hard at it, as Brandon went on speaking.

"I was told that everything would rest with you—after you had opened the box!"

Sir Henry Langdale picked up a small knife from a mahogany table and cut the string. Immediately under the outer layer of brown paper was a note written in block letters. He read it—then handed it over to Brandon. The latter observed that his companion had now moved quite close to that bell! The note said:

"Others threaten—but we act! You were taking a yachting cruise—meaning to leave the mouth of the Thames on Saturday! You will still leave the mouth of the Thames on Saturday, taking the very estimable bearer of this letter with you! You will steam two miles out and—wait. You will send £100,000 in Treasury notes and bearer bonds with Doctor Brandon, dispatching him alone to the motor-launch which you will have observed following you! On our launch will be your daughter. She will return to you with the very quixotic man she is foolish enough to love!"

So that was the meaning of it all—Celia Langdale had been kidnapped and was being held to ransom! But this was not the solution of all the other weird details. Brandon glanced up from the letter, to see Sir Henry Langdale staring at something he had exposed in the bottom of that small box.

"Good God!" he groaned, and staggered backward.

Brandon moved swiftly over to him. The breath left his lips and his eyes gleamed. He was gazing at—a human toe!

Sir Henry's face was ashen. "Others threaten—we act!" he was mumbling.

He was holding a small piece of paper in his other hand. There were bloodstains on one corner! He was holding it so that Brandon could read:

"You will not fail us! The next thing we shall return—which we stole from you—will be a limb! Doctor Brandon will tell you that we show no mercy!"

Brandon ground his teeth. It was all clear to him now; others threatened—those devils acted! Next time it would be a limb!

"I'm going to ring up Scotland Yard!" said Sir Henry Langdale abruptly.

"Scotland Yard—what can they do? How long do you think it would take them to find that house? And if they did—what do you imagine would have happened to your girl by then?"

"Help me—help me!" It was the pitiful cry of a man hurtling near a brink. "What they've done to her—is ghastly!"

"They've done nothing!"

Brandon explained; told of the splendid self-sacrifice of that other woman.

"Your daughter has a friend in her and her husband, Mr. Frant! This is not a time for panic. Those brutes are capable of anything."

A servant tapped on the door.

"The afternoon post has come, Sir Henry," he said; "her ladyship told me to bring it to you—together with the early evening papers!"

The baronet had snatched at a paper, was opening it out, searching with feverish haste. He saw a heading:

"DEVELOPMENT IN THE LANGDALE KIDNAPPING MYSTERY!"

"They've found my car!" he said, glancing up. "Found it abandoned in the Essex Marshes!"

Then what he went on to say brought an exclamation from Brandon. It was: "My chauffeur was lying inside the car trussed-up. His clothing was torn as though in a struggle. They found him dumb and his mind a blank. He only lived a few minutes."

Brandon swore under his breath. So Harvey Debroy's brother had done to that poor wretch what he had done to the Silent Six. But this chauffeur had been lucky—he had escaped into Eternity.

Brandon's thoughts went on. Celia had told him that their own car had been waiting outside the theatre that night. Which meant that it had been stopped on its way to the theatre and the chauffeur overcome and operated on then and there by Dr. Debroy, trussed up and thrust under the seat—meant, too, that the poor devil was still there when Celia had been driven away.

Phew! What a nerve! That would account for the necessity of transferring the girl to another car—to enable these blackguards to abandon the Langdale car with the still trussed chauffeur beneath the seat.

He frowned. According to the newspaper report there had been a struggle in the car, and he—Brandon—had removed a bullet from Amos Debroy's lung—a bullet fired from a Yankee silent pistol. How Amos Debroy came by his wound was now pretty plain.

In that struggle in the car Debroy's pistol would play a part. That chauffeur had proved game. But after getting hold of the weapon and "plugging" Amos Debroy, he had been overcome!

But when had that struggle taken place—before, or after the operation! He could conceive that chauffeur coming to, and,

realising what was happening, fighting in his frenzy. He could even conceive Amos Debroy carrying out his filthy task after he had been "plugged," for his injury would not necessarily incapacitate him immediately. Anyhow, it was a feasible explanation.

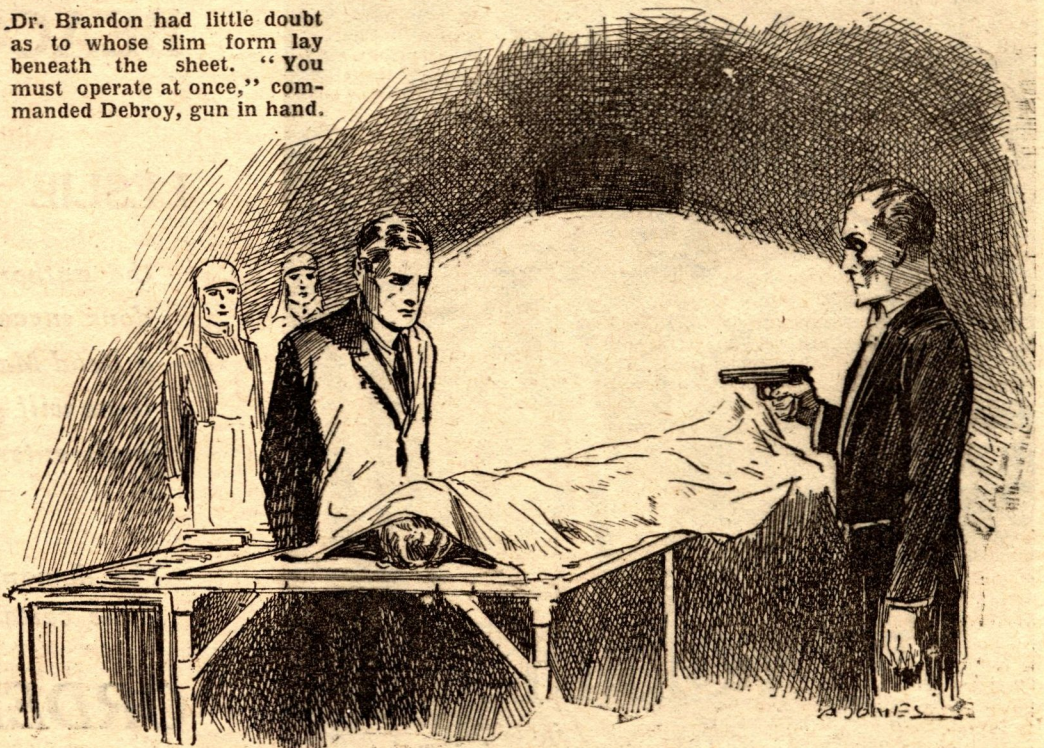
Sir Henry Langdale had dropped into a chair, was staring before him with anguished eyes. Brandon's glance went from the baronet to the letters which the servant had placed on the table—to one letter addressed to him—"John Brandon, c/o 23, Park Avenue!" He picked it up, opened it. The note was from Frant!

"That motor launch Harvey Debroy has told Sir Henry Langdale about in the letter is a trap! The young lady will not be there! You will arrive with the £100,000, and you will be held! Harvey Debroy means to keep the young lady till she consents to marry him. After the motor-launch lands with you and the money you are to be killed and your body dropped in the Essex Marshes. I have overheard the whole story. The Debroyes are making arrangements for a flight. I am hoping to get out to post this. If it reaches you, for pity's sake, be careful! Those brutes have not yet discovered the trick you played over the operation. If they do, heaven help my wife!"

Brandon stood there with heaving chest. Frant had written that warning—had managed to get out somehow to post it, too. He had given no indication where that hell-hole was, for his wife had said he did not know! Brandon examined the envelope. Everything seemed against him, for the postmark was so blurred as to be quite indecipherable. But, anyhow, inaction was done with now. He—Dick Brandon—had got to outwit these scoundrels. Cunning had to be met with cunning—that was the only way!

He sat down, seething with this thing. All else was outside his mind—the poor old man and this palatial apartment, and the chirping of the birds from the near-by park. His brain began to take hold of a chance—

Dr. Brandon had little doubt as to whose slim form lay beneath the sheet. "You must operate at once," commanded Debroy, gun in hand.



so desperate that few men would have dared even to conceive it!

"Sir Henry Langdale," he said abruptly, "your daughter won't be on that motor-boat. I'm to be trapped—and dumped into the marshes! I want you to place yourself in my hands. If I win through your daughter will be returned to you. If I fail I will see that she does not suffer as those beasts have made others suffer. Will you trust me?"

"The police, they—"

"If Scotland Yard knew what is in my mind I should be laughed at for a maniac—put away, as a man who sent a note to them saying he meant to throw himself in the Thames and didn't do so! Oh, believe me, we are up against a precious mob! Will you trust me—absolutely?"

"What else is there I can do?" Then he added: "The terrible anxiety is killing her mother and me!"

"On Saturday your yacht will sail with me on board. You will do precisely as this man says, except that the packet I shall take on the motor-launch will be a dummy! As soon as I am aboard the motor-boat you will give orders to steam away!"

"But—"

"I want some hundreds of pounds; I've a

lot to do before your yacht sails. Now—are you going to trust me?"

Sir Henry Langdale's face was haggard. "Doctor Brandon, the life of my girl is in your hands!" he said simply.

A DESPERATE PLAN.

For the rest of that day Brandon lounged about in the West End. It was a queer feeling—to know that the police were dragging the Thames for him! To know, too, that in Dead End there were dozens of poor folks who were mourning him! He was worshipped down by the river-side—it was because he was worshipped that he dared to take this desperate chance!

He bought the later evening papers and studied them. One told him that a body, believed to be his, had been recovered from the Thames, and was now awaiting identification! He wondered who would "identify" him?

After dark he went to Dead End. There was a certain man he called on—a man who owed his life to Brandon's skill and who had once taken a dying oath to repay him.

"Blime—the doc's ghost!" he gasped, as Brandon entered his choice abode and shut the door.

It didn't take Brandon long, though, to convince Jimmie Santler that he was flesh and blood! He was talking to Jimmie for more than an hour.

"It's a desperate game, Jimmie, my lad. But it's the only one! Money's no object. Your men must be picked—not from the Dead End district. D'you know any place where you can get 'shooters' and ammunition, and flash-lamps?"

Jimmie grinned! That was the only answer he vouchsafed!

"You and I are paying a visit to Shoe-buryness to-morrow. D'you know much about the marshes there, Jimmie?"

Jimmie did! He further said: Blime, doc!" some half a dozen times, and volunteered the information that he was in his "blinkin' element!"

"You won't make any mistakes, Jimmie?" Brandon said, rising. "Sure you've got every detail correct?"

"Rely on yer 'umble, doc!"

In the days that slipped by Dick Brandon was tingling to get into the fray!

Brandon knew for the first time in his life what real luxury was on the following

PASS ALONG PLEASE!

The THRILLER
THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS 2d



to next week's number of
"The THRILLER," in
which will appear another
brilliant book-length novel

"THE SECRET of BEACON INN"

BY

LESLIE CHARTERIS

the author of that stupen-
dous success "The Story of
a Dead Man." Next week's
issue will give a long even-
ing's entertainment of real
thrills.

The demand will be large.
Make certain of your copy.

ORDER NOW!

Saturday when s.y. Celia steamed majestically out of the mouth of the Thames. He stood leaning against the deck-rail, watching the waters sweeping away from her bows as she surged through them. Time and again Celia's father had pleaded to be told the details of this dangerous plan, but Brandon had refused.

"If it fails, it's my own funeral, Sir Henry. You've given me all the help you can; the rest is in the lap of the gods!"

Following, not a great distance in their wake, was a motor-launch. Debroy's boat for a certainty! She was signalling. Presently the yacht hove-to and dropped anchor whilst the motor-launch fussed about in the stern. The low-lying Essex marshes were scarcely discernible in the gathering gloom.

"Steam-yacht ahoy!" called a voice.

It was the voice of Harvey Debroy himself. Brandon filled his lungs. The battle would soon begin. All those days, both at that mystery house and afterwards in London, he was held in leash. Now inaction was to end. If only he had luck!

There followed another challenge from the launch. Brandon wondered how many there were on board. Not many, for she was not big enough for that! It was getting dusk when a small boat was lowered from the Celia, and Brandon climbed in. A package was placed in the stern, and Brandon began to row. It was not easy in the choppy sea, so the launch chugged to meet him. When he was alongside he focussed his eyes, and saw that the launch contained only Debroy and one other.

"You've got the packet?" Debroy whispered hoarsely.

"Yes; where's Miss Langdale?"

"Hand up the goods first, Doctor Brandon!"

Debroy's face was wreathed in a wicked smile as he bent down. The packet was big and the boat rolled and was drifting away, so it seemed such a natural thing for Debroy to lean over and catch hold of the gunwale, groping greedily with his free hand at that packet which Brandon was holding towards him.

Then something happened—so quickly that Debroy only had time to utter a single cry of alarm! He felt each of his wrists gripped with steel-like fingers, and he was hauled bodily over the side of the launch and dumped with a thud into the bottom of the row-boat, which rocked ominously beneath them.

"Plug him, Darkie!" Debroy screamed.

"If you fire, Darkie," Brandon warned, "you'll probably hit this choice master of yours!"

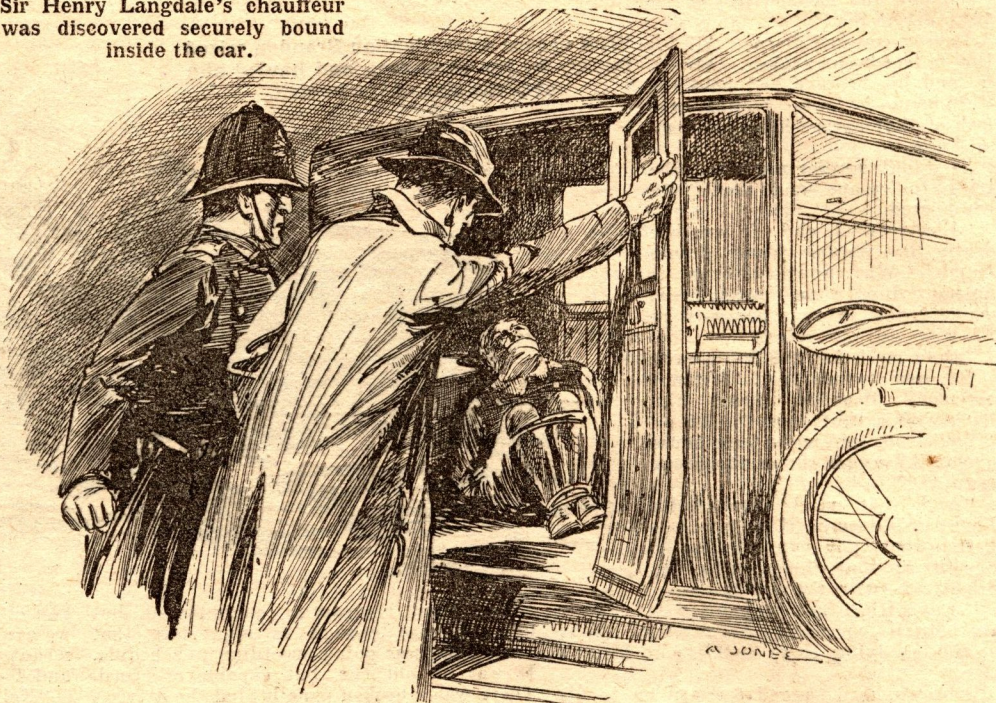
This was a risk Brandon had had to take. It was all in the hazards of the game, so he had accepted it cheerfully. Darkie didn't fire; the light was so uncertain that he wasn't sure what part of that heaving mass was Debroy!

"Lie still, Debroy, or I'll choke the life out of you!" Brandon thundered.

Debroy struggled violently, but Brandon twisted one arm behind his victim's back, pinning it beneath with the weight of Debroy's body holding it down and added to by Brandon's own knee in the tender spot of the other's chest. Then Brandon ran his now free hand over Debroy, finding what he wanted.

"Listen!" he cried, and something went

Sir Henry Langdale's chauffeur was discovered securely bound inside the car.



plop into the water. "There goes your Yankee silent pistol!" Then: "Darkie, if you want to get out of this mess alive, bring your launch alongside and fasten a line to my boat. Debroy and I are going to have the pleasure of being towed ashore—but toss your pistol here first!"

Debroy had ceased to struggle. He felt something sticking into his ribs in a hard and unsympathetic fashion.

"A six-shooter, Debroy!" Brandon whispered grimly. "Just tell friend Darkie that he'd better let me have his weapon, for I'd hate to have to pull my own trigger and hurt you!"

Debroy barked out his order, and Darkie's weapon dropped at Brandon's feet. In another second that, too, had found a watery end.

Then Darkie manœuvred the launch nearer. He reached over and grabbed the tow-line from the nose of the dinghy. His job was difficult in the choppy sea, but at last it was accomplished.

"Now head for the shore, Darkie," Brandon sang out.

Darkie did. The water churned from the propeller. His head was buzzing with this new trend. He knew terror in its acutest form. He saw the Langdale yacht moving, but she was not following them, she was steaming seaward.

Debroy saw this, too, and his mouth gaped.

"Surprised, are you?" Brandon asked. "I shouldn't be, if I were you. There's going to be a whole bunch of surprises coming your way!" Then he added with a chuckle: "Would you believe, Debroy, that the parcel I delivered to Sir Henry Langdale didn't contain his daughter's toe after all!"

"You lie!" Debroy spluttered. "I made the parcel up myself!"

"Nevertheless, you'll find I'm right—if things go through without a hitch; just a little patience, that's all!"

Debroy was getting frightened. Brandon's personality was dominating him, and all the while that yacht was steaming further away.

"What in hell's name are you playing at?" he demanded. "D'you think you'll get away with it?"

"I hope so!" Then, to Darkie, Brandon called: "Pull your wheel over a bit. That's the point we're making for, where you see that light!"

"The police?" Debroy demanded.

"No—not yet, at any rate, Debroy. Sit up—that's right. You'll be more comfortable. I hate a chap who fidgets. I'm hoping the police won't butt in on this little adventure for quite a while, for both our sakes!"

Brandon's fumbling fingers grasped the packet he had brought. This he thrust overboard.

"Just wastepaper, Debroy!" he explained. "So you fancied you would do me in and drop my body into the marshes, did you? You reckoned on keeping Miss Langdale a prisoner until she consented to marry you, eh? You are engaged at your big house preparing for a hurried flit, are you?"

Debroy's jaw fell. "How in Hades did you—"

"Oh, a little bird whispered it, Debroy. I said we should have a reckoning, didn't I? Well, we are having it. It's my turn now—you cur!"

Debroy strove to recover. "And what have you gained by this trick? Miss Langdale is held at my house as hostage!"

"And you are held in this boat as hostage, Debroy, so that levels things a bit!"

"And my house—do you know where it is?" Debroy snarled.

"No; but you are going to take me to it!"

"I'll see you hanged first!"

"Mr. Debroy, let there be no mistake! You will be hanged—if you don't!"

The breath left Debroy's parted lips, and his right hand slipped towards his neck. "Hanged, you fool—what for?"

"For the murder of your wife, old Frant's daughter, who lies buried in your garden of death!" replied Brandon.

A harsh oath left Debroy.

"It's a lie!" he screamed.

"For having a hand in the murder of Sir Henry Langdale's chauffeur, who was found trussed-up under the seat of the abandoned car! He was dumb and his memory gone; he has died since!"

"Dumb; memory gone! Ha, ha!"

"Dumb and memoryless, as are your Silent Six!"

Debroy cowered down. All his life he had been ruthless. Always he and his brother had held the whip-hand—he was feeling the lash of that same whip upon himself now.

"I didn't murder my wife. She tried to escape—and died!" he whimpered.

"Electrocuted, eh? It was her death that struck Frant dumb. Dumb? Why, you fool, Frant is no more dumb than I am! He is waiting now in your house—with his wife—for our return!"

"Find my house! I defy you!"

He rose to his feet. Without ceremony Brandon thrust him back with a "Sit down!" Then: "You either lead me to your house or you'll die to-night on the Essex marshes!"

"And that would seal Celia Langdale's doom. Had you forgotten that, you cunning devil? She is in that house with the Silent Six—with my brother!"

"And with Frant and his wife! They are both living merely for revenge! Your brother is lying there helpless at Frant's mercy!"

Debroy's head sagged forward on to his chest. He knew he was up against it now. He was watching the launch make for that light on the shore, watching the white foam in her wake churned from her twirling propeller. He seemed to see something looming ahead, shaped like some giant Nemesis.

Their landing-place proved to be a mud slope on the Essex side of the estuary. Brandon had marked the spot when he and Jimmie Santler had previously gone over the ground. It warmed the heart of the young medico to know that he had got such splendid pals. No sooner had their boat touched solid than a voice called out of the darkness:

"That you, sir?"

"Yes, it's me, Jimmie!"

"Got the blighters? How many of 'em?"

"Only two!"

Jimmie had thoughtfully dragged an old plank to the bows of the motor-boat.

"Don't want the gen'elmen to git their tootsies wet, doc! It'd be a shame—I don't fink!"

"Got the cars in the lane, Jimmie?"

"You bet! Come on, yer beauty!"—to Darkie.

A gleam of light from his torch touched Jimmie's face. Darkie knew that Jimmie was not of that breed who would stand any nonsense; besides, he glimpsed cold steel.

In a brace of minutes Jimmie had both Darkie and Debroy securely trussed.

"What shall we do wiv this posh motor-launch, and the tow-boat, sir?" a voice asked.

"Push 'em out. They'll slop about till somebody finds 'em! Anyhow, we haven't got time to bother!"

"Thought we should have at least a car-full, doc!" Jimmie Santler grumbled.

"To be truthful, Jimmie, I did, too! But we're not out of the wood yet!"

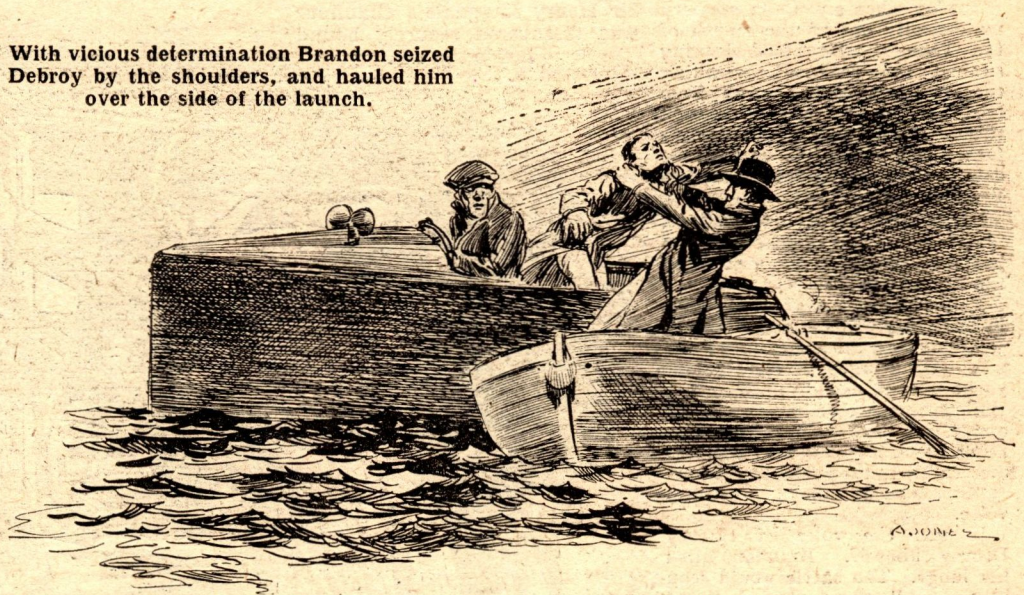
There was an evil smirk on Harvey Debroy's face. Brandon was right—they weren't out of the wood!

Darkie was conducted to a car, and handed over to a pal of his captor. Then Jimmie proceeded to another car and "wound her up." She was not a beauty, but serviceable.

"Get in, Debroy!" ordered Brandon.

Debroy did. He was having a dose of his own medicine now. He hadn't the vaguest

With vicious determination Brandon seized Debroy by the shoulders, and hauled him over the side of the launch.



notion what his captor contemplated, but he was wise enough to appreciate that everything was going according to schedule. It was an old car, but capable of speed. There was a broken pane behind the driver's seat.

"Very convenient, Debroy!" Brandon remarked. "Jimmie will be able to hear your orders with no trouble."

"My orders?"

"Yes, my friend. You may have gathered that I am a desperate man; also I'm an angry one. You have been adding fuel to that anger ever since you kidnapped me in Dead End. I've a mind to put an end to you now and trust to the Frant's to rescue Miss Langdale."

Their car was slowing down. They were now clear of the winding lane, that dipped to the water's edge, and on the main road. The second car was following. Debroy glimpsed it stalking them. He didn't know whether it contained a few or a number: Actually it contained merely the trussed-up Darkie and one other, beside the driver.

"Jimmie's waiting for your instructions, Debroy. Tell him the way to take—this is the main road."

"I'm a stranger to these parts, you fool!"

"My information said that you meant to drop me in the Essex marshes. That's why I gathered you expected to take the Essex side back to your cosy mansion. Now, Debroy, my finger itches on the trigger of the gun against your ribs. I'm having no nonsense. You'll direct this car without the slightest error. It's as well we understand each other—thoroughly. There's too much at stake to let a thing like you stand in the way."

"Keep to the main road till you reach Dunstan's Cross, then branch to the right," Debroy snarled.

Jimmie Santler opened out his engine and let her "rip," and that car behind followed suit. For an hour and a half they ate up the miles. It was a ride that Jimmie afterwards declared to be the most thrilling of his career.

Presently Brandon called out and the car slackened, the one behind also slowing.

"Where are we now, Debroy?" Brandon asked.

They were moving past a cottage. It seemed rather familiar—and then Brandon remembered. It was the cottage of his adventure that night.

"Stop, Jimmie!" he called.

"You needn't. You will find the cottage empty. All those guarding cottages I told

you of are empty. You claim to know that we are preparing for a flit. Well, this was meant to be our greatest coup. My brother and I did not mean to take risks!"

"Neither do I mean to take unnecessary risks! There's a telephone in there—if your cottager should be inside, he might send a warning through to your house, mightn't he?"

"The telephone—ah, the telephone, my friend!" Debroy answered queerly.

"Jimmie, get out your shooter and keep him covered—you couldn't miss him through this hole in the glass."

Jimmie Santler agreed. Brandon hurried to the door of the cottage. To his amazement, he found it open. He produced his flash-lamp and held his shooter ready. But he didn't have to use it. There, stretched out dead on the kitchen floor, was the old cottager!

Apparently he had been in the act of telephoning, for the receiver was still dangling at the end of its cord. It was rather an odd-looking receiver—all metal. He went back to the waiting car.

"Your old cottager's dead, Debroy!" he said grimly, taking his seat. Then to Jimmie: "Further along the road you'll see the lodge gates. Stop this side of them, run your car off the road and put her lights out."

Jimmie did as he was told, the following car doing the same. Within five minutes Brandon, Debroy and Jimmie Santler were walking to the lodge. It seemed sinister in the quietness.

"Keep your shooter in his ribs, Jimmie, while I investigate."

Very shortly he was back. He was breathing deeply.

"You devil!" he said. "Your lodge-keeper is dead, too?"

"What are you going to do now, Doctor Brandon?" Debroy queried softly.

"I'm going right up to that house. I said the plan was desperate, didn't I? Well, it either comes off or I give that little girl and the Frants the chance of escape—this way!" He tapped his shooter significantly.

"You are a brave man, doctor. And afterwards? If you get your lady-love away—what then?"

"The rest will be in the hands of the police."

"We have carried on a successful business, my friend. Held to hostage many. Our fortunes are large. You fancy that house is in the heart of loneliness. You are wrong. The village of Sweival is less

than a mile away. My dead cottager told you the truth that night. You see, he assumed that you would never leave my house alive. How should he know that it would be necessary for us to use you? They will tell you in the village of Sweival that my brother and I are benefactors; eccentric, if you like, but just and generous."

He laughed.

"This was to be our last coup from these headquarters. We should have left with regrets—it is consoling, you know, to be so respected! You see, how thoughtful my lodge-keeper was—he left the lodge-gates open for my return. He little thought that when I passed through them it would be as a prisoner. There was another reason we meant to quit this neighbourhood," Debroy continued. "Celia Langdale was a hostage I wanted to keep. She was to have been mine, Doctor Brandon—all mine."

Brandon noted the seeming submission to defeat of his prisoner, but did not relax his vigilance a moment. This might well be a ruse to throw him off his guard.

They had been walking up the drive, keeping in the shadows of the bordering trees. Brandon had ordered those other two in the second car to stay behind with Darkie.

Brandon and his companions were close to the front door now. The doctor knew that this was the climax of the desperate game. Inside that house were six dumb men—who would not hesitate to carry out any command given to them by this human devil.

"Got your shooter out, Jimmie?"

"You bet, guv'nor!"

"Ring the bell. Cover whoever answers the door. You get me?"

Jimmie did. It was eerie. Dimly Brandon saw a glimmer shining through the fanlight. What a life-time had seemed to pass since he had last stood here! He edged Harvey Debroy away.

"Don't forget—a whisper of alarm and it's your last!"

"Not a whisper of alarm—I promise!"

There was a strange inflection in Debroy's tones; a suggestion of mocking scorn. There was something uncanny in a man who could laugh at a moment like this!

Jimmie rang. The door was answered immediately—by Frant! His face was ghastly. He was shivering. The sweat poured down his cheeks.

"Then you got my note, sir? Thank Heaven!" he breathed to the figure he saw limned faintly down there.

"Ah," whispered Debroy, "so Frant was the source of the information!"

Frant came half-way down the steps.

"Heavens, it's horrible, sir!" Then he caught sight of Harvey Debroy with that sinister smile twisting his features. "But you've got that beast with you. Kill him, doctor, kill him! Let me get at him!"

He hurled himself down the rest of the steps, but a word from Brandon halted him.

"Don't be a fool, Frant!" Brandon warned. "There are those Silent Six to be reckoned with! Where are they?"

"Strange that they are not here to welcome us, eh? The Silent Six, Doctor Brandon! You are quite correct—there!"

It was Debroy who had spoken. They were all in the hall now. Jimmie Santler was staring about him.

"Doctor Brandon," cried Frant, "there are no Silent Six! They were sent down into a cellar to move a great box! They went in, one after the other, like sheep! They did not come out!"

"Electrocuted, Doctor Brandon. It was foolish of them to step on that iron floor until the current had been switched off!" Debroy explained. "My brother and I are marvellous—he with his medical skill, I with my electrical knowledge! You will

find my oil-engine and my wonderful dynamo in the basement.

He laughed again. There was something diabolical in that laughter.

"You see, we couldn't be trammelled with six silent men—nor yet with those faithful custodians of our guard-cottages. Frant does not know that they, too, have passed away! They were all called to their telephones; they met their fate the instant they touched the metal earpiece. Electricity is a wonderful invention—just the movement of a tiny switch in my brother's room, and—hey, presto!—death in those telephone wires!"

For a fraction even Brandon's iron nerve was shaken. "You devil!" he gasped.

"You saw those two bodies? Would you also like to see my Silent Six? No? I thought you wouldn't be so simple as to walk into that trap!"

"And now, Debroy?" Brandon's fingers were itching to shut about this thing's throat.

"You and your cockney friend, here; Frant and his wife and my brother; Miss Celia and that second nurse-woman are the only living creatures now left in this house. By the way, I should think it highly probable that at this moment that second nurse-woman is with my brother in his room, preparing him for the long journey we had meant to take! You see, she is his devoted wife!"

THE TRAP.

THEY were at the foot of the stairs now, Brandon taking the precaution to push Debroy along in front of him. Jimmie Santler was glancing about him in undisguised terror. There came a banging on a door and a scream. It was followed by a voice—Celia's!

"Get up those stairs!" snapped Brandon. Debroy did. He was still smiling.

"Is that you, Dick? Let us out—oh, let us out!" Celia screamed.

"Unlock that door!"

"I have no key!" replied Debroy.

"Get along the corridor—sharp!"

Debroy obeyed—halting at an open door, the door of the bed-room he—Brandon—had occupied.

"Frant, fetch Celia and your wife here, through the secret passage!" Then he added, strangely: "But leave the sliding panels open!"

Brandon felt that there was something working in this monster's brain—some subtle knowledge that he was keeping back! The uncanniness of the atmosphere was overpowering. In a minute or two Frant returned with Celia—the girl was helping Mrs. Frant along. The older woman's face was white, and she was limping. Debroy was looking at her curiously—and from her to the girl.

"Are you going on all right, Mrs. Frant?" Brandon asked quickly. Then he turned to Debroy. "Do you understand now what I told you on the launch—about Sir Henry Langdale's packet?" he said.

"Jimmie!" Brandon went on abruptly. "Keep this brute covered while I investigate. I won't be long!"

"Not 'arf, doc!" responded Jimmie Santler.

Brandon hurried along the corridor and up the stairs. It was his "sixth sense" that guided him—and his destination was that top room where Amos Debroy reclined upon his bed.

"You beauty—the game's up!" Brandon said.

The woman whom Brandon now knew as Doctor Debroy's wife came away from the window and stood beside the man's bed.

"So I fathom, Doctor Brandon—from the

fact of your presence here! Well, what is your proposition, umph?"

"That you get ready at once to accompany me—I've no doubt that your wife can help you!" Brandon replied grimly.

"And then a cell and trial and—things like that, eh?"

But Amos Debroy was smiling. That left arm reached out till he held his wife's hand, whilst his right arm was stretching towards the metal receiver of the bed-telephone. "My wife and I prefer this way, dear Doctor Brandon!"

Brandon remembered—and sprang; but he was too late—the metal-receiver was in Amos Debroy's fingers—and Debroy and the woman were contorting units of dead humanity.

Brandon shuddered and turned away. He left the room, and went downstairs, returning to the others.

"Your brother and his wife are dead, Debroy," he reported coldly. "They took the short cut by touching the metal telephone mouthpiece. They cheated the hangman that way; but you—"

"Dead!" Debroy said gutturally. Then he laughed, a horrible laugh. "And I will cheat the hangman, too, and take all of you into eternity with me!"

He swung round, and like a shot drove his head at a tiny switch cunningly hidden against the door-frame moulding. He was laughing again, echoing cackling laughter. "A switch in every room—like this! So useful in an emergency! My friends, the death current is on! Look!"

A murmur of horror broke from Celia's parted lips. Right round the room near the ceiling there was a trickle of fire.

"Wires encased in highly inflammable material. I fused them with that switch. They are fused in every room in this house. Soon it will be a blazing inferno!"

"Rats in a trap!" cried Debroy. "By now the staircase is a mass of flames. It's a thirty-foot drop to the lawn! Will you try it? There will not even be time to tear your bed-sheets into linen ropes, Doctor Brandon."

He was edging now towards that secret panel.

"Come away from there, Debroy!" said Brandon, the crackling of the flames mingling with his voice. "Come away, I say!"

Brandon went across the room, caught Debroy by the arm, and flung him round. Debroy's eyes gleamed.

"Is that why you told Frant to leave those panels open?" he snarled.

"Yes, you dog! You showed no mercy to others. What mercy do you expect from me? Through that secret panel there lies only the scaffold—for you! Choose, the scaffold—or death in this room!"

"I choose death here!" said Debroy.

The others were watching Brandon, held speechless by the sudden trend of events. Brandon took out his pocket-lamp.

"Go through there!" he ordered.

They did. He was the last to pass through. The panel slid to—shutting off Debroy's hideous laughter. The light of the spluttering flame gleamed through the secret panel at the end where Celia's bed-room was. It threw ghostly shadows dancing on the walls. Brandon was fumbling along the stonework. Then, suddenly, there appeared a cavity, revealing a flight of steps beyond.

"I discovered this by chance. I explored it, too. It runs down and under the house!"

Down and down they went, stumbling now and then upon the uneven floor. The air was stifling, but soon it became cooler!

(Continued on page 24.)

ARE YOU **SHERLOCK HOLMES?**

TRY YOUR SKILL ON No. 8 OF—

Bafflers!

THE POPULAR
DETECTIVE STORY GAME.

THE RIVER WYDE TRAGEDY

WHERE Bob Trevors, a Wyde Village farm-hand, met his death, the Welsh police finally learned by very sensible methods of deduction. But they never caught the murderer because they did not determine quickly enough from which farm his body had been thrown into the river.

Early on the morning of October 4th, men working in the old mill by the river bank, saw a dark object washed over the low dam of the river and became lodged between two rocks only fifty yards from the east bank. They investigated, and found that it was the body of a man, and brought it ashore at six-twenty a.m. The actual time of the sighting of the body as it washed over the dam was established as six-thirteen.

It proved to be the strangled body of Bob Trevors, a young labourer, who had previously worked at various times for many of the farmers whose farms abutted on the river. Since all the farms were on the east side of the river, and since the body came down so close to the east bank, it seemed clear that the victim had been thrown into the water from one of the farms. It was also clear that the man had been strangled by a piece of rope before having entered the water. The coroner found no water in the lungs; the body had been floating.

The coroner pronounced that the body had been in the water "not less than forty minutes and not more than four hours," and that death had occurred before immersion. A search of the dead man's pockets yielded two illuminating clues; his watch and a scrap of paper. The watch was a cheap one of standard make. Its water-soaked hands pointed to five-twenty-five, and it proved to be nearly wound up, lacking only three turns from being fully wound. From tests made on the spot with other watches of the same

brand and type, it was determined that Trevors' watch must have stopped within two to four minutes after immersion.

In the dead man's breeches pocket was found a small ball of paper, a fragment of a note, handwritten in capital letters with a blue crayon pencil. Though soaked and smeared it was recognizable. The fragment said:

"Farm, North-west Corner by River Fence at Five-Fifteen Tomorrow Morning If You Want The Truth About Molly."

"A FRIEND."

Now, it was guessed that the unknown writer of the measure had meant Molly Sanders, whose reputation as a fascinating and vivacious flirt was known to all the local young "blooms." Intrigues and quarrels over her were frequent, but this looked like murder.

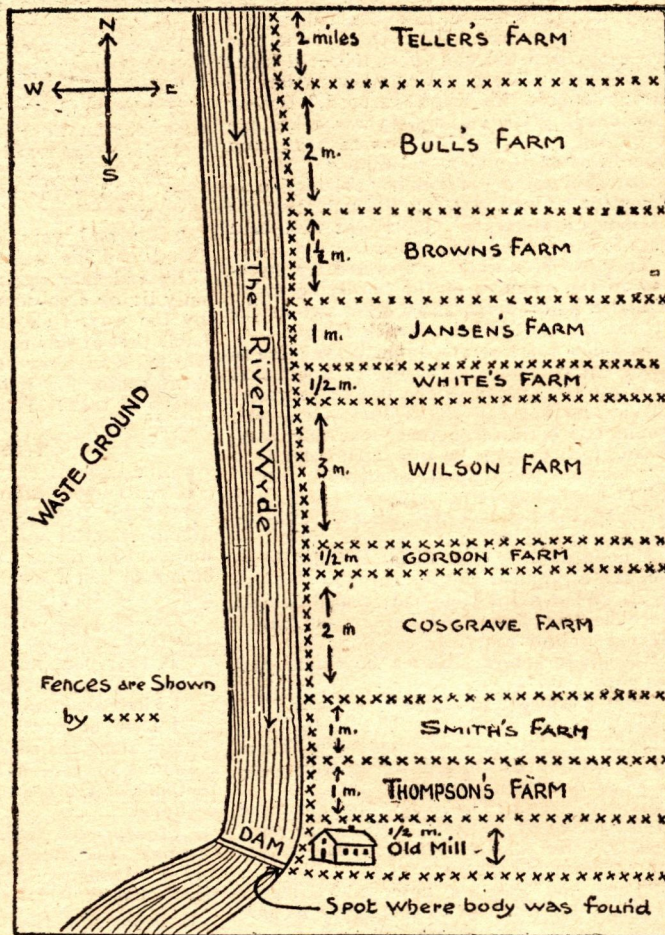
Accordingly, the Welsh police obtained a rough map of the district (see sketch) and the speed of the river current on the east side. This was found to be six miles an hour. They learnt, too, that the river was without snags

THE RULES.

The rules are simplicity itself. On this page you are given details of Baffler Problem No. 8—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.



The diagram of the district in the possession of the police.

or impediments on the east bank for a distance of eleven miles.

Had you been a detective, on which farm would you have said that Bob Trevors probably met his death?

The question to be answered is:

To which farm would you have directed the search for further clues? (Marks 10.)

"THE SILENT SIX"

(Continued from page 23.)

They emerged at length into the park about fifty yards away.

Behind them that pile was one blazing mass now! Celia would not look back! Brandon thought he saw a man's form silhouetted in one of those blazing squares! They reached the lodge-gates and went towards the waiting cars.

It was an astonishing story Doctor Brandon told the police some hours later.

"I say, young man, do you drug, or anything?"

It was Detective-Inspector Kilmant, of the C.I.D., who put the question. Doctor Brandon and he were seated in his snug office at New Scotland Yard. But they were

not alone. With them were Sir Henry Langdale and his daughter—who now sat very close to Brandon, and a strange little fellow named Jimmie Santler and the Frants—for Mrs. Frant insisted on being present, despite the pain of her foot.

"Let's get hold of it!" cried the policeman. "A doctor snatched up and carted off, and forced to perform operations, dumb men with dulled intellects; a human toe in a parcel; wholesale murders, and—oh, my gad, let's get a breath of fresh air!"

It needed a lot to persuade Inspector Kilmant—but he began to thaw when he remembered the odd way that Sir Henry Langdale's chauffeur had been found trussed-up under the seat of the abandoned car. It was added to by the fact that, at any rate, one of the criminals was in custody—a person answering to the nickname of Darkiel!

A few months later there was the report of a wedding in the London papers. Rather a fashionable wedding, too. A young and unknown medico, of the name of Richard Brandon, and Celia Langdale.

Celia's friends thought she was throwing herself away. But she didn't—nor her parents, either. There's talk of another practitioner taking the Dead End surgery, and Doctor Brandon launching out in a more healthy neighbourhood!

Some folks have queer notions—perhaps that is why Mr. and Mrs. Frant chose to live in the village of Sweival on the small pension Sir Henry Langdale insisted on their having.

Probably a grave in Sweival Churchyard had a great deal to do with the Frants' decision!

THE END.

SCOTLAND YARD MAKES IMPORTANT ARRESTS IN THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT OF

THE TRAPPER!

A DRAMA
OF THE NIGHT-HAUNTS
OF LONDON

By
GEORGE DILNOT

Author of "Scotland Yard," etc.



INTRODUCTION.

THE Trapper, a wealthy but dangerous fanatic, was 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.

Entirely ruthless in his methods, he is trying to organise a gang, one of the first members of which is Dick Estrehan, an ex-clerk of the firm of Hint, Hint, Sons & Barter.

Estrehan, after embezzling £20,000 of his employers' money, had hit the high spots in the West End, and fallen victim to the wiles of Stella Cliffe and Velvet Grimshaw, two crooks who, ignorant of his real position, fleece him of the money.

In the hands of the Trapper, Dick is promised that the £20,000 shall be paid back in payment for one year of his life. For that period he must give his life and reputation to the Trapper, the alternative being prison and disgrace.

Meanwhile, Velvet Grimshaw is murdered under strange circumstances at a West End night club. On his coat is found a wire noose such as is used for trapping rabbits.

This was not the first appearance of the wire noose. Several previous crimes had borne this trade-mark, and Chief Constable Winter, of the C.I.D., is determined to get the mysterious criminal known as the Trapper. The job is given to Detective Martin Wilde.

Wilde is obliged to accept the assistance, although in only an unofficial capacity of Quentin 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. Following incidents lead Wilde to become suspicious of the American and his partner, but he is unable to prove anything, and Thorold, who treats Wilde's suspicions with amusement, tries to persuade Pat to go to America with him, but she decides to stick to the case in spite of the unpleasantness.

When a certain crook named Paddy the Ghost is brought for trial at the Old Bailey, the whole court is "held up" by the Trapper while Paddy is rescued. Immediate chase is given by the Flying Squad, but the crooks get away.

Later, the newspapers receive a strange message from the Trapper, which is brought to Scotland Yard. It is a fanatical letter to the public, explaining his aims—and ability to carry them out, and also rather insulting to the police. The Press are persuaded not to publish it.

In the meanwhile, Stella Cliffe, who has been

under the surveillance of Patricia Langton, receives a 'phone call at her flat. The mysterious caller intimates that she should pack a bag and be ready for a car that will be waiting for her, and adds, when she seems dubious, that Dick Estrehan is anxious to see her.

(Now continue the story.)

THE MASKED MAN.

"WHY didn't you say so at first?" Stella demanded. "I'll come. Say, there's a pair of Dicks hanging about this place. What will we do about 'em? They're sticking to me worse than a sick headache."

"Don't you worry. We'll handle them," said the voice. "Good-bye. See you later."

It was nearing two o'clock when Stella was interrupted in the perusal of the adventures of a poor but honest and beautiful factory girl who eluded the wicked machination of a works-manager and ultimately married a duke, by the purring of a car which drew up with engine running outside the house. The sound of men's voices reached her as, suit-case in hand, she stole downstairs to the outer door.

As she emerged into the street, by the light of a street lamp-post she had a glimpse of a man running. By the side of a big saloon car another man was bending over a black blur on the pavement. The driver, standing on the running-board, was speaking to the latter in a low tone. Her heart missed a beat. She half-turned back to the house when the driver perceived her.

"Hi, come on!" he cried, and the other man straightened himself. In three strides he was by her side, had taken her bag, and had her by the arm. "Here you are! We'll be going. This is going to be no place for us in a minute or two."

As she shrank back he used increasing force. "Don't push me," she protested. "I've had enough of this. I'll not be mixed up in it. That man—have you killed him?" "He's all right. Don't be a little fool. We've only put him to sleep for an hour or two. Hurry."

Reluctantly she allowed herself to be ushered into the car. The man sprang in by her side and the driver let in the clutch. Her companion leaned across and pulled down the blinds.

"No reason for us to advertise ourselves," he commented, but Stella sensed that the real object of the action was to prevent her seeing the route taken by the car.

"If you've let me in for trouble, I'll get my own back," she observed, and dabbed her nose with powder. "I'm not going to be blamed for this rough-house business."

"We'll take care of that," said her companion, with easy composure. "You're safe enough."

"I've never squealed in my life, but you can carry things too far," she threatened. "Where are we going?"

"Don't get inquisitive, child," he said. "You'll see your friend Dick in a little. That's all you're bothering about, isn't it?"

She gave the ghost of a sniff, and refrained from further questions. Her intelligence told her that she would gain nothing by them, and she resented being treated as a child.

When the car drew up there remained on her mind no conception of the length of time the journey had taken. It might have been ten minutes, it might have been half an hour. With her companion she descended into a quiet street of large, old-fashioned, ugly houses as like each other as peas in a pod.

A heavy door swung open to the touch of a bell, and Stella was led to a sitting-room at the back of the house by the man who had accompanied her from her lodgings. She glanced about the sombrely furnished apartment and made a little grimace of disgust.

"Funny shop this," she commented, removing her gloves. "Reminds me of a mortuary. Where's the main guy? Where's Dick?"

Through a pair of heavy plush curtains which concealed an entrance at the other end of the room a man advanced. He wore a trim pointed grey beard and moustache and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. At a glance he was somewhere in the neighbourhood of fifty years old.

"Hallo, Stella!" he said. "Glad you've come. It's fine to see you again."

The girl stared at him, and her face gradually relaxed to a doubtful smile.

"Gosh, boy, you had me guessing! Where did you get that chin crop? It looks as real as if you were Mr. Methuselah himself."

"It is real, kid," he assured her. "I grew it to order, and the colour is dye. Just a precaution the chief thinks wise."

"I'll leave you to it," said the man who had brought Stella. "See you later."

Stella ran forward as soon as they were alone, and putting both hands on Estrehan's shoulders looked into his face. "Take those glasses off," she commanded, and as he obeyed bent forward and kissed him. "You've grown up, old son," she declared. "I'll bet you wouldn't fall for what Velvet and I put across you again."

His eyes lightened. Gently he pushed her to a chair and sat facing her.

"Yes," he said thickly. "I've developed pretty swiftly. I've learnt a lot in a few weeks."

She crossed her legs, drew out a cigarette to which she daintily applied a light, and regarded him with narrowed eyes. "Queer world, ain't it, Dick?" she observed. "We didn't think we'd meet again like this after the last time, eh? Still want to shoot me?"

He brushed aside the question and gripped both her wrists with unsteady hands.

"How far are you in this, kid?" he asked in a low voice. "What do you know about it all?"

The girl disengaged herself and threw a quick look round the room.

"Just about ten times less than you do," she retorted. "I was dragged in when Velvet was killed, partly because I thought that you—That's why I'm here now. I want to know more. I'm crooked, but I'm not silly. There's things I don't do. I've come because they said you wanted to see me. And now I'm here I'm all for a showdown. Tell me the truth, Dick. Did you have anything to do with croaking Velvet?"

"Good heavens, no!" he ejaculated. "He deserved all he got, but I had nothing to do with it. You don't think—"

"Never mind what I think. Why are you doing this Guy Fawkes stunt? What are you playing at if you're not hiding from the police? You're not a natural born crook, Dick. Spill it!"

He gazed gloomily at the floor.

"You ought to know. When—that night—you showed me what a fool I'd been I left determined to take what seemed the only way out. I met a man—a stranger—who promised to put things right. I was desperate—ready to grasp at a straw, and, and—"

"You fell for it?"

He spread his hands wide.

"What could I do? It was that—or the other thing. Besides, Stella, this is not ordinary crime. This is a—a sort of a crusade. You understand, don't you? I don't mean murder. I keep outside that. But—oh, my dear, it's the only way left to us. We've got to go through with it. We're committed."

"Not so much of the we!" she commanded sharply. "I'm nobody's fool, and I've done nothing they can touch me for." She laid a slim forefinger in the palm of her hand. "Graft is graft and murder is murder. Now that I know you had nothing to do with putting Velvet out I'm going to cut loose. And that's what I'd advise you to do, Dick. This bloke is crazy. What good will it do you if they get you in the dock at the Old Bailey to tell the jury that you're a crusader? They'll send you down all the same. This kind of talk gives me a pain at the back of the neck."

The young man slowly shook his head.

"It's easy for you to talk like that," he answered. "But I can't. I've got to go on." "Can't! Why, what's to hinder us walking right out now?"

A tall, masked figure moved silently from behind the curtains and broke into the conversation.

"Forgive me if I interrupt," he said quietly. "What is to hinder you?" In the soft, satirical tone there was subtle shade of menace. Dick shrank as if from a blow, but Stella turned upon the newcomer with a sneer.

"You've been listening-in. I hope you've learned something."

"Nothing that I might not have guessed, my dear," he said with a polite bow. "I gather that you're scared and want to save your skin—at my expense."

The girl stood up, one hand on her hip, the fingers of the other resting lightly on the table.

"I'm not scared, and you know it," she denied contemptuously. "You've got the Indian sign on Dick, but you can't hypnotise me. Why should we stand for this cranky kind of dirty work you're pullin'? If you want to risk your own neck that's one thing, but it's another thing again when you drag us in. Little Stella has learned one thing in her life that you don't know—and that's when to stop. How long do you think you can keep on with this stuff even if the police are mutts? Just about five minutes more. We're clear, anyway. We're going to beat it while the going's good. What about it, Dick? Come with me. I can handle this bird with his fancy dress mask and all."

She moved across, and putting an arm through that of Estrehan tried to lead him to the door. The masked man continued to smile.

"Wait a minute," he commanded. "You're a shrewd girl, Stella, but there are a few bets you've overlooked. Are you sure that you're so clear? It might be that I've got one or two things that I could tie to you. You'd better stick to us. It will pay you."

"Pah! Poor!" she ejaculated. "Come on, Dick!"

"I think he's right, Stella," interposed Estrehan, gently resisting her energetic attempts to pull him to the doorway. "We're all in the same boat."

"Dick has got sense," interposed the masked man.

She disengaged herself and regarded the young man with disgust.

"You're a poor fish after all, Dick," she said. "Well, you can take your choice. You can go on with your dashed crusading or you can come with me. Make up your mind."

The young man looked from one to the other. His face showed an agony of indecision.

"I hate to dwell on the trifling obligations to me," said the stranger in his subdued voice. "There's a matter of twenty thousand pounds, for instance. Quite apart from various sums you have both had from me. You're a crooked crook, Stella. You don't pay your debts. I do—to my friends and my enemies. If Dick here falls for any shenanikin he must remember that the police are looking for him—and I'm the only man who can save him. Let's finish this. There's more money than either of you have dreamed of if you stick by me. On the other hand, there's years and years in gaol."

The girl, cool, supercilious, seemed not to have heard him. Her hand was on the door.

"Are you coming, Dick?" she asked.

With sudden decision he sprang after her.

"I'm with you, kid!" he exclaimed, and, hand in hand, they passed into a darkened passage.

Something was pressed heavily against Stella Cliffe's face, and she gave a stifled shriek. As Dick Estrehan turned, a sack was thrown over his head and a pair of handcuffs pressed on his wrists.

They were led back to the room they had just quitted.

"You poor fools!" they heard the voice of the masked man.

THE HOUSE AT CANONBURY.

It would be pleasing to relate how Martin Wilde, by the examination of a motor-tyre print outside Stella Cliffe's apartments, traced her to the end of her excursion. This would have been one of those spectacular touches useful to the writer of detective fiction. But the inexorable demands of veracity are not to be avoided. There were no distinguishable tyre-marks, nor would the chief inspector have wasted much time in examining them if there had been. But the number as well as the description of the car had been noted by his men, and this prosaic fact offered an opportunity on which he was quick to fasten.

Hard on the heels of his information, messages were speeded over the wires to the two hundred police-stations of London. There was, of course, the possibility that the number had been swiftly changed once the car was away, but its appearance could scarcely have been altered. There was also the chance that it had not been noticed, other than as a vehicle on its lawful occasions, but there is little traffic in the London streets in the small hours, and since motor burglary became a profession the police are observant. The odds were even that it had been noticed. So that morning, as ten thousand policemen signed off duty, they were questioned.

Now it chanced that a constable patrolling in the dull thoroughfares of Canonbury had felt monotony press hard upon him. Five minutes after he had met his section sergeant he withdrew to the shelter of a secluded doorway and lit a surreptitious pipe. Since this is a breach of discipline, severely frowned on by the authorities, and since one could never be certain that a zealous section sergeant might not unexpectedly return, his vigilance was stimulated beyond the normal.

Thus it was that, unobserved himself, he saw

a car draw up at one of the neighbouring houses. A woman and a man, carrying a suitcase, alighted, and passed into one of the buildings. The car drove off, and, with a sigh of relief, the constable took the palm of his hand from the top of his pipe and finished his interrupted smoke. There was nothing to arouse his suspicion. Evidently a pair of belated wayfarers had just arrived home. But for his trifling infraction of the rules of the service the incident would have made no impression on his mind, nor would he have remembered the number of the car.

As it was, he was conscious of a glow of satisfaction when he was complimented on his observation and his memory in the morning. He did not trouble to mention the pipe. On such trifles do promotion hang.

The news did not reach Martin Wilde till after his visit to Miss Langton. His lips tightened as he considered it. Things seemed to be coming his way at last. But he was a cautious man, and he knew this was one of those cases in which hasty action might defeat his purposes.

Winter, to whom he sketched his ideas, agreed with him. There was no doubt that the girl who had been seen by the constable was Stella. The probability, but not the certainty, was that the house was a retreat of some of the principals of the gang for whom he was searching. The point was to entrap as many of them as possible. But several hours had elapsed, and it might be that all of them were no longer within the house.

They would have no indication that their whereabouts had been discovered, and would have no special reason for keeping rigidly within doors. But even criminals have to sleep, and if the house was being constantly used, it was reasonably sure that they would be there at night. The problem was not a new one for Scotland Yard, where it is almost axiomatic that the best time to catch a criminal is when he is literally asleep.

Wilde felt that it was policy to wait. Nevertheless, he took one or two steps.

Four of the brightest young men at the Yard were detailed for a trip to Canonbury. Two of these were provided with the habit and equipment of window cleaners. A great deal may be seen while a man is cleaning an upper window. It was their mission to find the amenable occupant of some house which would afford a point of observation, and in whom they might to some extent confide. Now that the Trapper and his confederates had been located, Wilde proposed that a constant observation should be kept. The slight risk of indiscretion had to be taken, for he could devise no other means by which an inconspicuous point of vantage could be obtained.

The other two men, it was decided, should be hawkers. They were merely scouts to obtain information which would give Wilde rough data for his plans. Besides getting topographical details of the neighbourhood, they were to glean anything they could of the appearance and habits of those persons who frequented the suspected house. On all of these emissaries Wilde impressed the necessity for the strictest caution.

But, in spite of these steps, Wilde was no nearer to discovering who was in the house when, at twelve o'clock that night, he stepped from his car at a point of rendezvous half a mile away. It was with some uneasiness that he learned that no one had been seen to enter or leave that day. He did not believe that any hint of his purpose had leaked out. Yet, if his men were right, there had been no sign of life about the place. It was queer.

By various ways thirty armed detectives had drawn a cordon out of sight of the house. Wilde made a circuit, and at his word it began almost insensibly to contract. A passer-by would have seen little to attract his attention—possibly a man or a couple of men sauntering quietly through the by-streets. Wilde had studied his tactics carefully. If his directions were obeyed, there would be no bolthole left unguarded.

Accompanied by two men, he made his way to the front of the house, while the rest of his little force closed in. The chatter of an electric bell was distinctly audible as he pressed the

button and waited crouched closely against the outside wall. It was not impossible that those within were on the alert, and that the answer would take the form of a pistol shot. Again he rang, and reinforced his summons with the thud of a heavy knocker. Dead silence followed.

Wilde whispered a word to his two companions and moved to a side window. There was no need for finesse. With the butt of an automatic he crashed a pane of glass, and, jerking aside a curtain that obstructed his view, thrust an arm within. A ray of light from his torch jerked about the room.

"Nothing here," he muttered, and, springing the catch, flung up the window, and, pulling himself over the sill, dropped into the room. The others were hard at his heels.

The inspector found and turned on the electric-light switch. They were in a dining-room furnished in a heavy Victorian manner. Dull oil paintings in tarnished gilt frames looked down on stiff mahogany furniture. On the table and on the cumbersome sideboard, bowls of flowers lightened the sombre aspect of the room.

"These flowers are nearly fresh," declared the inspector. "Come on, lads."

He plunged into the passage, and, switching on the lights as he went, began a swift examination of the house. A puzzled frown grew on his forehead as he progressed. The place bore none of those signs which might have been expected had it been hastily abandoned. Every room was in apple-pie order, beds made, floors swept, fires laid. It was as though those who had occupied it expected to be back at any minute.

"Darn funny," observed Wilde, back on the ground floor once more. "I suppose there's a cellar. Let's have a look at it."

A locked door beneath the stairway was evidently the entrance. A young detective shook the handle impatiently, and at a word from the inspector flung his full weight on the panels. The flimsy lock gave way, and he fell headlong. At the same instant there was the startling report of a revolver, rendered doubly loud by the confined space in which it was fired.

Wilde, pistol in hand, dropped on his face and threw the glow of his torch down the flight of steps leading to the cellar. No second shot followed. At the bottom of the steps a man was getting to his feet.

"Are you hurt?" demanded the inspector.

"Nothing but a few bruises," replied a cheerful voice. "Throw that light about, sir, I've still got my gun, and I'd like to have a go at the bird who tried to pot me."

Wilde obeyed, and as the light illuminated the vicinity of the steps, rose to his feet with a laugh. The beam of the torch was focussed on a pistol, fixed level with the doorway, and, from the latter, there led a length of string which gave plain indication of what had happened. The mere act of opening the door would fire the pistol. The inspector detached the string from the door.

"A booby trap," he commented. "Lucky for you that you took that tumble, or you'd have been dead as mutton now."

With some little difficulty he succeeded in retrieving the pistol, and, after a cursory examination, dropped it in his pocket. Then he proceeded with the interrupted inspection of the cellar.

This was unusually spacious, stretching to the full extent of the house. One small portion was devoted to the storage of coals, and another had been partitioned off for use as a wine cellar. The remainder of the space was much taken up with house lumber of various

kinds. Among this the detectives rummaged, scarcely expectant that any result would now attend their labours.

It was while thus engaged that one officer threw aside the topmost of what was apparently a heap of sacks. His cry brought Wilde quickly to his side. Lying side by side, helplessly tied with cord and gagged with handkerchiefs, were Stella Cliffe and Dick Estrehan.

STELLA'S STORY.

ESTREHAN was no sooner freed than he slumped into a dead faint. Stella was made of sterner stuff. She giggled hysterically as Wilde lifted her to her feet, and clung to him feebly.

"Gosh, but I never thought that I'd ever be glad to see you, Mr. Wilde. You're as welcome as flowers in May. Excuse me hanging on to you. I can't stand properly."

"That's all right. We'll have a doctor for you in a jiffy," he said. "Hold tight!"

He stooped and, lifting her in his arms,

Her blue eyes opened languidly.

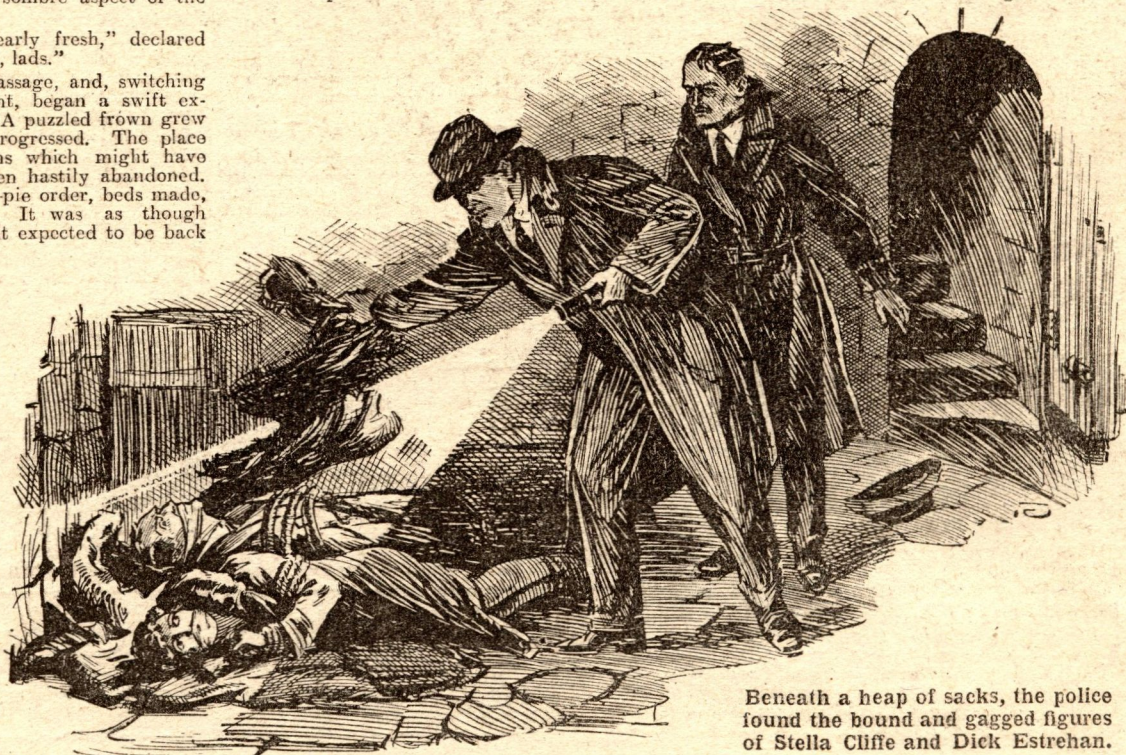
"Say, you're hanging on to me like a fly on a jam-pot. Waiting for Pil Stella to get good and ready to squeal, eh? Perhaps you got another guess coming."

The detective only saved his pipe from dropping by an instinctive tightening of the teeth, and jerked it back abruptly. While he imagined her to be asleep, she had been diagnosing his thoughts with uncanny precision. He laughed, partly at himself.

"Don't you worry about me," he said. "You lay quiet until the doctor comes. We'll go into things then."

She dropped an eyelid in a knowing wink, but before she could reply the sound of a doorbell announced the arrival of the doctor, and Wilde withdrew while an examination took place. He was waiting when the doctor had finished his ministrations, and they exchanged a few words.

"The man is completely exhausted," reported the divisional surgeon. "He seems to have been under a severe mental as well as a physical strain. He may be all right to-morrow



Beneath a heap of sacks, the police found the bound and gagged figures of Stella Cliffe and Dick Estrehan.

carried her up from the cellar and laid her on a couch in one of the reception rooms. The unconscious Estrehan, whose identity had been revealed by a little scrutiny, was brought up and placed in one of the bedrooms. Wilde had his reasons for keeping the two apart for a while.

He sent for the divisional surgeon and the matron from the local police-station, and, after giving a few other directions, sat down on a chair by Stella's side and filled his pipe. His face relaxed as he smoked silently and thoughtfully. The Trapper had eluded him, but the case had advanced another stage. There is no axiom more true than that when thieves fall out honest men come by their own.

It was evident that there had been some serious disagreement between the leader and his satellites—an event for which Wilde had long hoped. Stella and her companion might be in a mood to talk—in the Scotland Yard sense—as soon as their physical condition had been restored. He believed that it would not now be a difficult task to persuade them to say what they knew.

The girl lay with closed eyes and half-parted lips as if she had fallen into an innocent sleep. Wilde reflected grimly that many people viewing her thus would have found it hard to believe that she was a professional criminal. She looked as void of guile as a flower.

—or he may not. I'd advise you to have him sent to a hospital for the time being. The girl has stood it better. Twelve hours rest will put her right. I've given her a stiff glass of brandy, and she's recovered wonderfully."

The chief inspector nodded.

"It's important that I should question one or the other as soon as possible," he commented. "Every minute may make a difference. Would it do any harm if I had a talk with the girl?"

The doctor scratched his chin doubtfully.

"I should certainly leave the man alone for a while. If you must do it, see the girl."

"Thank you," said Wilde, and with a slight tap on the door went in to Stella. The police matron he dismissed with a word of thanks, and drew up a chair by the side of the girl.

She regarded him with a faint flush on her cheeks, and with a wry face sipped at a tumbler of brandy.

"Horrid stuff!" she commented. "Ugh! To think that people enjoy drinking that. You come back for this third-degree stuff?"

He adjusted a cushion so that she could recline more easily.

"The doctor says you'll be all right after a spell, Stella," he remarked. "I wouldn't worry you now, but there's just one or two things I want to know quickly. You needn't answer unless you like, but I'm patting it to you that it's not you I'm after in particular, of course,"

he qualified. "If you've had a hand in some things, I can't help myself, but you can reckon I'll do my best for you."

"Old stuff!" she interjected contemptuously. "Well, believe it or not, I've got a friendly feeling for you, Stella. I'm not going to take a formal statement now. What you say is just between us two. I know of no reason why you shouldn't come clean if you're not in this mess. If you are—"

He clipped the sentence short abruptly. The girl shrugged her slim shoulders. "You can't frame me for anything—you know that."

"That's all right," he reassured her. "We understand one another. I'm playing straight with you, but I make no promise to go outside the law. Now, tell me—how long had you been downstairs when we found you?"

She affected to think. "I dunno. Put it down at a million years, more or less."

"Don't fence. It can't hurt you to answer that question. We know what time you got here. How long after that was it that they parcelled you up?"

"No, there's no harm in telling you that," she said slowly. "It may have been a couple of hours."

He whistled softly. "Good lord! Over twenty-one hours! Poor kid, you must have the vitality of an eel! Who had a hand in it? Why did they do it?"

Her lips tightened stubbornly, and she shook her head.

"Don't know. Just a little amusement for 'em!"

For a brief second he hesitated. He knew something of Stella's type. Some strong motive clearly underlie her determined refusal to speak. However strong her loyalty to her associates, it would ordinarily have been shattered by the manner in which she had been so recently treated by some of them. He changed his tactics.

"It's a pity you hang on to this attitude, Stella. You know well enough that we're bound to get to the bottom of his business. And when we do, it will be all the worse for you—and for Dick Estrehan."

Watching her intently he saw that the shot had told. The faint flush faded from her cheek.

"Dick!" she repeated. "What are you doing about him? How is he?"

The inspector had shifted his gaze. He was apparently interested in a picture on the opposite wall.

"He's not too good," he said gravely. "Told me just now he was willing to make a statement in the morning. I don't know what he'll say. Personally I think he's been more of a fool than a crook, but if by any fluke we don't get those other birds, they might soak it to him harder than they otherwise would. Naturally if we got the full story, they'd probably see he was just a mug, and he'd be let down easy. There's such a thing as King's Evidence."

Her eyes narrowed suspiciously and she sat up straighter on the couch.

"Dick's just a poor boob," she said. "You're right there. But you don't want to believe that he's—he's—" She floundered for words.

"I know what I know," he answered sternly. "If you want to do him a good turn you'll tell me everything."

The girl pondered for a matter of seconds.

"If I put you on a line," she said, "will you give me your word of honour that you'll see he gets a square deal?"

"If you tell the truth," he answered, "I'll do what I can to make things as easy as possible. I give you my solemn word on that."

His air of sincerity made its impression on her. In fact, he was sincere, although he had lied when he said that Estrehan had promised a statement. That, according to his code, was a justifiable ruse to enable him to shake the unexpected obstinacy of the girl. In the pursuit of a dangerous murderer one cannot stick at trifles.

There was no great sympathy in his mind

either with Stella or with Dick. The one was simply a professional crook, the other a weak fool enmeshed in a net of circumstances. He would have been surely sent to penal servitude without a twinge. But, as it was, they were only pawns in the bigger game. To bend them to his purposes he might contrive to soften the asperity of the law. If any loophole presented itself he would fulfil his word to Stella by taking advantage of it. The form of a charge would depend largely upon him. His word would carry weight with a judge in passing sentence.

His chief concern was to find some means by which the main actor in the drama could be run down. To that end he was prepared to go further than he otherwise would have done.

"Give me a cigarette," said Stella. "I can't talk without a fag."

Although a confirmed pipe smoker Wilde always carried a packet of cheap cigarettes. They came in handy on many occasions as one of those little touches of courtesy that have sometimes an important effect. He passed over the packet and gave her a light.

"Start with the murder of Velvet," he said. "How did you manage that getaway? Who was the other woman?"

She nodded.

"Yes that was the beginning. You remember that I fainted. When I came to I found a lady with me. She dismissed the attendant and asked me if I was strong enough to walk. She explained that she was a friend, and that if I didn't want to be mixed up in a dirty murder business she would help me. I was still thinking that—that a friend of mine might be suspected, and I certainly wasn't anxious to go in the witness-box. So after a little confab I agreed. That woman was a wonder. She just showed a card to the guys on the door and we walked out with our heads in the air. It was like eating pie."

"H'm!" commented the detective. "You haven't mentioned the lady's name."

"No. She never mentioned it," said Stella steadily.

"You'd know her again?"

"I might. I can't say."

The man leaned forward a little.

"Was it by any chance Miss Langdon?" he demanded.

Her blue eyes met his deliberately. "No, it was certainly not Miss Langdon," she declared.

He gave a grunt deep in his throat. "All right. Go on. Where did she take you?"

"We just walked to Piccadilly Circus," went on Stella, "and there she telephoned to someone. Then we took the tube to Baker Street. Outside the station a big car was waiting. We got in."

"One moment," he interrupted. "Who was driving the car?"

"A man. I didn't notice much about him except that he was dressed in a chauffeur's uniform. She said a few words to him which I didn't hear and he went off. She took the wheel of the car and I sat beside her. We didn't start off at once. It was the first chance we'd had of any private conversation since we left the club, and she asked me a few questions. She knew quite a lot about me, though I can't guess where she got it from. Things I thought nobody knew. Among other matters, she asked where I was born. When I told her that my parents were village folk, and still imagined that I was an innocent shop-girl, and that my real name was Gubb, she declared that the last place Scotland Yard would think of looking for me would be with them in Surrey."

"She was right there," remarked Wilde.

"So we motored down," continued the girl. "I was to explain that I had been given an unexpected holiday. She gave me fifty pounds in Treasury notes, and said that if I was a good girl and did what I was told she would make my fortune. Of course, I don't believe all I hear, but the fifty quid was real enough, anyway. I was not to leave the farm without instructions, but in the event of being traced I was to communicate with one of her friends whose telephone number she gave me."

Wilde was getting impatient.

"Look here, Stella," he said, again leaning forward. "Who is this woman, eh? Come on, now, you know and you'd better tell me. Who is it? I must know."

(Who is this strange woman? Will Stella "squeak"? And what will happen to Dick Estrehan? Don't miss next week's gripping developments!)

The Solution of this week's 'BAFFLER' PROBLEM

on page 24.

**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. Search for further clues should have been directed to the Gordon Farm. (Marks 10). Since the victim had been struggling before immersion, his body may be assumed to have floated and drifted with the current on the east side of the river, which ran at a speed of six miles per hour since the hands of the watch, when examined, pointed to 5.25 (and it had been recently wound up and therefore had been running), and since the immersion tests with similar watches indicated that the water caused it to stop within two to four minutes, the time of the body striking the water may be assumed to be about 5.21 or 5.22. The body was sighted going over the mill dam at 6.13. It had, therefore, been floating down for fifty or fifty-five minutes at the rate of six miles per hour. It would, therefore, have travelled approximately five miles or a little more. The river, being free from impediments, can be assumed to have brought the body down from a distance of five miles. Measuring back on the map, it is apparent that the Gordon Farm, north-west corner is just five miles from the dam. Had it come from the Wilson or Cosgrave Farms, the body would have arrived at the dam much later or sooner. The murderer was never caught. The police, unfortunately, became confused, and tried the Smith Farm, which proved a dud. Later, on the Gordon Farm they found the footprint record of a scuffle, but were unable to fasten the crime on anyone in the vicinity. Molly was held guiltless.